



PLAY THERAPY NEWS

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Children and the Holiday Season

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People often anticipate the holidays as a chance to renew relationships with family and friends, as well as take a break from their everyday work responsibilities.

With a majority of the American population's families being blended, there is the question as to how to carry on with the usual traditions. It is important to recognize the significance of the holidays and their value in providing a sense of continuity in children's lives. Regardless of changing life events, such as divorce, it can

be reassuring to engage in and embrace the holidays, even if the participation and manner of each celebration is somewhat modified.

Parents spend a great deal of time trying to select the best holiday presents for their children. Yet, the best gift that any parent — those who are happily married, separating or divorced — can give to their children is security, peace of mind, a confident sense of self, as well as an inspirational role model for the holiday season.



The activities that are the easiest, least expensive and most fun — such as singing, playing games, reading, storytelling, just talking and listening—are also the best for child development.

—Professor Jerome Singer,
Yale University

For the children's holiday school break, give them the best gift of all, the wonderful memories of your spending time doing what they love most— playing with and investing time in them!

Happy Holiday Travel

Keep planning simple:

Traveling with kids in tow involves many details, so keep it uncomplicated.

Make getting to your

destination fun: Draw up a list of things one might expect to see from a car or plane, such as two-toned cows, a car toting a Christmas tree, a lake or river. Have the kids vie to see who spots them first.

Pack a fun bag: Assemble a bag for each child with stickers, paper and washable markers, poseable figurines, magnetic games, puzzles and a pillow.

Break up trip with frequent stops: Playgrounds, indoor fun centers and family restaurants are good bets.

Make a memory box: Bring an empty shoebox to collect items along the way, such as seashells, rocks or funny postcards. When you get home, label the box with the trip destination and date for a souvenir of your memorable family time.

Holidays: Tensions and Traditions

Suggestions for Parents:

- Parents should set the mood for their children. In happy times, and especially when times are difficult, children look to their parents as a model on how to handle situations and manage troubled feelings.
- Parents may involve their children in planning for holiday celebrations. Once parents have decided on options for changes that need to be made, they can present the alternatives to their children. Children appreciate being given choices, and when they have a voice, are usually more cooperative.

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HAVE SOME COOL WINTER FUN!



Happy Holidays to One and All

- Focusing on religious, cultural or historical aspects of a holiday provides a vital connection to the past. Holidays offer an opportunity to pause and ponder the larger spiritual or personal meaning of events.
- Maintaining and following certain traditions can be a source of comfort. The routine of familiar past celebrations may provide a sense of security and continuity in life. Getting back to normal includes engaging in as much of the "customary" family holiday rituals as time and circumstances will allow.
- Consider alternative types of celebrations. Although certain aspects may need to be altered, such as location, it can be helpful to continue features of some past celebrations, perhaps a traditional game of charades, ice skating outings or holiday cookie decoration.
- For many, the meaning and composition of the family has changed. If there has been a death in the family in the past year, the holidays can be especially painful. The first occurrence of a holiday is often the most difficult. It is important to acknowledge the loss and resulting changes. Some folks find comfort in carrying on with past traditions that are a tribute to and reminder of the person who has died; others prefer to create new routines and ways to honor a dear one's memory.
- If your family constellation has been altered, it may feel as if everyone else is pursuing their traditional activities but you. This pressure to return to normal may be compounded by strong persuasion from stores and media that provide a romantic vision of the holidays. It is important to recognize that *rarely* is real life as well orchestrated or positive. Families must try to determine what is personally realistic for them.
- Parents can use the holiday season to cultivate the joys of giving. Projects such as donating to a charity can be a yearly family custom that creates a sense of continuity. Starting a family coin collection for the local toy fund, gathering art supplies and warm clothes for needy families or delivering a holiday meal to a sick person are some other examples of activities for the family to work on together. It will not be long before kids learn that *real wealth comes from what is shared rather than from what is owned.*