DECEMBER 2022

Thriving the Holidays

KORU FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY



MAKING THE HOLIDAYS THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR

Holidays are meant to be the best time of the year. Unfortunately, they are often one of the most stressful times of year. We tend to overbook, overextend, spend too much, and let our routines slide. When we are stressed, there is no room for joy.

Stress is contagious, and our children are also easily overwhelmed from our own stress, which is worsened when their day is too crammed or when they have too much downtime. And, behaviours can explode when structure and routine disappear. And then we get into a vicious cycle where we shut down or explode in response. We go into survival mode and do what we can to get through the holidays.

But without a chance to enjoy what should be a wonderful time.

Before we know it, the holidays are over, and we are left exhausted, broke, disappointed, and disconnected from our kids.

Here are fifteen ways to help you and your family avoid overwhelm, love each other, enjoy the holidays, and maybe even help your children become a little more resilient.

#15 ROUTINE & STRUCTURE



Many children have trouble managing a lack of structure. The best thing to do is to keep them on their normal routine as much as possible, including the same morning and bedtime routines, as well as snack and mealtimes.

Have structured activities planned, such as holiday crafts, family movies, baking, decorating cookies, sleigh rides, skating, building snowmen, games, tobogganing, or going to the holiday market. Keep a calendar posted where everyone can see what each day brings.

#14 BE PROACTIVE



Be proactive and talk about any out-of-routine situations that might stress your children out. Have them brainstorm ways you can support them and how everyone can manage potential problematic situations.

Whenever you leave the house, ensure your children are rested and have had enough to eat. You know what happens with a hungry and tired kid in public. If they are easily overwhelmed by loud noises and crowds (who isn't!), do your errands during off-peak hours. Or, better yet, leave them with a friend. ;)

"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love." HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE



#13 BE ACTIVE

Although the thought of snuggling under a warm blanket, vegging in front of holiday classics, and hibernating from the world seems like an awesome idea, it can wreak havoc for families. Exercise and being active are critical to regulate mood and behaviours. (Fresh air outdoors helps too!)

"Take a break and chill because this is the time of the year to rejoice, celebrate, connect, and also feel rewarded."



12 CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Rather than hoping for the best, clearly establish and review any expectations, such as chores, and rules that need to be followed, such as a visit to Auntie Barbara's house. Don't assume they know. Better yet: make these expectations together as a family!

Also remember: telling children (and even our teens) once isn't enough. Review the expectations before the time arrives. You may even need to check-in regularly to help them be successful.

#11 GIVE THEM CONTROL

School can be very stressful so having a break can be rejuvenating. Use this time to allow them to do things they enjoy and feel successful with. Follow their lead. They might like coming up with an idea to create one memory of doing something special with the family.





#10 MINIMIZE NAGGING

On that note, children can benefit from having a break from nagging too. Many conflicts happen when children (and spouses!) feel like they are being nagged constantly about things they need to do and things they have forgotten to do.

A break from constantly hearing all the things they aren't doing can right be refreshing and reset their arousal levels (and yours!) and boost their overall confidence. Pick your battles. Be selective on what you nag your kids about.



9 SLOW DOWN AND BE

Holidays often means go-go-go as we rush from one mall to the next and one relative's house to the other. Although being active is beneficial for all, we also need to slow down long enough to notice the holidays in the first place! Dwelling on the past only creates regret and anger. Thinking of the future only creates stress. Being mindful in the present moment brings a greater sense of peacefulness and joy.

Every day pick one thing to do to be mindful and focus on the present moment. Perhaps sitting in front of a fire and mindfully enjoy a warm mug of cocoa, savouring its warmth and comfort.

Creating is a wonderful way to be mindful, whether it is drawing, colouring, baking, or building a fort. Other ideas include writing a list of all the things you look forward to in your day, going for a walk outside and taking in all the sights and sounds around you, or smiling as you watch your kids joyfully build a snowman, completely involved in the bliss of childhood.

8 SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY

When we're stressed, we have little patience and can't really support ourselves, let alone our kids. Find ways to reduce stress by simplifying. Identify the things that triggers stress and adjust. Try only one new recipe instead of 26. Avoid the mall and order gifts online. Say no to things that aren't important to you. Make easy meals in the slow cooker. Ask for help. Store bought cakes can be delicious. Do people even read cards anymore? Focus on what is most important.



#7 STAY CALM



Slowing down and simplifying helps with staying calm. We also need to **work** on keeping that calm. Remember, there are no such things as bad kids. Kids want to be good and do good. If they have trouble managing behaviours, it's because the situation is too much for them to handle. Maybe they have been out too late or had to sit through a boring meal for too long. Or there was something else they really wanted to do. Remember, our children - and even our teens - can only tolerate so much. By staying calm, you can figure out their needs and how to best support them.



An easy way for you to regroup after a stressful day with your child? Watch them sleep. There is nothing more peaceful.
Or look through pictures when you are all happy and having fun together. Carry that joy into the next day.

#6 EXPECT THE BEST



Sometimes we head into the holidays with dread or worry about how our children will behave, having to do last minute shopping (especially if we have to bring them!), or filling our children's time when we have a million other things to do.

When we go into situations with dread, we perpetuate that stress and tend to see the negative. With a little shift of mindset, we can start to see the awesomeness of our day. Expect that your kids will be thoughtful, gracious, respectful, and loving. And look for those times that they are! Every morning, ask yourself: What do I have the privilege of doing today?



#5 HAVE FUN!

Every day. Make it a priority to find small pockets of time - even just five minutes - to do something fun together. It's non-negotiable.

Family

Like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions.

but our roots remain as one.



#4 PRESENCE OVER PRESENTS

Children and teens always remember one over the other. Connections with your children is the #1 protective factor for emotional well-being and a key ingredient to building resilience. Everyday find ways to connect with your children. Give them space to be with you. And maybe even talk. And if they do talk, listen to them. Validate their feelings.





#3 SIBLING LOVE

When it comes to sibling rivalry, there are two points to remember. First, don't let them play too long. If they can play nicely before fighting for 10 minutes, only let them play for 5. Make sure they end their interaction on a positive note.

Second, have them work together. For example, they get to play a video game together if they can play together (and no access to video games otherwise - pairing them with a fun activity is also helpful).

In my house we have the Sister Love game where they earn points for getting along and helping each other. Parents earn points when they don't. At the end the winner gets to do something (that the children really want to do, such as choose a fun activity, outing, or dinner). Reinforcing children for things parents "expect" their children to do is often hard; however, reinforcement is a critical element for success.

#2 CREATE FAMILY TRADITIONS









At the heart of every

FAMILY TRADITION

is a meaningful

EXPERIENCE

The holidays are a wonderful time to create traditions, which are another major protective factor for emotional well-being. Participating in community, school, and/or family traditions helps create a whole host of positive emotions such as pride, compassion, and most importantly, belonging. (These three emotions are also foundational to effective emotion regulation.)

Get creative – brainstorm with your family as many different ideas as you can. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Send thank you cards (and maybe even COVID friendly treats!) to your local police/fire stations
- Have a family charity events where you volunteer for a charity. See if you can get extended family members and friends to join in too!
- Create a tradition of getting into new pyjamas and playing a new game
- Look through pictures from the past year and highlight your favourite moments. If they are old enough, have your kids make a slideshow - that will fill their time too!
- Have your children help you do important jobs like decorating, baking, and wrapping. Doing something meaningful fuels a sense of belonging, confidence, and resilience.

1 LOVE



Fill your holidays with laughter & love.

Above all, nurture your relationships to bring you the most joy in the holiday season. It takes time and dedication, but it can be done. Here are important tips to strengthen your connections with your children.

- ***Listen.*** Listening and validating others' thoughts and feelings fosters connection and harmony. If confronted with conflict, say things like, "I can see how that would upset you" or "good point."
- ***Connect.*** Listening is the best way to connect. You can also connect by learning something new about your child every day. We may think we might know everything, but you may be surprised! Ask about favourites: hobby, relative, song, or animal. Come up with your own creative ideas. "Who do you admire and why?" "If you can only bring 5 items to a deserted island, what would you bring?" Become well known to each other.
- ***Keep the calm.*** If you absolutely must bring up an issue, choose the right place and time. Hashing through a problem in the heat of the moment never brings positive results. Invite your child to chat when everyone is calm; otherwise, let it go.
- ***Start softly.*** How you raise an issue in the first three minutes of a conversation affects the outcome of the interaction. Instead of criticizing, softly state how you feel, the facts about the situation, and collaborate on how to fix the situation.
- ***Support.*** We all need support, and your children need it often. If you make a promise, keep it. If your child is having a bad day, listen, empathize, and always take their side.
- ***Create shared meaning.*** Create rituals of emotional connection, such as asking one thing they are looking forward to in their day or debriefing their day over dessert.
- ***Appreciate.*** Sincerely show appreciation for your child every opportunity you get.
- ***Love.*** Love is not a descriptive word: it is an action word. We DO love. What can you do to love your family? Maybe a special note under the door at night, a gentle back rub, extra cuddles at bed, or having a "yes" day where you say "yes" to all their requests (establish boundaries from the start!).

Every day, look for ways to connect, laugh, and love. Keep planting these seeds to create strong roots and healthy blossoms.