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The month before the holidays and all through the house

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Give the gift of time together. It's always the perfect gift. Images Shutterstock

instead of things - tickets to a theater or sporting event, art or cooking classes, a day at a theme park, etc. Check out @SFBucketList on Instagram for a unique list of things to do together in San Francisco.

3) Create master grocery lists: Plan your meals now, create a shopping list for each of your Thanksgiving and holiday meals, and store it on your computer. This saves my clients so much time not having to re-write the grocery list every year.

4) Get your guest room ready: Make your guests feel welcome - create a calm and cozy space with a soft throw on the bed, fresh linens, a water bottle, fresh flowers, or a flickering LED candle, etc.

5) Simplify holiday decorating: Declutter as you decorate, really think about your holiday décor - what you use, what you don't, what you love, what you keep just because you feel you should. Discard and donate decorations that don't light up your life, rather than storing them for another year. After you decorate this year, take photos so you can easily recreate your decor next year. Take a photo of each decorated room and the front of your house too. Print the photos and put them in the labeled storage box with each room's decorations. Next year, decorating will be so easy - and everyone can help because you have the photos!

6) Declutter the kids' toys: Now is the perfect time to go through your children's rooms - discard any items that are broken or missing pieces and donate the items they have outgrown that other children may enjoy.

7) Give back: There's nothing quite like the feeling of giving back to your community, and it's a great lesson to teach our children. Taking time to volunteer at a food bank or participate in an adopt-a-family program can brighten the holidays for others and for you too!

8) Talk to your family: What tradition does your family most enjoy? Have everyone tell you the must-do tradition that they like the best. What traditions does nobody really care about anymore? We can make ourselves crazy trying to do it all. Perhaps it's time to add a new tradition and let go of some old ones. You may be surprised that the tradition you've been bending over backward to fit in is something nobody really cares about anymore.

Here are a couple of new ideas: Play a game of high-low at your holiday dinner - ask everyone their high and low experience of this past year - you will be amazed at the conversations that these questions inspire. Make holiday dough ornaments with the family - my adult children still love this. Purchase scratch-off lottery tickets for the stockings or for each day of your holiday.

9) Don't forget to plan quiet time: And put it in your calendar! Kids need quiet time and so do adults. The holidays can get busy. We're often good about scheduling the things we need to do but forget to block out time for ourselves. Watch a holiday movie, enjoy a leisurely cup of tea or hot chocolate, grab a cozy blanket and read a book (alone or with the kids), make a puzzle, etc. Give yourself and your family the gift of quiet time.

Wishing you the happiest of holidays!

After an unpredictable year, I am looking forward to spending some extra quality time this season with my family and friends. The pandemic is far from over so our typical holiday season might look a little different this year. If we have learned anything, it's flexibility, resilience, and adaptability. For many of us, the past year and a half has highlighted the value of time with loved ones. So, my goal this year is to de-stress the holidays.

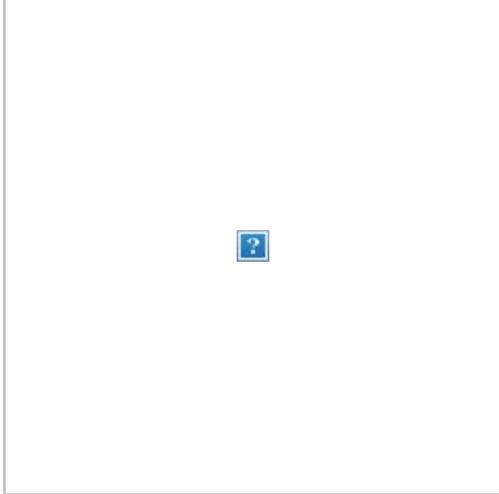
Here are a few of my favorite tips to help you really enjoy this holiday season so you can focus on what's important to you.

1) Order gifts early: You'll avoid the stress of last-minute shopping. Keep in mind, that we are seeing major supply chain disruptions and delays this year, so it's even more important to shop early.

2) Give the gift of time together: It's always the perfect gift. We all learned during the time of COVID how valuable time is with loved ones. Purchase experiences



Take photos of your decorations, so you can easily recreate them next year. Images Shutterstock



Professional Organizer, Jennifer Raftis, CPOr founded Efficiency Matters, LLC to help you with all of your organizing needs for your home and business. She is a Certified Professional Organizer and an active board member with NAPO, National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals. She is also an independent representative for The Container Store and has expertise in designing closets, garages, pantries, playrooms and more. In addition, she is a Corporate Organizing and Productivity Consultant and has worked with Fortune 500 companies across the U.S. Another large part of her business is move management especially working with seniors who are downsizing. She and her husband have lived in Moraga for 30 years, raising 3 kids and working countless volunteer hours with many local non-profit organizations and schools. Jennifer@efficiencymattersllc.com, 925-698-3756 www.efficiencymattersllc.com

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