

Expectation: n. 1. looking forward to; anticipation 2. a looking for as due, proper or necessary 3. a thing looked forward to 4. a reason or warrant for looking forward to something; prospect for the future, as of advancement or prosperity 5. the probability of the occurrence, duration, etc. of something, esp. as indicated by statistics.

It's that time of year when expectations run riot. What are YOUR expectations for the holidays? Are you expecting joy, happiness, great gifts, happy reunions with old friends? You've been watching too many television commercials.

Will this be the year you are given a diamond? Or a new car? Or your family finally expresses their admiration and appreciation of you? When you indulge in expectations about people or events and they are not or cannot be fulfilled, you have created resentments before the fact.

Every form of media portrays the holidays as happy, serene, exciting, loving, enjoyable, rewarding...fill in the rest of the blanks yourself. But for too many people with high expectations, the holidays can be a sorrowful disappointment.

Families fight. Food burns. Someone who is expected fails to show up. Someone who isn't expected does show up. Gifts are not what was wanted (and expected). Too many people eat and drink too much and lose sight of what the holidays are about: simply enjoying some time off and being with those who mean a lot to you.

If you cannot or choose not to spend the holidays with your family, the time can be a terrific downer. Depression rates hit an all time high at this time of the year. Crisis lines are always swamped with calls.

Why doesn't this day look like a Norman Rockwell illustration on the cover of a 1945 "Life" Magazine? Family gathered around lavish table. Dad carving the turkey. Mom wearing pert white apron and smiling at everyone. It was a painting, a fantasy, Rockwell's expectations perhaps.

There are many effective cures for disappointing holidays. The first is: Don't build up unrealistic expectations.

If you must be alone and/or away from home, volunteer to serve others who are extremely needy at this time of year. Or invite friends who also are alone to join you for dinner. Serve meals in a shelter or deliver them to shut-ins. Entertain kids who don't have families or must spend their time in a hospital. Visit nursing home patients who otherwise would get no attention. Rent and watch movies like "It's a Wonderful Life" or "Pieces of April."

Just look around you to find out what you can do. Check out your local newspapers. Call the Chamber of Commerce. For that matter, be inventive and come up with your own plan. It's really hard to feel sorry for yourself when you are serving someone else. And after all, isn't that the true spirit of the holidays-giving minus expectations?

Week's Quotes:

"Happiness equals reality minus expectations." Tom Magliozzi.

"The real winners in life are the people who look at every situation with an expectation that they can make it work or make it better." Barbara Pletcher.

"Anger always comes from frustrated expectations." Elliott Larson.

"The best things in life are unexpected-because there were no expectations." Eli Khamarov.

"There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow." Orison Swett Marden.

"Life is so constructed, that the event does not, cannot, will not, match the expectation." Charlotte Bronte.