

HOT TOPICS

MANAGING STRESS, ANXIETY AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES DURING HOLIDAY SEASON

Presented by Parent Network of WNY - December 2018



FAMILY ACTIVITIES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

December is finally here, and it's truly a wonderful time of year for many of us to enjoy family, good food and friends. If you look at a family video from past holidays, you might see all of these things, plus several meltdowns caught on camera. It can be funny to watch these videos years down the road, but it's not so funny "in the moment." Very often, it's unrealistic expectations that trigger these meltdowns and added anxiety.

To minimize the meltdowns and the stress that often go hand in hand with the holiday fun, try to create more realistic expectations. All of the cookies may

not be perfect when they come out of the oven, and every gift may not be a favorite. However, there are memories created when kids take turns mixing the batter, or shopping for what they truly believe is the perfect gift for a sibling. Maybe it's the chance to buddy up with an older brother or sister when a younger one isn't quite ready to shop on his own. Or, maybe all those fine motor skills worked on in occupational therapy are put into practice while wrapping gifts.

Relationships are strengthened, bonds are formed, and maybe a few social skills are developed without anyone even realizing it. For some, this may prove to be too much of a challenge. Understood.org has some practical tips and resources that families can use to help kids get ready for new situations. For strategies to help deal with gift exchanges, social situations, food sensitivities, and more, go to this link:

<https://www.understood.org/en/family/events-outings/holidays-celebrations>

The holidays give us a chance to step out of our daily routines, celebrate traditions, and reach out to others, even in small ways. It is rarely about the perfect decorations, or the perfect gift. If this time of year is a chance to create a new memory or be with loved ones, that is perfect enough.

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MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays are fast approaching and it can be a difficult time of the year for teens and their families. Stress can easily turn into anxiety and feeling overwhelmed. We have end of the semester exams and pressure for good grades, family gatherings and gift-buying. Things can become difficult to handle that is when it is time to stop, take a deep breathe, and focus on what is important, our mental health. Below are some ideas to help your teen with the anxiety/stress around the holidays.

- **Plan ahead-** Have an open conversation about what worries or what overwhelms them this time of the year. This way you can come up with a plan to help reduce those concerns.
- **Try and eliminate surprises-** Talk about what the plans are, who will be there, what to do if feeling overwhelmed.
- **Secret signal/Exit Plan-** Come up with a way to help your child without drawing attention to their concerns. Even if it is just for the need to step outside for a breath of fresh air or if they need to leave that situation, have a plan.



Parents things to remember for yourself.

- **Take the pressure off yourself** - Do what you can do and only what you can handle. Make sure you realize that things may not go exactly as planned but it is okay, you will figure it out.
- **Identify your specific worries/fears** - Once you acknowledge them then you can develop a plan to how to work through them so you can enjoy the holidays.
- **Say No when you need to, give yourself time** - Time to relax, time to breathe, time to prepare, time to be a family.....Know your limits.
- **Take care of yourself** - Our kids pick up on our stress so try to stay in a balanced state of mind for you and your family.

