

Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

John Stamm, Ph.D.
Supervisor

Bill Stockton
Editor

CHILDREN AND HOLIDAYS: A HOLIDAY SURVIVOR'S GUIDE PARENT HANDOUT

by
Stephanie Whaley, School Psychologist

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Background Information - The holiday season is rapidly approaching. Along with good times and good food, all too often, comes a good bit of **STRESS**. A season full of goodness and merriment becomes taxed with increased tension, headaches, heartburn, and **STRESS** for many families.

What Can I Do As A Parent? - Often there is not enough time to handle the hectic demands of the season. In addition to the normal day's demands are the extra planning and organizing for holiday events. A way to decrease **STRESS** is to use your **time** wisely.

- Make a list of all the things you need to do; find a quiet spot, and go over it carefully.
- Prioritize the items and eliminate activities which you feel are not necessary. By carefully examining your priorities and being realistic in regard to the constraints, a more manageable list will emerge.
- In order to maintain a sense of accomplishment, cross out or highlight items as activities are completed.
- Depending on your schedule and the number of expectations, a fresh list may be compiled each day.
- Share your list with others so that family support systems can be enhanced and communication shared.
- Remember to plan time for yourself!

Another source of holiday **STRESS** is **money**. The holiday spirit is contagious and "impulse" buying occurs. Stores "help" us by deferring bills until February! Families entertain and the gala New Year's festivities are celebrated. Our budget is stretched to its limit and can cause or add to our level of holiday **STRESS**.

- Only use deferred billing if you feel this payment plan fits your future budget.
- When possible, arm yourself with a list of specific items prior to entering the store. This preplanning will cut down on impulse buying.
- If impulse buying is a problem for your family, use only cash and leave the credit cards at home.

- Reflect on the true meaning of the holidays and keep within your budget. An open discussion of finances with older children can often help.
- Let members of the family know the amount you have set aside for holiday purposes and ask them to keep their requests reasonable.
- Younger children may be disappointed by not receiving the exact thing they want. If you decide it was not worth the money, stick to your decision.
- Children are tremendously resilient and their disappointment will pass if a specific present is not delivered.

A third source of holiday **STRESS** is **relatives**. During the holiday season, too much family togetherness may lead to tension and hard feelings. When grandparents, parents, and other siblings arrive on the scene, adults may tend to feel displaced, and repressed feelings associated with hostility, favoritism, and past perceived injustices may emerge.

- Try to limit the amount of time spent with family members who tend to agitate or cause ill feelings.
- When family gatherings occur, conversation should be steered around unpleasant topics or past confrontations.
- Maintain a pleasant, cooperative, approachable demeanor even if it does not reflect your true feelings. Time passes quickly and those around you will benefit from a positive effort made toward diminishing conflicts with relatives.
- If young children are involved in family gatherings, specific activities or play material should be available for entertainment. Children cannot be expected to sit quietly and listen to adult conversation.
- If guests visit overnight in your home, try to diminish conflicts that arise from close living quarters.

A fourth source of holiday **STRESS** is **children**. Before you say, "Bah! Humbug", rest assured that the holidays are a wonderful time for children. For adults, the holidays are often filled with childhood memories. However, children can become stressors for a number of reasons. First, the school schedule which helped to regulate their days has ceased. At school, children know when it is time to eat, play, do math, sing, etc. This schedule makes the day predictable and we all enjoy predictability. But the holidays become unpredictable times for children. Parents often try to pack more activities into their own schedules and children can become upset about this "perceived neglect." Temper tantrums, and even a statement or two about a parent's lack of caring about them may be observed. Parents can quickly develop a case of the holiday hollers.

- Try to keep a schedule for your children. Let them know the day's itinerary.
- Be sure to allot an appropriate amount of time for rest during your child's schedule.
- When at all possible, allow time for relaxing, fun, interactive activities such as reading together, discussing upcoming events, working jigsaw puzzles, playing Uno, or other family related games.

The above article was written by E. Bard and was adapted with permission from the *Communiqué*, a publication of the National Association of School Psychologists.