

HOW TO TAKE THE STRESS OUT OF THE HOLIDAYS: HELP CHILDREN RISE TO THE OCCASION, AND DON'T AIM TOO HIGH

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID
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The holidays bring joy, but they can also be stressful—both for parents and children. If you have children with psychiatric or learning disorders, even favorite traditions can turn into a test of stamina and patience. Here are some tips to help minimize stress and make the holidays more fun and fulfilling:

- 1. Be open to change.** Talk with your children about your traditions—which ones they love and which you might change to make them more fun or memorable for everyone. This is especially important when family dynamics have changed because of divorce, a new marriage or sibling, or a death in the family.
- 2. Be realistic.** Factoring in your children's limitations when you make plans will reduce stress on everyone. Not overestimating your children's patience and ability to focus will help you enjoy yourself more, too.
- 3. Prepare children for changes in routine.** Holidays represent a change in a family's normal schedule, and for some children that's unsettling. Preparing them for changes in their routines—what to expect and what you expect of them—will help head off meltdowns. If you're traveling, bring familiar toys and books, and make sure you have quiet one-on-one time like reading before bed.
- 4. Give yourself a break.** Don't stretch yourself too thin trying to create the "perfect" holiday season. Decide what is important, prioritize, and say "no" to what you can't handle.
- 5. Be sure to laugh.** Children pick up their parents' stress and tension, so they're more likely to be irritable if you are. Have a sense of humor, enjoy your children for who they are, and keep in mind that what you'll all remember when it's over is likely to be the unexpected moment when everybody was relaxed.

