

HOLIDAY TIME WITH KIDS

ARTICLE

The winter holiday season brings with it much more than wonder and merriment. Weeks and sometimes months of holiday shopping, traveling, food, parties, visits and visitors can create enough stress to exhaust the most festive of us. Children of all ages feel it, too, especially when their routines are interrupted with an overload of events that are often out of their control. The changes in schedule, though well-intentioned, can impact behaviors and moods. “In general, we all do better with routines in day-to-day life,” said Dr. Mollie Greves Grow, a pediatrician at Seattle Children’s Hospital.

“Structured routines, even during busy times like the holidays, help parents regulate the emotional and functional changes their children undergo as they develop. Routines help children know what to expect as they go through these changes.”

The mother of 5- and 7-year-old girls, Grow, speaks from experience as well as expertise. She offers parents several tips and reminders to help foster a peaceful and joyous holiday season for the entire family.

PRIORITIZE SLEEPING AND EATING

There will be some deviation and relaxation from a normal schedule during the holidays, but parents should stick to their child's sleeping and eating patterns as much as possible. The amount of sleep recommended for children varies with age. Toddlers typically sleep 11 to 14 hours in a 24-hour period; preschoolers 10 to 13 hours; school-age kids and preteens 9 to 12 hours per night; and teens 8 to 10 hours. Eating on a regular schedule also helps maintain energy and blood sugar levels. If planned parties or meals conflict with your child's eating schedule, work to find a middle ground whenever possible and bring along healthy snacks if needed. For toddlers and younger kids, adhering to a consistent eating and sleeping schedule makes it less likely they'll have a meltdown. "Regardless of age, we function better when we eat and sleep right," Grow said.

TAKE PART OF HOME ON THE ROAD

Comfort items from home may help your child acclimate to a different environment: a pillow, blanket, noise machine or favorite stuffed animal. For infants and toddlers, call ahead to see if a pack-and-play or a crib is available where you'll be staying. It doesn't matter if you're travelling 10 hours or taking a visit to your neighbor, kids may be already exhausted from previous program, less sleep, bad mood or anything else. If you know, how to help them to feel good, do your best to agree on taking those small "unimportant" things with them, because it may mean a world to them in the moment although they will forget it in the car few minutes later. Do not forget, stress less is it much easier, smoother and even more fun for all family members.

BE OPEN AND HONEST WITH FAMILY

We tend to see more extended family around the holidays. They may not always be aware of the rules and routines your household follows. A good approach is to be forthcoming and explain why something is or is not allowed for your child. Even if you're not directly explaining to them, just say it to your child loud in that way, others can hear it and understand the way you're controlling kid's behavior. Try to understand that those people want the best for your kid, too, just don't know, what you are used to and the best for them doesn't need to be the best in your eyes (as well as vice versa, so ask before you act with other kids in your family). This will create a better understanding and awaiting atmosphere, because most of the people understand that we are different and like to know it in front. And if you meet someone who doesn't? It is ok, too, you don't need to fight for yourself, just gently repeat yourself, this is the way we do it, because we know it works for us.

SET LIMITS WHEN IT COMES TO DIET

The holidays offer easy access to unhealthy foods and dessert items that shouldn't be consumed in big quantities. With younger children, it's easier to choose what is put on their plate. As kids get older and make more decisions on their own, this can be a challenge. When it comes to diet, moderation is key. Grow suggests one way to encourage moderation is to have the parents set limits on the quantity of certain types of food and then let the child decide what they eat. An example is allowing a set amount of sweets per week (i.e., one per day or only on a weekend) and leaving it up to the child to decide when they get to treat themselves. "Have a conversation with your child and explain that the limits on consumption aren't a punishment, rather, to help them stay healthy," Grow said. Do not forget, that it is very hard for the kids to understand the limits in the moment they stand in front of a full plate, manage what you have at home and if you're having a visit or visiting someone thing about if the diet exception will make more damage than the happiness of your kid can bring him. If there are even more kids, this may be very difficult to set, but important to think about. Sometimes it is good to let the kid do more with the others and be happy than strictly hold on a plan. Including next day's stomach ache.

DEVELOP A GAME PLAN FOR SCREEN TIME

There may be more access to television, computers and mobile devices at home while children are on holiday breaks from daycare and school. One way to manage this is with an age-appropriate media and screen time plan. The American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines on the subject and commonsensemedia.org are both great informational resources for parents. Many of the same holiday specials parents watched as children are still popular today (“A Charlie Brown Christmas” first aired in 1965). Use your discretion in how many of these you allow your children to watch. When you do allow them to watch, be with them and discuss the lessons taught in the special. Make it more than just a show. By watching together, parents can be “media mentors.”

PLAN FOR GROUP ACTIVITY

It is up to parents during holiday breaks to find a substitute for the physical activity that is part of a child's normal daycare or school curriculum.

Prepare for the indoor and outdoor options in your area by having the right rain or snow gear and attire available. Whatever options are available, try to make some of those family activities and have your child help decide those activities. These can be opportunities to create family traditions. Go out for snow activities, find a way how to be creative with paper and scissors (love Pinterest and YouTube!), buy a table game under the Christmas tree... there's a plenty of possibilities to be in contact with your kids through the holidays and it's even easier than thought when you plan it. Plan shared time – once with mum and once with dad to have the other one holiday time, too :).

ENJOY THE MOMENT

Many of the frenetic activities we take part in during the holidays are not meant to take center stage, but often do. Focus on creating memories with your child. It's a great opportunity to make the breaks from your routines special instead of stressful. "Kids grow fast. They change quickly and each year is very different for them," Grow said. "It's important for parents to slow down, be present and enjoy this time of year with their children." Whatever you plan and goes wrong, take it as it goes, whatever you plan and have no time for it, forget it or leave it for later. The most important thing is to spend lovely time together, because the usual year time comes soon, when dad (and later moms, too) sees the kids an hour in the morning and one in the evening... That's the way we live and we have to find the best way how to do the best out of it. Kids' first three years are the most important in creating their relationships with parents and relatives. The next one work with the mold created before. There's always possibility to do it better.

TIPS FOR QUALITY TIME

- Regularly scheduled dates - taking the time and effort to plan and schedule regular quality time will provide an opportunity for your child to look forward to that time as it approaches as well as enjoy it when it is happening.
- Morning routine - Can you add just 10 minutes to your morning routine that is dedicated to your child? Maybe you do stretches together to start the day...
- Bedtime routine - As kids get older it may seem like they want to be more independent and don't need you for bedtime as much. You could still set aside time between TV, dinner, homework and bed to really focus on talking together.
- Cook dinner or bake together - Sometimes it may seem easier to just do it yourself, I know. But if you work together your kids will learn lots of useful life skills in addition to getting that time with you.
- Living room sleepover - If you're already there from your movie night... why not extend the fun with a living room sleep over?! If your kids like to sneak into your bed, they will LOVE the chance to sleep in the living room with you!

QUESTIONS

1. Do children spend enough time with their parents?
2. Would you change to a system, where women were working together with kids at home and had the chance to take an eye on kids for everyone else so the other could do something?
A system on community living...
3. What's your favorite family time together?
4. If you could choose a place to go for holidays with kids, where would it be and why?
5. What is the thing your kids love to do the most (and you do not need to agree with them)?
6. What you thing will be the best surprise for your partner for the holidays (doesn't need to be a Christmas gift)?
7. How much family do you have to visit through the holidays and how far do you plan to travel?
8. Are you changing your plan this year according to the last years?