

Let There Be Peace in the Home: Helping Children Manage Stress During the Holiday Season

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The Christmas season is often filled with much excitement and anticipation for children. For some adults, the Christmas season is filled with stress and anxiety with the added financial strain, the extra food preparations, and extra time commitments on an already overloaded schedule. When children pick up on the stress, they become just as vulnerable to experiencing holiday stress as adults. The following are some practical tips to help children manage stress associated with the holiday season:

1. Help children to prepare their hearts and to focus on Jesus. When there is a material-centered holiday, the stress is placed on the parents to make everything right and perfect. Quite honestly, the children are set up for disappointment because material things will never completely satisfy.
2. Help children to have an attitude of service toward others. Parents and grandparents often work very hard at Christmas. Much of their effort is focused on making the holiday season special for the children. Unwittingly, this can encourage self-centeredness on the part of the children. Instead, children can be encouraged to be a part of the festivities by helping. Children that are focused on serving others will be less stressed and feel more connected.
3. Include family members in planning the schedule for the holiday season. Keep it simple by prioritizing relationships and events. Parents can remember that they have authority over their children's schedules and may need to say no to some activities. Children that are overscheduled and shuffled from place to place often become stressed.
4. Allow for plenty of time for children to play outdoors. Better yet-- join them in their play! Fresh air and physical exercise are great ways for children and adults to bring their stress down.
5. Plan times of rest and relaxation. In many families, the pace of life is fast and the holidays only increase the pace. It can be difficult to relax. Children need quiet times. If rest is not planned for, it often does not happen during the holiday season.
6. Maintain children's eating and sleeping routines as much as possible. This includes limiting the amount of sweets and not overeating.
7. Maintain family traditions. Family traditions promote bonding and attachment as well as provide security and a sense of belonging. Family traditions can still be maintained without the stress surrounding it.

8. For some children, Christmas can be a reminder of loss and of what has changed in the family. It can be tempting to try to compensate for the loss through material items or food, when there is a greater need simply for the presence of a parent or other trusted adult. A wonderful gift to a child that has experienced loss is to allow the child the space and support to grieve and express their feelings.

9. Lastly... parents take care of yourselves! Have realistic expectations; do not expect perfection for yourselves or children. Allow yourself time to relax. Children with relaxed parents will find it easier to relax and to manage their stress.

May you and you family have a Blessed Christmas and New Year!

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