

15 Tips To Help You Survive the Holidays With Your Family

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Although we anticipate the holidays being a time filled with family, fun and traditions, it can quickly turn into a calamity. Parents may feel frazzled and overcommitted while children are experiencing excitement and sugary treats.

Thus the holidays can quickly become a recipe for disaster resulting in parents yelling, children misbehaving, increased sibling squabbles, and intense emotions bursting from all. When children misbehave at this time of year, it may be their way of telling us that they are stressed and overwhelmed.

Below are tips that will keep the holidays joyous for everyone.

- 1. Keep routines.** Do your best to maintain the same bedtimes, nap times and mealtimes. When kids are overtired and hungry, their ability to tolerate frustration goes down.

- 2. Provide structure** to carefree days off of school. Some children have difficulty with less structure— misbehavior can increase and sibling squabbles become frequent. If this happens, restore routines and structure to your day.

- 3. Prepare for travel**, long car rides and visits with relatives. Bring books, toys and games to occupy children when traveling. Make sure to include children in packing for the trip. Putting children in charge of gathering items to help pass time, makes them feel included, responsible and more likely to cooperate.

- 4. Make sure kids get physical activity and/or get outside.** Most school day routines include going outside or some physical activity. Over break, it may be hard for kids to be in the house all day. Provide physical activity to help them burn off extra energy and release tension that may get them into trouble.

- 5. Remind children of expected behavior.**
 - Before you walk into grandma's house say: "Who remembers the rules in grandma's house?"
 - Before going into the store, talk to children about what you are going to purchase: "We are here to shop for Daddy and Aunt Sue. There will be a lot of things in the store that we will want for ourselves, but we are only going to shop for what is on our list."
 - Before you open gifts say: "Who can tell me what we say after we open presents?"

6. Take a break when you need to. When you know that going out will inevitably lead to cranky, over-tired, over-stimulated kids and that you are destined to feel exasperated, it may be best to stay home. Choosing quiet family time where everyone can relax and enjoy themselves is definitely worth considering. Another option is to go out for a limited time and plan to leave as soon as you see warning signs of fatigue or misbehavior in your children.

7. Keep a calendar of events. Place all school activities, family outings, shopping excursions, visits from friends/relatives and quiet time on one calendar that kids have access to. Talk with your children about the activities and what is involved. When kids know they have to dress up, be quiet or be away from home all day, they are more likely to be cooperative. As you look at the calendar, be proactive in thinking about how you can prevent a tantrum or power struggle.

8. Remember your values, and teach them to your children. Identify values that are important to your family. Talk about your traditions and what they mean to you. Develop new traditions. Hold a family meeting to discuss traditions and activities this year.

9. Make lasting memories – Involve children in capturing memories. Children can take pictures, make movies, create scrapbooks and draw pictures. Have them interview family members about their traditions or the meaning of the holiday. These activities send the message that family and traditions are important.

10. Help kids focus on giving not getting. Talk to children about giving and the importance of helping others. Involve them in charitable activities such as shopping for toys or food. Children can carry the items to the drop off location, make cards, bake and wrap gifts. Ask children to think of a gift they can give to each family member that does not cost money. Children will recognize their good fortune more by taking action rather than through our lectures.

11. Help children make a list. When children say: “I want this; can I have it please!” Say: “Well, put it on your wish list.” Saying this, acknowledges their want. Remember, children will want “things,” and this is normal and appropriate. At another time, help children review their list. Ask them if they believe they will get everything on their list (No). Help them prioritize the items, and modify their list to help them learn to self-limit.

12. Prepare for opening gifts. The excitement of opening multiple packages can be overwhelming for some kids. Set limits ahead of time. For instance, “We can play with our toys after all of the gifts are opened.” Or, “We must look at each gift and say thank you before the next gift can be opened.”

13. Be a good role-model. Show your children that the holidays are joyous and fulfilling, not just a stress-filled time that revolves around marathon shopping trips and constant cooking and cleaning.

14. Take care of you. A common holiday trap is taking on too much or expecting the “picture perfect” holiday. Be kind to yourself. Put time for YOU on your “to do” list! It really is OK to politely say “no.” Children would rather have joyous and relaxed parents than lots of presents, a clean house and stressed parents.

15. Find a quiet time each day to connect with your child – Remember, the gift children need and want more than anything is you – your time, attention, cuddles and hugs. Make sure to plan for this most precious gift this holiday season.

As co-founders of Parenting Perspectives, Lauren Bondy and Karen Jacobson help parents enhance their parenting tools to promote healthy development and nurture the unique potential of their children. They have presented their original, interactive workshops to thousands of parents on a wide variety of topics including: power struggles, self-esteem, sibling rivalry, temperament, discipline, friendship, and school issues. As keynote speakers on the topic “Raising Respectful, Responsible and Resilient Children in a Privileged World,” their work has been called “eye opening, incredibly positive and non-judgmental.” They have appeared on ABC-7’s “Connect with Kids” as well as radio. Visit www.parentingperspectives.com or call 847-562-9503.