

Dealing with Parenting Stress During the Holiday

The holidays are here! This time of year makes me think back to my childhood, many of my fondest memories are centered around this time of year. Being from Wisconsin I remember many a snowy Christmas mornings going to my grandmothers, putting up the tree, getting together with family and memories with friends. Now that I am older I have come to realize that all of the fore mentioned take a lot of time, a lot of planning, and they also can create a lot of stress.

The holiday season that we imagine full of giving, joyfulness, and family can also bring stress and trouble. Parents become stressed with the need to fulfill their child's every wish. Children have expectations around how many gifts they'll receive, what kind and which sibling gets more.

Family is together more over the holidays, which can also cause stress. Add to the mix extended family either coming in for a visit, or traveling elsewhere, and difficulties can arise. Families find themselves staying with relatives they don't really like and sometimes hosting others who can be trying on our patience. Differences, grievances and resentments can suddenly move front and center.

College kids coming home for the holiday may struggle as they adjust to being under mom and dad's roof once again after experiencing the freedom and independence of living away from home. Feelings may be conflicted about returning home again after an absence.

So, what can you do to make the holidays more joyful?

Volunteer -- Help in a soup kitchen as a family. This builds a habit of giving in your children, teaches great values and nurtures a sense of gratitude for what they have. In place of one of your child's gift this year go to an Angel Tree at you local store and let your child pick out a toy or game for someone less fortunate. Adopt a family and share your love with someone else who may not have what your family has.

Talk – If you take some time to find out what your children expect from the holidays it will be easier to deal with disappointment. Talk one-on-one with each child when you are relaxed and in a good mood. Help them to focus on what is realistic.

Think about Time – Look at what you normally do during the holidays and see if you can let some of the baking and shopping go to spend time with your kids. Ask your children get older involve them in more holiday activities including wrapping presents, decorating, and more. Most importantly keep your family routine the same. Foregoing naps, staying up late, skipping meals, or eating a lot of fast food can be stressful to your children and to you.

Reflect - Spend time reminiscing with your older children. Ask them about their first memories of the holidays. Remember why you celebrate the holidays to help your children take the focus off themselves and place it on others. Look for teachable moments, the holiday season is filled with the potential to share ideals about giving, receiving, responsibility, and caring just to name a few.

Keep your eyes and ears open to your family dynamics this holiday season. Simplify where you can and put relationships ahead of activities. Although the demands are high during the holidays, your time to impart the deeper meaning of the celebration is fleeting. Take the time now to create memories that both you and your children can treasure for a lifetime.

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