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CapeWomenOnline serves as a venue for the women of Cape Cod to share their ideas, experiences and resources while inspiring each other in their life's journey.



Dear Doreen

Cape Cod therapist Doreen Quinn has joined our team of contributing writers to answer your life questions. In her first column, Doreen responds to reader's concerns about parenting, child support and divorce.

Send your questions to:
DearDoreen@capewomenonline.com

Dear Doreen,

I am dreading the holiday. My family lives too far for us to drive and airfare is too expensive. How can I make my holidays enjoyable?

Katherine/ Orleans

Dear Katherine,

The holidays can cause us to experience many different feelings. Many of us have set expectations on how our holidays should look and feel.

I am sorry you are unable to be with your family during the holidays. you must have had some very special times with your family during the holiday season. Since you are unable to be with them it is important for you to recognize what you always enjoyed about the holidays with your family and create some of that in your life.

Many of my friends do not have family in the area so they began creating traditions that included their friends. For example, a holiday party that includes some friends and co-workers and you participate in a yankee swap can bring laughter and connections. A yankee swap is where each person is given a number when they arrive with a gift of a pre-determined amount. The swap begins with #1 and continues numerically. Each person is allowed to take a gift from the pile or take someone else's gift, which leads to people fighting over certain gifts and rejecting others. In my experience it usually ends with a great deal of laughter and silliness.

Another friend of mine would gather friends for a potluck dinner and caroling. There are many people that do not have family around. Inviting them over for a Christmas/Hannukah Eve dinner or Hannukah/Christmas brunch is always fun and greatly appreciated by those that are experiencing the loss of not having family around.

Volunteering at the food pantry or delivering meals to individuals that are unable to leave their home is also a wonderful way to share your joy. Many churches ask for individuals to help clothe or buy gifts for children and families in need. Make sure you participate in your community events. Sandwich has a caroling night every December. Everyone is welcome to participate and then go to the Daniel Webster afterwards for cider and cookies.

Making your holidays unique by incorporating some of your family traditions and beginning some of your own will bring a sense of joy and connection to your home and friends.

If you have any further questions about the yankee swap or comments please contact me at Dear Doreen.

Blessings to you at this joyful time,

Doreen

Dear Doreen,

I have been participating in an online dating site. I am in my fifties and have found it difficult to meet men. I met a man that lives in another state and has a home on the cape. We dated a few times and had a wonderful time. He stated that he enjoyed spending time with me. I thought he was interested in a relationship but he no longer calls or e-mails on a regular basis. He only finds time to see me when it is convenient for him. I like this man and would like to continue dating him. What should I do?

Sarah/ Centerville

Dear Sarah,

Congratulations on opening yourself up to new opportunities through a dating site. It is challenging for many people to meet others for dating or relationship purposes. I have spoken with many people that have had great success through online dating.

As for this man you are interested in; I believe he has made his feelings clear through his lack of communication. If a man is interested in a woman then he will find time to consistently communicate with her. He will also make an effort to see her.

In my professional experience I have found many men run when they feel something deeper for a woman especially if they have been hurt in the past. It is possible that this man experienced some deeper feelings for you but is not ready to be in a formal relationship.

You can communicate with this man and tell him how you feel. This can be risky if you are not prepared to hear his true feelings. Or you can simply discontinue communication and continue dating other men through your dating site.

Remember we all are special, sharing your love and kindness with someone is a valuable gift.

Good Luck,
Doreen

Dear Doreen,

Every year I tell myself that I am not going to become overwhelmed and stressed during the holidays. But every year from November through January I become a irritable, complaining, stressed out person. I am a married woman with four children, ages 15,13,10 & 8. My profession is full time mom.

How can I de-stress my life and make room for joy during the holidays?

Cynthia/Falmouth

Dear Cynthia,

Thank you for asking a question that many of us ask throughout the holiday season. Your profession as a full time mom is one that doesn't end at 5 or the end of a shift. It is a 24 hour a day job. Managing a home, school work and extracurricular activities for four children probably gives you very little time to breathe and relax.

The first step to de-stressing your holidays is changing your expectations. You are not superwoman so don't expect your self to be. Make reasonable choices that will benefit you and your family.

Your children do not care if the house and decorations are perfect. They will remember if you were irritable and frustrated. Because your children are great ages to help and participate; I suggest you have a family meeting/discussion and discuss how you want your holidays to proceed and what that would look like. Make sure you take notes so everyone's thoughts are recognized.

Once you have all spoken you can set priorities and determine which activities the family is going to participate in. Mark a calendar with the date and time of each activity and give a copy to all family members.

Gift giving can be stressful; finding the right gift or who or who not to give a gift to can lead to frustration. Make a clear list of everyone you give gifts to. Set a budget and determine beforehand what each person will receive. Stick to your budget no matter how many times you are tempted to break it. I find making donations to someone's favorite charity is always an appreciated gift and easy to complete.

Most importantly you must find time for yourself. Studies have shown that a person's stress and irritablility can be decreased through exercise, meditation and music. Take at least 20 minutes each day to walk, attend a yoga or exercise class, rest and/or listen to music. You will find that after you engage in an activity geared to you, your stress will decrease and you will have more energy to give to your family.

It took me many years to realize I needed to take time for myself especially during the holiday season. So please do this for you and your family. It will make a huge difference, I promise.

Best Wishes and Happy Holidays,

Doreen

Doreen Quinn resides on Cape Cod with her family. She is actively involved in her community and specializes in helping individuals find their core self.

She earned her masters degree in social work from Boston College and has been counseling groups, individuals, families, couples and adolescents for over ten years on Cape Cod.

Doreen deals extensively with issues of substance abuse, parenting, bullying and social skills. She is a member of the Cape Cod Suicide Prevention Coalition, South Shore Independent Therapists, and National Association of Social Workers. Her private practice is located at

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