

Healthy Holidays

The holiday season can be a time of joy filled with quality time with family and friends. It can also be a time for disrupted schedules and increased meltdowns for our youngest celebrators. Take a packed agenda, add a crowded mall, and sprinkle an excess of sugar on top and you have created an environment of chaos for children. Thankfully, there are things you can do to help.

Hurry less. As much as possible, household and other routines should remain the same. Routines give children a sense of security. Children, and often adults for that matter, are typically afraid of the unknown. Providing consistency through routines throughout the holidays can help decrease anxiety and stress.

One thing at a time. The typical holiday “to-do list” is long and arduous (hang lights, buy Aunt Molly the perfect sweater, bake gluten free cookies, etc.). However, our brains aren’t built for multitasking, and doing more than one thing at a time means at least one thing is receiving less than our full attention. If the “one thing” is your child, you may be adding stress to your “to-do list.”

Lead by example. Modeling is a powerful teacher. If you appear stressed, your children will follow. “H” and “O” are also good ideas for adults, too.

Implausible expectations should be curbed. Expectations should be realistic. For example, consider how long your child can sit still at the dinner table or how well he or she can tolerate novel food items. Tailoring your expectations for your child’s developmental reality can decrease stress for all involved.

Discuss things ahead of time. Preparation is key. Give children a timetable to allow a smooth transition. For example, “We are eating in two hours.” “We will be sitting at the dinner table for 30 minutes.” Or, “There will be 20 people at the party.” When asked, “How long?,” sometimes it is more developmentally appropriate to use concepts of time your child is familiar with (i.e. “We will be sitting at the table for one Paw Patrol show.”)

Action of gratitude. Your child will more than likely receive a gift they don’t like. Plan ahead to avoid embarrassing exclamations, such as, “This is ugly!” Role play how to say thank you, no matter what knitted treasure is beneath the wrapping paper!

Yes! Say yes more often than you say no to those little requests such as, “Will you read me a book?” Or “Will you play with me?” The most important gift you can give or receive is quality time with the ones you love the most.

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