

Mental Fitness News and Tips

Children and Holiday Stress

Families want their holidays to be happy for everyone, especially the children. Most parents do not realize that the holiday season can be a time of change, noise, sleep schedule disruptions, and increased stress for their children. It is important to remember that children and parents need to find time to relax and enjoy a wonderful time of the year.

These tips may help both parents and children recognize holiday anxiety and feel less stress.

Here are some ways to reduce stress for the entire family:

- **Remember routines:** This is especially good advice for parents of small children. During the holidays, children will find their routines disrupted. When a routine is broken, stress can result. During winter break, youth are often dragged along on shopping trips, taken to special events, stay up past their bedtime, and eat too many sugary goodies.



- **Nutrition:** Avoid fast food! Add all of those holiday treats and you end up with a stressed out, hungry family. Try to keep a supply of healthy snacks on hand, drink water, and teach the kids how to prepare your families' traditional foods or meals. Take the time to eat together.

- **Family traditions:** Many do not realize how important traditions are to themselves and their children. Family traditions offer great comfort and security for children. What are your family traditions? Perhaps your family would enjoy creating decorations, incorporating a cultural tradition, reading from a book, signing songs, or preparing a family recipe together.

- **Rest and relaxation:** Everyone, especially a child, needs "down time" over the holiday season to rest and relax. A well-rested child will be much happier on a trip to the store than one who is in need of a nap. Schedule some rest and relaxation time for everyone in the family. Turn the TV off, give your phone a time-out, shut the computer devices down, put the video games away . . . RELAX!



- **Laugh:** Laughter is still the best way to beat stress and change everyone's mood from bad to good. Lighten the mood with a funny movie, play a game together, go outside and play in the cold, or enjoy a cup of hot chocolate (with plenty of marshmallows).



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What to watch for:

Signs of a child's holiday stress may include:

- Tears for seemingly minor reasons
- Nervous behaviors such as nail biting and hair twirling
- Physical complaints including headaches and stomachaches
- Regression to younger behaviors: temper tantrums or bedwetting
- Withdrawal from school, friends, and family
- A change in your child's regular behaviors

Mentally Fit Families

Make a stress-free holiday your new family tradition! Wonderful memories of the holidays are a beautiful gift you can leave with your children. In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, the holidays may be one of the few times when you can offer a present that only you can give... priceless memories of a holiday filled with fun, love, and laughter for the entire family.

Adapted from the Anne Arundel County Department of Health

This newsletter is provided by the School Community Partnership for Mental Health, of which MPS is an integral part.