

Preventing holiday stress and anxiety in children

The holidays are a fun and joyous time but also a very busy one, and holiday stress and anxiety in children can and does happen. During the holidays, there are lots of fun activities and events going on, both at home and at school. And while that can be a good thing, the constant hustle and bustle can be just as overwhelming and nerve-wracking for children as it is for adults.

Recognize the signs that your child is stressed out. These signs may include:

- increased irritability or anger
- clinginess
- more crying, whining, or complaining
- sleep troubles (or sleeping too much)
- physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches
- more or less eating
- isolation and/or refusal to participate in activities
- regressive behavior such as bedwetting or thumb-sucking

Try these tips to help alleviate your child's stress and make the holiday season a merrier time for everyone:

Set a Calm Example

The most important way parents can help ease anxiety in children during the holidays is by trying to keep things relaxed as much as possible. As with so many situations, the way parents handle an issue can set the tone for how their kids will behave. If you let holiday stress get to you, your kids will definitely pick up on it, and child anxiety is more likely to be a problem in your house. To minimize anxiety in children during the holidays, take steps to handle your own stress and anxiety.

Set Up Conditions for Good Behavior

Avoid taking your child to places such as the mall or holiday gatherings when he is hungry or tired. It's hard even for grown-ups to deal with noise and lots of stimulation when they're not feeling their best; kids get hungry more often and become tired more easily, and may understandably have a tough time being on their best behavior and are more likely to experience holiday stress when they're exhausted or hungry.

Remember the Importance of Routines

The holidays can throw a big wrench into household routines, and that can play a role in anxiety in children. To minimize holiday stress in your kids, try to get routines back on track once an event or party is over. For instance, if a school holiday concert or a church gathering goes past your child's bedtime, try to stick to quiet, calm activities the next day and get your child to bed on time the next night.

Watch What They Are Eating

Another thing that can fall by the wayside amidst the holiday hubbub is healthy eating. Between all the extra sugary holiday snacks and the lack of time to sit down to regular meals, it can be all too easy for kids to eat less healthy foods, which can contribute to holiday stress and anxiety in children. Try packing healthy snacks when you have to go shopping or run other holiday errands and try to minimize the number of sweet treats at home. Whenever possible, offer healthy snacks, such as air-popped popcorn or apple slices with cheese and crackers and limit cookies and candy to after-snack treats.

Get Your Child Moving

Fresh air and exercise are essential for boosting mood and re-setting the spirit, which can alleviate holiday stress and anxiety in children. Make sure you schedule some time to get your child outside to run around and play.

Avoid Overscheduling

As tempting as it may be to accept every invitation from friends and family, try to limit your holiday parties and activities so that you and your child are not overwhelmed. A couple of events a week may be fine, but having an obligation every day can lead to holiday stress and anxiety in children.

Have Your Grade-Schooler Help You

Big kids love to help mom and dad, especially if they get lots of praise for being responsible and helpful. If you have to shop, ask your child to help you look for an item at the store (fun stocking stuffers for cousins, for example). Giving your child a task will not only boost her self-esteem, it'll distract her and help prevent any holiday stress and anxiety.

Schedule Some Quiet Time

Having some peace and quiet with your child is more important than ever during the busy holiday season. Find a quiet corner and read a book with your child or create holiday pictures for grandma and grandpa. Take a walk outside in nature, away from noise and crowds and obligations.

Remind Your Child and Yourself What the Holidays Are Really All About

A great antidote for holiday stress and the bloated commercialism of the season is helping others, whether it's by shoveling an elderly neighbor's sidewalk or by wrapping presents for needy kids at your local church. Helping your grade-schooler become a charitable child will help alleviate her holiday stress and anxiety.

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)