

## Family Counseling Service: Why Do Divorce Rates Spike Following Summer and the Holidays?

By Larry Deavers

Divorce rates tend to spike in the weeks following the Christmas holidays and during August, following the summer vacation season. This spike may be due to couples wanting to protect their children or other family from their marital problems during important family get-togethers or vacations. For some, their family vacation during the summer may be their final attempt to save their marriage. There is also the additional stress on the marriage that comes from having extensive involvement with extended family, or from coordinating the family vacation, which can exacerbate an already stressful relationship.

Making a hasty decision to divorce following a stressful family experience is likely more reactive and emotionally driven, than proactive and carefully considered. Knowing that the stress of holidays, or a family vacation, is likely to add to the pressures on the marriage, it is best to hold off on making any final decisions while under the additional stress.

It is normal for holidays and vacations to fail to live up to our expectations. Even though it's common to experience disappointment along with the joys of the seasons, our hopefulness that things will be better this year often creates a sense of optimism that overlooks previous stressors. To help reduce the effects these stressors might have, it's important to think about what

normally generates the stress, and plan ways, as a couple, to help reduce those during family activities.

Close, continuous, and unstructured time for days on end, even with family members you enjoy most, is stressful. These can lead to emotionally charged situations. Because the stress of a holiday or vacation season can expose any weaknesses or unresolved issues in your relationship, it may be best to build in some kind of "safety valves" into your plans to let one another decompress when stress strikes.

A proactive plan may include pre-arranged signals to indicate to each other when you need a timeout, and an agreement to allow the other person to retreat from one another or other family members for a short time.

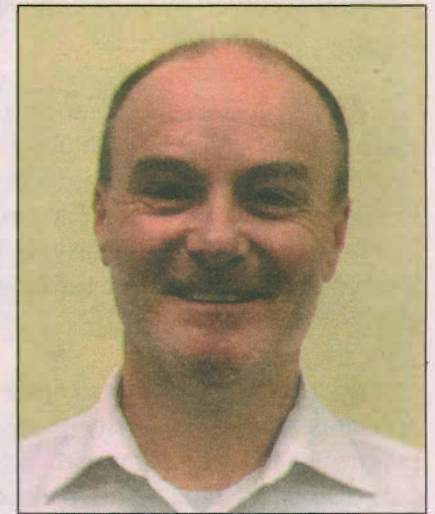
**"IT IS NORMAL FOR HOLIDAYS AND VACATIONS TO FAIL TO LIVE UP TO OUR EXPECTATIONS."**

A "short time" doesn't mean avoiding everyone for hours or days, but taking the time you really need to gather your thoughts and emotions and regain your composure. Total avoidance creates its



own kind of stress on the marriage and on the family.

The important point is to remember not to make any major life decisions if your ability to think clearly is compromised by your emotional reaction to stress. If you plan ahead going into these family situations, and allow one another the space you each need to be alone and decompress, you can increase the chances of enjoying the pleasures the holidays or vacation season can bring, while minimizing the stressors. If you can both focus more on the positive aspects of what you have as a family, you increase the chances that you can approach your marriage with the renewed optimism and energy you will need to make other necessary changes.



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