



no "kid"ding did you know?

topic: helping kids handle holiday stress

website resources

[10 Ways to Reduce Kids' Stress](#)

[Helping Children Cope with Holiday Stress](#)

[Holiday Stress and Children](#)

[Alternatives for Youth's Resource Page](#) for Boulder County services

The following "No 'Kid'ding" article appeared in the December 2008 issue of Alternative for Youth's (AFY) [Youth Matters newsletter](#).

All the joys of the big holiday season are upon us. How wonderful the holidays can be for kids with a break from school, time with family and remembering family traditions and holidays past. But just like adults, kids can have added stress during the holidays, especially for those whose families have changed over the last year due to divorce, moves, death, mental health issues and military service overseas. There are things parents can do to help kids cope.

Do you know the signs of stress? These include:

- Tears for seemingly minor reasons.
- Nervous behaviors such as nail biting and hair twirling.
- Physical complaints, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, diarrhea, etc.
- Regression to younger behaviors: bed wetting, eating with hands.
- Withdrawal from school friends or siblings.
- Any behavior that your child doesn't normally do could be a sign of holiday anxiety

Do you know what you can do? Parents and guardians can be proactive in helping their children enjoy the holidays by following tips appropriate for their children, such as:

Take it easy. This might require taking children out of the spotlight during holiday plays or performances at relatives' homes; reducing the time you spend at parties by combining parties and get-togethers; and limiting travel plans.

Rest and relaxation. Make sure kids get plenty of rest. While it may be exciting to stay up late, lack of sleep often leads to increased irritability. If you don't already know, ask your kids what is fun and relaxing for them. Do they wind down with music, reading, spending time with you, playing with siblings or doing fun activities like watching movies and sledding?

Remember routines. During the holidays children find their routines disrupted as they are often dragged along on shopping expeditions or taken to events over which they have no control. Especially for small children, when a routine is broken, stress can result.

Plan early and include your kids in the planning. Kids need some degree of control and predictability. Prolonged uncertainty, constantly changing plans or last minute decisions can all increase stress. Early planning may also help with sticking to routines.

Family traditions. Uphold and maintain family traditions even if a parent is absent. Kids count on certain traditions. They can have an important grounding effect by letting kids know that even though some things have changed, other things have remained the same.



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Limit television and video games. Limit the amount of time kids spend alone watching TV or playing video games. Encourage physical activity and interaction with peers.

Don't promise things you can't produce. For example, don't promise a parent will be home in time for the holidays if the decision is really out of your control.

Don't try and compensate for an absent family member with lots of gifts. What most kids really want is your time and attention.

Take care of yourself. Try to avoid getting overloaded with obligations. If you feel stressed, it increases the pressure and tension on your children. Cope with your own holiday anxiety. The less holiday stress you feel, the more relaxed your children will be.

Give back. Volunteer at a food bank, kids' hospital or community center. Find ways to give to your community; volunteering often relieves feelings of holiday anxiety. Check out Boulder County's Volunteer Connection Holiday Opportunity and Donation Guide for ways you can give back.

Keep up good eating habits. Between parents and guardians being too busy to cook a nutritious meal at home and all of the sugary holiday treats, kids and parents end up with a stressed out, hungry family. Plan at least one healthy meal as a family everyday. Remember to toss in a healthy snack while you're visiting the mall.

Attitude check. Both children and their parents need to have an attitude check before the holiday season begins. Take a deep breath, and have everyone in the family pledge to make the holiday season a time of joy and peace. Remind everyone that with the right attitude, that goal can be met. Remember to laugh together.

With some planning and attentive effort, everyone can enjoy and have fun during the holidays.

Note: The above is provided as information and does not indicate an endorsement by Alternatives for Youth of the listed websites.