



SIX TIPS FOR KEEPING THE HAPPY IN YOUR HOLIDAY

During the holiday season, most of us spend our energy focusing on things like buying gifts, juggling schedules, taking care of last minute seasonal details or gearing up for holiday travel.

In the middle of all the hustle and bustle, it's easy to overlook how draining events and activities can be for our children. While you're fretting over how to get it all done in record time, be aware that your kids maybe soaking up seasonal stress like a sponge. When the wheels come off, we may find ourselves trying to bribe our children for good behavior, repeatedly reminding them that Santa is watching or perhaps desperately pleading with our five-year-old to avoid a major melt-down at Aunt Gertrude's annual holiday gathering.

Whether you are taking a long trip in the car, shopping in the mall, sitting at a restaurant or attending a family gathering, here are a few tips for keeping you and your kids de-stressed this holiday season.

IDENTIFY POSSIBLE PITFALLS

Take a few minutes to think about past holidays and consider the following when planning for upcoming seasonal gatherings or trips.

- ▲ Where or when might your kids have a difficult time during a holiday event or activity?
- ▲ Does Megan hate to shop? How likely is it that little Billy will be bored out of his mind at the annual neighborhood New Year's Eve party? Will driving straight through to Grandma's send Sarah over the edge?
- ▲ What might help them manage their behavior better?
- ▲ Is there any way you can pair a taxing activity with one that your kids enjoy or something that gives them a break?

GIVE KIDS A HEADS UP

Kids tend to handle things better when they know what to expect. To keep kids in the loop, spend a few minutes when things are quiet (i.e. over dinner or before bed) chatting about upcoming holiday plans. Let them know important details (when, where, and who) and what you expect of them during the celebration, occasion or activity. When appropriate ask them to help brainstorm ideas about what will help make the event more enjoyable.

Seasonal calendars can also help keep everyone on track and excited about future festivities.

RESIST THE JUNK FOOD FIX

Nothing sets off a major holiday melt-down faster than a hungry kid. Avoid junk food fixes by packing a small box or bag filled with bottled water and an assortment of healthy snacks (i.e. granola bars, apples, grapes, pretzels, snack mix, nuts etc.) Keep the bag in your car when you're on the go, so when you're pinched for time you can bypass high sugar or high fat options.

UNPLUG OCCASIONALLY

As a parent there are times when handheld games, mobile phones and the DVD system in your car seem like the best inventions on the face of the planet. While there's nothing wrong with occasionally letting kids plug in so you can have a few quiet moments to decompress from the holiday rush, be mindful about what kind of habits you're cultivating this holiday season.

To offset digital overload, think about ways you can use idle time more creatively. For example, books like the Christmas edition of Chicken Soup for the Soul offer a positive holiday message through a series of simple short stories. Not only does it get your kids reading, it also helps them connect with the spirit of the season. If you have younger children, you could take along The Night Before Christmas or perhaps rent an audio book from your local library. To get everyone in the holiday mood, play your favorite seasonal CD and have a sing along.

Worried about keeping young minds active and engaged while sitting at a restaurant or biding time during an event? Think about packing a small bag or backpack with items to keep kids busy. Visit a nearby dollar store to stock up on things like holiday stickers, paper, pencils, crayons, small activity books or word puzzles. The key is to only use the bag when you are on the go so items will keep their appeal.

GIVE BREAKS AS NEEDED

If your child seems a little overwhelmed or on the verge of having problems, give them a break by removing them from the situation. Go for a short walk, get some fresh air outside or engage in a quiet conversation that helps them redirect their attention.

CATCH THEM BEING GOOD

During a holiday event or activity, focus on doing more connecting than correcting. When kids are doing good job of helping out or behaving be sure to let them know. Do your best to give them kudos throughout instead of waiting until the end of the event to let them know you appreciate their help.

TAKE ACTION CHALLENGE: Pick one event you will be attending with your children this holiday season and schedule 15 to 20 minutes to prepare for it ahead of time. Consider implementing at least three of the tips listed above and see how it changes things for both you and your kids.