

Reducing the Stress of Family Holidays

Now is the time of year when people spend more extended time with their families. Generally this is a great thing but for some people there can be stress.

The stress may be from unresolved childhood issues such as sibling competitiveness, old hurts, parenting issues, alcohol abuse past or present. It seems when kids return home it is as if they never left and the game is on. As we age, we see things differently; hopefully we act differently as we have learned things through experience.

I read a book a long time ago called *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. It comes from the Toltec, an ancient group of scientists and artists that lived in an ancient city outside of Mexico City. Their wisdom has been passed on by Don Miguel. It has sold over 2.7 million copies, so it must speak to many people.

The agreements are:

1. Be impeccable with your words
2. Don't take anything personally
3. Don't make assumptions
4. Always do your best

Be impeccable with your words. “Your word is the power that you have to communicate, to think and thereby to create events in your life.” Your word can create joy or misery. Think of the effect your word has on others. Even things said in teasing can have profound effects on others and become part of their belief system.

Don't take anything personally. If you do, you “take on their emotional garbage” as your own. You set yourself up to suffer for nothing. Many times others' anger or opinion has nothing to do with you at all!

Don't Make Assumptions. This is an indication of lack of communication. We believe we know what is said and defend our assumptions or try to make someone else wrong. Sometimes we assume others can read our minds. We can

take things personally and end up with drama over something that is far from the truth.

Always do your best. Not more than your best so you become exhausted. Not less than your best so you are frustrated and live with regret or guilt. By being good to yourself, you become more giving to your family and community. Doing your best means taking action, allowing you to live fully and can lead to intense happiness.

These are so simple yet so complicated. You need to know yourself. What agreements have you made to yourself that stand in the way of living out these four agreements? It is wonderful to explore this and see what happens at the next reunion!

I highly recommend this book as an opportunity to review how we communicate and learn the benefits of communicating clearly!

The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom, by Don Miguel Ruiz, published by Amber-Allen Publishing Inc. (1997)