**On Your Mind, Nov/Dec, 2017**

**Holiday Issue**

Dear Dr. Robinson,

My 10 and 7 year old sons only think of Thanksgiving as a break from school and stuffing themselves with turkey. Don’t get me wrong. They are great kids, but just a tad “me”-oriented. We probably add to the situation by just collapsing and vegging out in front of the TV with football games. Also, because it’s a short work week, my boss tries to cram five days of work into three. Any thoughts about how we can put more “thanks” and “giving” in the holiday? Signed, Drained.

Dear Drained,

Ya know, given your surroundings and work demands, good for you for even remembering the intent of the Thanksgiving holiday. Making changes sounds like a process of swimming upstream for you and your family. Hang in there. Family traditions can be challenged and changed with planning, effort, and upbeat attitude.

First, talk with your spouse privately. Make sure you both are on the same page. There’s a saying in psychology. We are drawn to the familiar, even if it is unhealthy. So, change involves persistence long enough for the healthy unfamiliar to become familiar.

Once your spouse is on board, plan a family meeting. Tell the kids that you want to plan holiday activities that will embrace the meaning of “thanksgiving.” Tolerate the groans, “sounds like homework,” and “do we hafta?” Keep your smile and be upbeat. Use the week preceding the family meeting to notice incidentally ideas that you’ve heard about. Use your active listening to hear your children’s feelings, and then redirect them to options.

I’ve known some families who find a homeless person to bring home for family dinner. Others volunteer at a nursing home or a homeless shelter or serve food at a local church feeding the disadvantaged. Others make Thanksgiving an extended family, or multi-family, neighborhood event. Others tape the football games and trade vegging out in for a family trip to the park, the zoo, or another local attraction.

Lots of possibilities. As you are committed to the change and find the energy, your family will follow your lead. Once you have a plan, include the kids in the details. Hopefully, their groaning will become excitement.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

For Christmas break, the local schools allow almost a month off from school. Of course, my kids are thrilled about it, but the change in their routine and the time alone, having to find things to do, take their toll. They gripe about being bored and they are moody. I want them to enjoy their time off. I don’t want to ground them for just being kids, but, at times like these, they can get on my nerves. Help.

Signed, Out Of Options

Dear Out,

With your comment about their time alone, I’m assuming that your kids are middle school and high school, and also reasonably responsible. That being the case, you will have more options by planning ahead, factoring in reward and consequence, helping them establish a routine, and inserting family outing time as schedules permit.

For example, start with a family meeting. Use your grease-board, family calendar to tag events during the time off from school. If there are local concerts, movie nights, sleepovers, church events, and time for holiday shopping, put all of that on the calendar. Use these events as rewards for tasks completed and for keeping a good mood and attitude.

Get creative about ways they can become more responsible, while also having more fun. For example, divide up age-appropriate ways they can help you out (code for “chores”) since they have more time. Have them balance computer gaming and phone texting with pleasure reading. Have them plan, shop, and prepare evening meals, and then brag on them as you share the meal together. Help them think outside of the box as well and be creative with the time off from school, supporting ideas that they come up with, within your time and expense limitations. With cooperative planning, holiday time can be fun, family time.