

10 Ways to Minimize Holiday Stress of High Energy Children

"My kids are, to put it mildly, very active. When the holidays disrupt the regular hectic times, home stress multiplies 10 fold. Any tips?"

After studying stress for 50 years, Hans Selye concluded we need a certain amount of "good stress," to keep mentally sharp and physically healthy. However, too much stress is, well, too much stress. The goal is not to prevent stress (neither a useful nor possible goal), but rather to minimize the time too much stress hangs on to your kids, and you, especially during the upcoming holidays and especially for children begin with high energy.

Bruce A. Brunger, author of "ADHD in the Young Child: Driven to Re-Direction," suggests re-directing overly distractible active children to best enjoy the holidays. When reacting to our tips based on his ideas, try postponing an automatic, "That won't work with my kids." Instead, seriously consider crafting creative personalized alternatives that might fit your own kids, parenting style, budget and other resources, schedule, and already set specific holiday plans.

1. Build-in Routines.

Before and during the holidays, set routines they can count on such as bedtimes, and times for shopping, decorating, baking, etc.

2. Create Traditions.

Create your own family traditions: write and read together a special family story or create a "countdown" calendar.

3. Practice for New Experiences.

To minimize unwanted impulsive behavior, role-play expected behavior.

4. Be Consistent.

Routines should be as predictable and dependable as possible. Even changing them one time translates to your children as, "Oh, so the schedule and rules you set CAN be changed."

5. Limit Sweets.

Try stretching out the candy distribution over several days.

6. Provide Activities during Travel Time.

Over-prepare since the time it takes them to become bored is often opposite your expectations.

7. Spread Gift-giving over Several Days.

Try giving gifts out over several days, or several times during the day, to minimize boredom and stress.

8. Have Realistic Expectations.

Face it: something unexpected will come up. So, plan ahead but also be ready to "go with the flow."

9. Institute Holiday Projects.

Re-direct your child's energy toward constructive projects such as giving old or new toys to charity or creating holiday-themed arts and crafts projects.

10. Schedule Quiet Time.

Turn on relaxing music and take a quiet break with your children each day.

Normally, spontaneity is fun, but for many kids at this time of year, changing already altered plans can be stressful, even when the plans are for a fun activity. This is often hard for grown-ups to understand. Kids can be laughing and dancing around not because they are happy but seriously over stressed. Is the energetic light in their eyes actually a lit fuse in disguise? Planning ahead to keep stress at a useful level is one more way to help your children prepare today for success tomorrow.