

Children & Holiday Anxiety

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The holidays are hectic – and they can be stressful – especially for children. Buying presents, attending holiday events, planning celebratory meals, juggling family and extended family schedules – all to be “ideally” festive, can really crank up the pressure you put on yourself, and ultimately on your children; for what you feel, your children feel.

Below are a few suggestions to reduce holiday stress for you and for your children.



- *Manage your own stress.*

You are no good to anyone if you are so stressed out that you cannot function. Plug into to what is important to you. Practical self-care. Get plenty of sleep. Breathe. Exercise. Eat healthy, clean, wholesome food. There is no way to prevent your children from feeling your stress, but you can prevent how much stress you allow during the holiday season. Minimize and set a great example for your children.

- *As much as possible, maintain your routines.*

Children thrive with predictability. Keep meal time and bedtime routines consistent. Children need sleep. In fact, children ages 1 to 2 years old require 12-14 hours a day. Children ages 3 to 5 require 10 to 13 hours a day. Keep meals healthy and wholesome, serving real food (vs. food that comes from a box or pouch – shop the walls in the grocery store). Eat with your children at the table. Turn off the television, phones, iPad, etc. These devices raise stress levels in children.

- *Manage your expectations.*

Celebrate holidays only on the actual date, as much as humanly possible. Advent calendars are fun, but they add to the hype of the holidays – especially for children. Children do not understand the concept of time. They live in the moment so when they hear “in 23 days....” all they hear is “something BIG is coming”. They don’t understand what is coming or when it’s coming. And that leads to anxiety and stress. Try to keep your child focused on just one day at a time.

- *Plan for Activity.*

Exercise is an incredible stress-buster. For children and adults. Spend your upcoming days off school for holidays at the park, the mall playground, Kids Place, Money Joe's, or the local trampoline parks. Go on walks together. And do not forget to join in the fun yourself.

- *Spend time together every day.*

Intentional time, where you are sharing an activity with your children. Going to the occasional movie or indulging in a family movie night is perfectly okay but focus on activities that involve personal interaction. Play games together. Visit a nearby children's museum together. Bake cookies or decorate gingerbread houses as a family.

- *Create family rituals.*

Whether it is holiday baking, a holiday open house, or making homemade gifts, or a concert you always attend, create things you can do together every year that are meaningful and fun. Create family rituals you *want* to do. And give yourself a break – if you hate mailing holiday cards, don't mail holiday cards. Pick a less hectic holiday for sending cards. Hate decorating for the holidays – keep it simple. Stockings, a tree with just lights and a wreath. Simple = Beautiful. Do the parts of the holiday celebration you love and give yourself permission to ditch the parts you don't. Simple is beautiful.

- *Pick a children-based charity to support.*

A toy drive or donate outgrown clothing to a shelter or clothing drive. Include your children. Let them know that not all children have lots of clothes to wear or lots of toys to play with and that it is kind to share what you no longer use with other children who have less. Donating money is great any time of year, but children relate deeply to active participation. And it teaches children to think of others and it develops empathy and kindness.

Your children will be young for a very, very, very, short time and holiday with them should be beautiful and meaningful and enjoyed together. Give yourself permission to just slow down and keep things simple so you can enjoy these years. They will be gone in a blink of an eye.