

Here are some solutions and reason why there is a spike in break-ups during the holidays.

1. What would some of the top reasons be for the spike in break-ups around the holidays?

Family

As much as we love our family they can get in the way. When we enter a relationship we somehow expect to live with the same traditions, rules, and expectations that we lived with growing up. It might be the only thing we know. And we expect our partners to do the same. In reality this is not the case because our partners have another set of traditions, rules, and expectations. As life would have it, we are very often attracted to our exact opposite. This can cause a large amount of unhappiness and is highlighted over the holidays.

I have a couple that used to see me and they struggled with a very busy extended family. His family had traditions during the Christmas holidays and every year, for years they spent Christmas at his family. One year she just refused. It was a shock to the family and to him. He was under an unbelievable amount of pressure from both his family and his partner. It's a tricky situation because you want to be with your family and you want to keep your family traditions and teach your kids these. In the same way, you want to please your partner and create new traditions. If your traditions are very different this can cause major conflict.

Solution:

- If you are expecting your partner to sacrifice for you, then you must be willing to sacrifice for them. If you are not willing than you cannot expect your partner to be willing.
- Remember that you and your partner CAN and are ALLOWED to create new traditions. You are your own “new family”.
- You will need to compromise and be fair in your judgment.

Gift

Let's face it: getting a gift that we don't want or like can be more than disappointing; it can feel like your partner knows very little about you. It becomes bigger than the gift; it's about how connected you feel. Often, we believe our partners are meant to just know how we are feeling, to know exactly what we need, or just to see the situation the same way we see it. We feel they should be able to instinctively and intuitively know us and what we are thinking (without us even saying a word). It sounds crazy when you say it like that but ask yourself when last you said, “But why doesn't he just help with the dishes?” or “Can't she see I need some space?”

Solution:

- If you are a super sensitive person when it comes to gifts and if you really feel your partner is clueless then give them a list.
- If your partner gives you a list surprise them with an EXTRA something small that they will not expect. Don't forget the something from the list.

- Remember that some people have a gift for gifts and others just don't. It doesn't determine the depth of your relationship.
- There is a very good chance that your partner is not clairvoyant and they have absolutely no idea how you are feeling. So tell them and be specific: "Love, please help me tonight with the dishes." "Honey, I need some time today just to do nothing."

Holidays are meant to be fun Right?

Have you ever felt like you needed a holiday straight after your holidays? The truth about holidays is that normal things still need to happen. Like clean the kitchen, wash the dishes, do the laundry. If you are not going on holiday you are most likely going to spend more time at home. Therefore there is more dishes, more laundry, and generally more mess. Sometimes it's easier to be at work than deal with it all.

Plan:

- Discuss the plan beforehand and stick to it.
- Remember to ask for assistance otherwise your partner will never know and, more importantly, never help.
- Get help over the holidays. Get grandparents involved and or your nanny\maid.
- Prioritise time alone
- Do something that is fun for you.

Expectations: This is something that most couples often struggle with. What you are expecting from me and what I am expecting from you. If this expectation is not met it can leave the relationship paralyzed. If you planned a relaxed holiday and envisioned you and your partner reading by the pool and your partner envisioned a few parties and an adventure-filled holiday, it can be disappointing for both of you.

Plan:

- Get specific about your expectations and explain to your partner the importance of the event. This doesn't mean you have to plan every day. It's just to express your expectations.
- Be tolerant of each other, remember they are on holiday too.

New Year Resolutions:

I am a strong believer in creating and executing a new year's resolution. However, if your resolutions involve you developing personally, or changing or doing something that your partner doesn't agree with, this can cause friction. For example, your new year's resolution is to stop smoking but your partner smokes and is not willing to give up with you; or, your new year's resolution is to take a year off and study but your partner feels that you cannot afford it.

Sometimes during personal development your partner can feel left behind.

Plan:

- Include your partner in the growth.
- Be mindful that your partner might be right.
- Relationships are about mutual sacrifice.

Going on holiday

Often couples that are having issues believe all they need is a great holiday (like in the old days). They believe they will reconnect. Unfortunately, there is nothing more taxing for the relationship (maybe having a baby) than travelling together. The added stress is too overwhelming and can often bring out the worst in that person.

Solution:

- If your relationship is already a challenge I would suggest a holiday that is less stressful for your personalities. For example: if your partner is shy and doesn't like talking to strangers, drive rather than fly; if your partner is not comfortable spending money then camp. Try and foresee the possible stresses and avoid them. It's meant to be about the two of you reconnecting and having a great time; not about the destination
- 2. **What can you do to pin-point your relationship problems (since your perception might be clouded by all the family drama/parties/responsibilities)?**

Stop and Listen. The only reason you leave your partner is if you are unhappy. Nine times out of ten you will express that unhappiness in some way over and over again. The way you express this unhappiness can be different for every person but the solution remains the same. Listen to what your partner is saying without judgment. It's about their unhappiness not about you.

People have a threshold. Once your partner has over-stepped the threshold there is no coming back. They can stand on their head and dance. You won't even notice. The bottom line is it is too late. I have so many clients coming to see me saying the same thing: "I told him\her and he\she never listened"; or, "I don't understand what happened, we were so happy." Don't reach your partners threshold and listen to what they are telling you.

3. **What are some of the signs that you might be heading towards a pre-Christmas break-up?**

In my experience people are too different for specific signs. However, if you are feeling unsure, you are most likely feeling unsure for a reason. Trust your gut feeling and open yourself up to listen. Then don't take what they are saying as judgment or criticism. They have the right to feel the way they are feeling. If you still don't understand then ask them. If you are unsure, seek help. There are lots of Marriage Counselors, Therapists, and Life Coaches available to help.

4. Why are holiday breakups especially painful?

Holiday break-ups are particular difficult because - well let's face it – holidays are meant to be fun and relaxing. During the holidays you expecting to feel good and you are expecting to create new memories as a couple. You are not meant to be dealing with a break-up. However, in reality, it's something that happens often. I don't believe break-ups are given the sympathy they deserve. A break-up can be equivalent to a death. It's a strange thought, right? If you have ever broken up with that person you thought would be the one, it feels like something inside of you dies: the dreams for the relationship, the hopes, the desires, the goals, and all the planning. It's like a death. All those great memories that you shared must just be forgotten. Generally, when someone dies you are given time to grieve, you get a funeral to make peace, and you get family and friend sympathy and support. And you are allowed to take as much time as you need to "get over it". When there is a break-up, if you are lucky and you have good friends and a large family you might get the sympathy and support you need. And let's face it, you are meant to "get over it" yesterday. A break-up over the holidays fuels the loss, the grief, and the disappointment. Family and friends are having a great time and you are left with this hole inside of you, desperate for someone to repeat the same story about how perfect you and your ex actually are for one another. Over the holidays you are expected to be smiling and having a great time.

5. Top tips on preventing relationship difficulties over the holidays?

- The first rule that I always suggest to every couple that comes to see me is try to have a date night weekly. If not weekly than as often as you can. It's so important to have alone time and reconnect.
- Learn to communicate. Yes, communicate! You most likely talk to each other all the time. But do you communicate? Meaning, have you understood the message the person speaking has said? See link for details: <http://ar-lifecoach.co.za/communication-is-an-art/>
- Discuss what you are expecting to happen during the holidays. Be specific.
- Take responsibility for the situation you are in and be aware of blaming your partner. For example, "He should have helped me"; "He never just takes any interest".
- Be honest to yourself. If you find your gut feeling nagging at you or your anxiety rise in a certain situation regarding your partner, listen and accept it. I often have so many people say to me, "If I am honest I knew something was wrong".
- Ladies, if you need help ask for it. Your partner is not a mind reader. They cannot guess that you need help with the dishes, kids etc. Gents, if your partner asks you to do something it's because they are feeling overwhelmed and need your help. Help them with the small things: take out the trash, hang up the clothes, take the kids out.
- Don't take everything so personally. Just because he said your kids are so naughty doesn't mean he thinks you are a bad mother. Or just because she said don't forget to feed the dog doesn't mean she is nagging (just feed the dog).