**Stress less? Dec. 8 webinar aims to help families enjoy the holiday season**

Communication, planning is key to happier get-togethers

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Ahh, the holidays: a time for getting together with family, enjoying a fine meal and catching up on each other’s lives. That is, of course, if the stress of the season doesn’t ruin the party.

“It’s important for families to communicate their expectations as they go into a holiday season,” said JoEllyn Argabright, a family and consumer sciences specialist in K-State’s Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby. “It’s really easy to be swayed by the hustle and bustle, and the buy-buy-buy, give-give-give party mentality.”

Argabright and Tristen Cope, an FCS agent in the Chisholm Trail Extension District, are urging families to be especially aware of holiday dynamics – which have taken on new meanings in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This year is going to be a little different in the fact that some of our families haven’t been together for some time now,” Cope said. “I think it’s going to be important for all family members to keep in mind that there might be some children who have some shyness – maybe they don’t want to give out hugs this year; maybe they don’t fully recognize all their family members. It’s going to be important to keep that in mind when we’re interacting this year.”

Argabright and Cope will be sharing strategies for stressing less and enjoying family get-togethers more during the free online workshop, *Stress Less: Connect and Communicate Through the Holidays*, scheduled for Dec. 8 from 12:15 p.m. to 1 p.m.

The session is part of K-State Research and Extension’s ongoing webinar series, titled Living Well Wednesday, which launched in spring, 2021.

“I am hopeful that we can get back to giving love and spreading joy to others, but it may look different right now,” Cope said. “It may be a simple hello, it may be a high-five, or it may be a wave. It will take some time…and talking with (family members) about their comfort level.”

Cope notes that even though young children often show their excitement during the holidays, the period can also be stressful to them.
“I think it’s important to identify ways that younger children can be involved in the planning process, and throughout the holiday season,” she said, adding that parents can give children their own calendar to keep track of time and events or places they will be going.

“A calendar gives kids ownership and allows them to plan and stick to a routine,” Cope said.

Teens and young adults can get distracted with devices, so families can think ahead about ways to keep them engaged with the family.

For older adults, situations with many people and background noise can be overwhelming and make it difficult for them to actively participate. Rooms with extra tables, or toys on the floor present tripping hazards.

During the Dec. 8 webinar, “we will provide tips and tricks for how families can increase their compassion and teach family members of all ages to recognize normal sensory decline in aging family members,” Argabright said. “By doing so, we hope to help older families to be more included and provide history and family tradition.”

Thinking in advance about holiday gatherings – and communicating expectations – will also help to set reasonable parameters, Argabrights said.

“It’s important for families as they enter the holidays to outline what is reasonable for them to host or accommodate their family members, and not be shy about communicating,” she said. “And that helps you keep in mind that you want to have time for everyone to congregate but it is okay to say enough is enough – it’s time for us to go back to our environments where we’re comfortable.”

Registration and more information on the Dec. 8 webinar is available online, or by contacting your local extension office.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Living Well Wednesday, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/fcs/livingwellwed

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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