

Four Steps to Help Parents Reduce Holiday Stress

The holidays are coming up, and although many parents look forward to having their children home from school, they also find that after a few days it isn't so easy having the kids underfoot all the time. The youngsters are all excited about Christmas, they start fighting more often, and when they're not doing that they complain to their parents that they're bored.



This season is one of those odd times that combine a lot of fun with a lot of stress. It isn't easy having the children right on top of you again, especially when they're all pumped up about the presents they're going to get and can't seem to leave one another alone. Here are a few ideas for maintaining sanity during these both enjoyable and difficult times.

1. Help Kids Plan or Structure Part of Each Day

With school-age kids, help them plan or structure part of each day, then let the youngsters figure out what they are going to do to entertain themselves for the rest of that day. Do not fall into the trap of seeing yourself as the resident entertainment committee! You might help Emily by allowing her to have a friend over to eat dinner, watch a video and then sleep overnight. The rest of the day your daughter decides for herself what she'll do. Or you might take Ryan out to lunch and then to a movie, but the rest of the day he entertains himself.

2. Be Clear About the Rules from the Start

Make the above rules clear as soon as the vacation starts, so when the kids come up to you and say, "There's nothing to do," you can reply, "You and I will be going out at 4, but in the meantime I'm sure you can think of something." Above all, don't keep making suggestion after suggestion after suggestion, only to have a child shoot down each idea as soon as it's out of your mouth. Making a lot of suggestions to your children for what they can do implies that you are responsible for their keeping busy and feeling entertained.

3. Plan Lots of One-on-One Fun

Plan lots of activities one on one with your children. Just you and one child—no spouse or siblings. Not only does this eliminate the fighting, it offers the opportunity for real closeness and bonding. Most parents find that it's a lot easier to have fun when it's just you and one child, rather than the whole family together. This may sound funny, but family fun is overrated! Kids love having a parent all to themselves, and under these circumstances each youngster is usually much easier to get along with.

4. Avoid Feeling Guilty

Don't feel guilty if—two days before December 25—you find yourself wishing the kids were back in school already. You have lots of company! It's not easy having a lot of wound-up little ones chasing each other around the house.