



SHANE LYNCH PSYCHOLOGY

It's coming...

Are you ready for the holiday season and all it brings? You know: the good, the not-so-good, and the get-togethers?

Don't forget

For some, this may be the "most wonderful time of the year" but not for all. It's also worth noting that for those that need it to be wonderful and this is not achieved, it can be just as disheartening as it is for those that find it the most taxing time of the year.

Managing one's anticipations or expectations is very important to making it through December at home and at work.

About Shane

We celebrate Christmas in our house. I'm hoping to do some sledding and ice skating and other festive activities with our kiddos. Thankfully we will have a lot of family to celebrate with this year which, for me, really makes this time of year special. And maybe some snow, too.



Navigating the Holidays

Every year around this time when company Christmas parties start to pop up, when the malls put up their decorations, and the stores start playing that "tis the season" music, I begin to hear from clients about both the good and not-so-good aspects of the holiday season.

Some revel in the return of the "candy cane hot chocolate mocha something-or-other", while others stress about budgets, shopping, and the barrage of get-togethers. Of course, what's joyous to one is bah humbug to another. The theme that seems to run through both the good and the not-so-good is the "getting together."

How do we best navigate this season in ways that keep us getting the most from the good parts while not letting the not-so-good parts take over? Individually, I'd say the key here is knowing your boundaries. If you're part of a couple, know each other's boundaries. If you've got kids, be sure to set boundaries in



Tips for Dads & Moms

Setting boundaries with your kids at this time of year can be really tricky. Hopefully you've done some of this before and have some boundaries that are already well-established. It will always be better to flex boundaries during special times of the year than to have to create them.

If you've already got bedtime established on any regular day, you can now refer to that boundary when you are choosing to be more flexible with it at Aunt May's house, or with Grandma and Grandpa. "Well, normally this is when we start getting ready for bed, but this is a special night with family/friends, so we'll stay up a bit later. When it's time to leave I'll let you know and I'll need your cooperation to get out the door so we can get home."



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advance so it's not a big surprise to them when they inevitably bump into them over the next couple of weeks.

Before I launch into examples of each so you have some practical understanding/approaches moving forward, let me first define boundaries.

The metaphor I like to use is the sliding glass patio door. In summer here in Calgary, the evening tends to cool off a bit. For those who like fresh air or don't have air conditioning it's the only time of day to open that sliding door. Of course, when we open the sliding door we get the cooler air (what we want), but we also get mosquitos (what we don't want)! So we quickly shut the sliding glass door. Now we're safe from mosquitos but we don't get cool air anymore. The solution is to pull the screen door which keeps out the bugs but let's in the cool air. The open sliding glass door is unhealthy or no boundaries. The closed sliding glass door is unhealthy or rigid boundaries. The screen door is how healthy boundaries work, that is, we can keep out what we don't want and allow in what we do want.

Individually, it's a good practice to build our own awareness of when we are operating from a place indicative of healthy boundaries versus one of the other two options (no boundaries or rigid ones). If we know this we can make some individual adjustments. If we know that Uncle Bob is going to trigger our rigid boundaries by talking about topics we staunchly disagree with at a family gathering, shift into healthy boundary setting by not engaging with Uncle Bob (i.e., don't argue, roll your eyes), instead decide what you're letting in (i.e., time with your Uncle) and what you're not letting in (i.e., what you have decided is his misguided or misinformed perspective). If rigidity can step aside, you may even be able to validate—but not agree with—his perspective. Now that last bit is a pro-level ability that even psychologists can struggle with from time to time. But, if you can differentiate between agreement and validation, it's totally possible. Since everyone wants to feel validated, it will probably bring an end to the discussion more quickly than an argument defending our rigid boundaries.

As a couple, if you always go along with whatever your partner wants you're operating unhealthy boundaries (i.e., no boundaries). Determine what you are willing to accept and not accept and be clear about both. "Dinner is fine, your family and friends are great, but I'd prefer to not play boardgames all night afterwards."