

Make Holiday Times Special Times

We are approaching the time of year when many families of various cultures and faiths celebrate a holiday of one sort or another. It is a good time to build and reinforce family traditions. Holiday activities can include special foods, games, decorations, parties, story telling, visiting family and friends, religious celebrations, and possibly gift giving. Being a part of family holiday traditions can provide a child with a sense of belonging and security. Family holiday times build family memories.

Stress-Free Holidays

Holidays are times when there are many extra things going on. These times can be stressful for children, as well as parents. The following hints can help reduce holiday stress for your child:

- Take your child's needs into account and try to keep routines the same.
- Be sure your child gets enough sleep.
- Make time for your child each day. This can include having her help with a holiday preparation.
- Allow time for active play.
- Expect some "cranky" moments or even some regression in behavior. Be sympathetic instead of annoyed.
- If your child misbehaves, talk about it. You might want to say to your child, "There's a lot going on right now. Let's take some time to sit together and cuddle."
- Tell your child what to expect for holiday activities. For example say, "Today we will be going to Grandma's for dinner. Aunt Josie and Uncle Fred will be there. You will be able to play with your cousins."
- Tell your child if you are feeling stressed. Apologize if you do get upset about something and yell or snap at your child. It is good for your child to know that you can admit a mistake and ask forgiveness.
- Choose those things that you enjoy most to do for holidays. Cut back on any that are not essential. If you are less stressed, your family will be too, and you will enjoy your time together more.

Ways Your Child Can Help

Young children can do many things to help you get ready for a holiday. Here are just some of the ways your child can help:

- Simple food preparation, such as scrubbing potatoes, mixing cookie dough, or tearing lettuce for a salad.
- Decorating paper place mats.
- Putting stamps on envelopes.
- Making simple decorations.
- Dusting the furniture.
- Setting the table.
- Folding laundry.
- Putting groceries away.

Holiday Gifts

If gift giving is part of your holiday tradition, talk with your children about them. Share your values about the meaning of that particular holiday. Plan some other fun family activities around the gift-giving time to minimize the importance of gifts. Encourage your child to make some gifts. He can do special things for a friend, a neighbor, a shut-in, or an elderly person.

Surviving Shopping With Kids

Here are some ways to help you survive those shopping trips when the kids must go along:

- Limit the number of stores to two or three per outing.
- Keep your shopping list short. Talk about gift ideas and budgets before you go.
- Try to shop when the stores are less busy. Children can be overwhelmed by crowds.
- Locate restrooms before you need them!
- Shop with your child when she is fed and rested.
- Take along a snack in case it is needed while you are out.
- Include one thing your child wants to see while you are out shopping.
- Try to make the shopping outing fun. Be sensitive to your child's needs.

Plan Ahead For Holiday Shopping

It is a good idea to set a budget for holiday expenses. Whether your holiday involves a special meal or decorations or gifts, you should plan ahead for what you will need to spend. Make a list of what you will need to buy. Figure out how much you can afford to spend. Before charging something, figure out what the credit costs will be. Would it be better for you to buy something less expensive and pay cash for it? Look at the total picture when figuring holiday expenses. Spend what you can afford and you won't feel stressed about your budget.

Adapted from Family Time/Work Time