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Tips on Coping With Holiday Stress

National Children's Crisis Charity KidsPeace Offers Ideas to Help Families Enjoy the Season

NEW YORK, November 1 -- The holiday season can be a time of joy, wonder, and personal renewal. Or it can leave you drained, emotionally, physically...even financially. How can you keep the holidays “jolly days” for you and your family? Here are some common stress points and tips on dealing with them from the 125-year-old national children’s crisis charity KidsPeace:

Stress Points & Coping Tips

1. **Overexpectation.** This is the single biggest cause of holiday stress. Unrealistic hopes that everything and everyone will suddenly be perfect (unless they are usually perfect) can only lead to disappointment, frustration and depression – the exact opposite of what you and your family had hoped. Be realistic and enjoy the true meaning of the holidays, which is about celebration and togetherness – not perfection.
2. **Overscheduling.** Most of our lives are already overscheduled, even before adding in visits from relatives, religious events, and travel. Do yourself and your family a favor: Make plans carefully in advance and don’t be afraid to say “no” when you or your kids are overscheduled.
3. **Overindulging.** Eat, drink and be merry...within reason. Overeating can worsen certain health problems and causes unneeded guilt over extra pounds. Enjoy the bounty of special celebrations but don’t go overboard. Remember that alcohol is calorie-heavy and is a natural depressant. Try the old trick of drinking a glass of water in between alcoholic drinks to limit your intake and stay hydrated.
4. **Overpaying.** In a world of expensive electronics and holiday TV commercials bombarding our kids, it's easy for financial stresses to drain your enthusiasm – and your wallet. Don't confuse “stuff” with love. Make a budget and stick to it. Most of all, remember to give the gift of time to children. Long after the \$100 video games are forgotten, kids will remember sledding down hills with you.
5. **Overexertion.** Don’t wait until the last minute to shop for food and presents. Shop ahead of time. Use the Internet. And don’t go it alone! Make preparations and the events family occasions. Involve children in the planning, shopping and decorating. Getting the kids to help with meals can be memorable and fun.
6. **Overbearing Relatives.** It’s almost a cliché, but family conflicts can resurface during what should be ideal moments. Try to avoid falling into old tensions or old roles. If certain people are problematic, be creative with seating or invite people to different occasions at different times. Set aside differences until after the holidays. If friction arises, leave the room to baste the turkey or take a walk with someone.
7. **Overstressed Kids.** Children are sensitive and can be the first to feel tensions. With schedule changes and family stresses, keep an eye out for signs of discomfort among children. Unusual head or backaches, nightmares, withdrawal, irritability and other out-of-character behaviors are a sign that something is amiss. Talk to your kids or have them visit a safe problem-solving resource like www.TeenCentral.net.

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“Just as there is no perfect plan for the holidays; there is no perfect plan for minimizing stress,” says Dr. Herbert Mandell, medical director of KidsPeace and the KidsPeace Children’s Hospital. “Planning ahead, being sensible about food, scheduling, and shopping, and having realistic expectations about the holidays can do much in making the season a brighter, healthier one for you, your children and your whole family.”

Lorrie Henderson Ph.D., acting president of KidsPeace, who with Dr. Mandell compiled these tips, offers this perhaps comforting bit of practical philosophy: “Ideally, the holidays are a *culmination* of the family’s life and activities over the last year. Instead of expecting a sudden, magical lifting of all problems and the onset of a “perfect time,” use the holidays to celebrate the passing year, rebuild and strengthen bonds through old or new family traditions, and reinforce the positive experiences and messages of the past 12 months. In a sometimes turbulent world, the holidays are a time when we can reflect on our lives, our relationships with each other, peace on earth, and – maybe – how best to find peace in our own homes.”

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Tips for parents are available at www.kidspeace.org. Help for older kids and teens is available at www.TeenCentral.net, an anonymous, problem-solving site developed by KidsPeace, renowned Harvard child expert Dr. Alvin Poussaint, and Brown University child development pioneer Dr. Lewis Lipsitt.

KidsPeace is a 125-year-old national children’s crisis charity dedicated to giving hope, help, and healing to children facing crisis. Based in Bethlehem, PA with more than 50 centers nationwide, KidsPeace directly thousands of children a day with life-saving treatment to overcome the crises of growing up. With the help of VIP leaders including its national spokesperson Leeza Gibbons and child safety and self-esteem icon RETRO BILL, KidsPeace helps millions more each year through prevention and awareness programs designed to help America’s kids and parents avoid and overcome the kinds of crises that can affect any child – from disasters and personal traumas to family issues and neglect. KidsPeace was named “The Outstanding Organization” of its kind in the country by the American Association of Psychiatric Services for Children and was called “a prototype of what we need for all children everywhere” by the late, nationally renowned child and family expert, Dr. Lee Salk.

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