



PLAY THERAPY NEWS

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Children and Holiday Stress

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Holiday schedules are unlike those of any other time of the year. Many parents believe that children are unaware of, or are somehow immune to, the stressors around them. Yet children are very sensitive to changes, whether they are positive or negative. Even though we view our seasonal celebrations as an upbeat time of the year, variance in daily agendas do impact kids. How can families support a sense of calm during holidays? One idea is to give kids tools with which to quietly compose themselves. Children can learn to manage their own

anxious energy through using slow deep breathing, visualization and affirmations. Does one have to be a certified yoga master to teach these methods to children? If a parent can sit quietly with a child and write calming thoughts, listen to a tranquil CD or holiday music, take time to mindfully listen to one another using eye contact, applying breath, visualizations and affirmations will be the next easy step. Just try these methods 10 minutes a day for a healthy holiday gift for your children to use all year. [\(See Resources\)](#)



The mind and body affect each other. Unmanaged stress can affect children physically, socially and emotionally. It is worth exposing children to relaxation techniques.

- Patricia Arcari, PhD, RN, Associate in Medicine, Harvard Medical School/ Mind Body Medical Inst.



Lower Holiday Tension

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2009,) traveling, visiting family members, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase your child's stress levels. Stick to your child's usual routines, including sleep schedules and timing of naps to help you and your child enjoy the holidays.

Keep travel simple:

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

Travel with a fun bag:

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

Use 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 memorable souvenir.

Family Changes and Traditions

Suggestions for Parents:

- Most importantly, 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.
- 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

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Resources

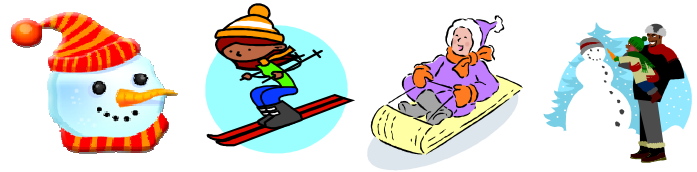
Reducing kid's stress:

<http://stressfreekids.com>

Tips for beating holiday stress:

http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/holiday_stress.html

HAVE SOME COOL WINTER FUN!



Happy Holidays to One and All

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- 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 may involve their children in planning holiday celebrations. Once parents have decided on options for needed changes, they can present the alternatives to their children. Children appreciate being given choices, and when they have a voice, are more cooperative.
 - 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.
 - 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.*
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