

REDUCING HOLIDAY STRESS

As the traditional holiday season approaches, family stress begins to build. Parties, shopping, family commitments, activities, presentations, and anticipation all take their toll on adults. What happens to children at this time of year? Often adults can use words to express their over stimulation, while children resort to the most basic level: their body language. Whining, crying, hitting, sibling rivalry, lack of cooperation can peak as the holidays come closer. Parents can take action before the season swings into gear. With family plans, thoughtful consideration in the forefront, holiday stress can be reduced and family time can become more relaxed and productive. Some ideas worth trying include:

1. Delay talking about the approaching holiday until a few days before it will occur. The concept of time is quite abstract and beyond the cognitive abilities of most preschoolers. Waiting is very hard for most children and almost impossible for some. Make it easy on yourself and your children by choosing to save anticipation for the very last moment!
2. Let your child know clearly that gifts are NOT rewards for good behavior. Gifts are given because someone loves you and cares about you. Children can become very worried that their behavior will never be “good enough”. Your LOVE is your greatest gift to your child.
3. Be sensitive to your personal reactions to the busy holiday season. Children sense their parent’s every mood. Your personal stress can be communicated to your child without saying anything!
4. Your child may ask specific and often value-laden questions about holiday time. Take time to answer each question thoughtfully. “Is Santa real?” “What is Jesus’ birthday?”
5. Provide opportunities for your child to relax. A pile of soft pillows, a quilt over a card table, a sleeping bag may give your child a safe refuge from too much stimulation. Books and quiet music on a tape player are additional modes of relaxation.
6. Paper and drawing material can offer a means of expressing a child’s feelings. Asking your child to draw how he/she is feeling can be therapeutic.
7. Aggressive and over stimulated children can find relief in a warm bath tub. Bubbles, soap crayons, and containers for pouring assist in stress reduction. Adults may find they need these outlets too. Having children bathe before dinner can turn conflict into fun!
8. An outdoor easel on the deck, in the yard, hooked to the fence, or located on the driveway can give an overly-stressed child a creative release. Mix tempera paint with liquid dish detergent for easier clean-up.
9. Dough or clay offers a way to air frustrations. A simple recipe for homemade play dough follows. Cookie cutters and round blocks are all that is needed for uninterrupted play. In our climate, try this outdoors!
10. Limit sugary foods. Many children become more active or aggressive when high sugar levels are present in their bodies. This can be a challenge to parents at holiday time. Sugar is best offered in small amounts and on infrequent occasions. Alternatives include fresh fruit. Texas is famous for wonderful citrus products.
11. Set aside time for family. Even in the busy holiday season, take one night each week for an at-home family time. Concentrate on each other. Sing, play special music, read meaningful stories, play family games, hug, kiss and tell each other, “I love you”. Time and love always work wonders!