

Home is where the Heart is: Making Spirits Bright

For many of us the holiday season is our favorite time of year. The lights, the decorations, the break in the everyday routine make for special memories. But these very aspects that make the times so appealing to us can cause havoc for lots of children. If yours are having a difficult time, consider these recommendations.

1. **Stick to typical food proportions.** This is not a concern of actual portion size, children are growing and quantity will fluctuate. However, try to stick to your usual ratio of "growing food" to "treats". Not only will this keep your child feeling more balanced, but it will save you tantrums once the holidays end.
2. **Maintain daily routines when possible.** When we're feeling overwhelmed with tasks, it's easy to cancel everyday plans whether that be your child's weekly play date, enrichment class or park outing. But keeping to the usual schedule, will buy you more compliance for other activities.
3. **Make time to sleep.** An overtired child (or adult) is cranky and unreasonable. Whenever possible, try to stick to bedtimes or at least allow some sleeping in time.
4. **Space out crowds/strangers.** Yes, your dear great aunt that you see once a year counts as a stranger. Enjoy the time together as a family, but realize that following it up (or doing it in conjunction with) an outing to visit Santa (another stranger by the way) may not be the best idea.
5. **Prolong the special activities.** Foster developmental skills by allowing your child to experience activities over and over again. Set up a small tree with ornaments that can be removed and re-hung on a daily basis. Keep a roll of sugar cookie dough in the freezer. Cut a slice or two each night and let them shake the colored sugar on before it goes into the oven. Nightly magic! Mail your holiday cards over the course of a week and allow your little one the thrill of placing a few in the mailbox each day.
6. **Extend the gift giving.** Fun as it is, a pile of presents can be overwhelming and the quantity and opening can overshadow the toy you searched for high and low. Consider spacing out package delivery. Maybe you are comfortable with opening gifts from relatives on a day other than the specific holiday. Perhaps Santa could deliver one gift a few days in advance as a reminder of good behavior.
7. **Keep the focus on the spirit of the season.** It's easy to develop a case of the "gimmies" when we are bombarded by relatives asking what we'd like and commercials insisting we need an overstuffed playroom. Some families use the days after a holiday celebration to "pass on" older toys no longer used to a local charity. Making special wrapping paper or artwork for relatives is another way your child can participate in holiday giving.

No matter what you celebrate, wishing you and your family and very happy holiday season and New Year!

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