

FAMILY Managing the Holiday Excitement

There are few things as exciting in the eyes of young children as winter holidays. Stores come alive with displays, lights and tinsel. There is music, cookies, treats and dreams of toys.

Young children look up with eyes as big as saucers. Last year's memories of winter holidays may be gone as the child was too young to remember, so now they look on as if it is the first time. They are filled with bewilderment and excitement. The pace of their parents, the decorations in the house and stories of what is to come, fuel their excitement.

Then holidays approach, parents pace may change from fast to frantic, the stores become ever crowded and the sheer noise of the season can become deafening. The child moves from bewilderment and excitement to being overwhelmed and scared. Rather than enjoying their child's joy, parents may find themselves managing their child's behavior.

Yes, Virginia, winter holidays can be a stressful time not only for parents, but for young children too.

Parents can help keep the holiday season within tolerable limits for their young children by following these few simple tips:

1. Keep your child's routine stable. Bedtime, naptime, mealtimes and all other regular activities should be maintained as best as possible. These routines provide stability and certainty in the life of the child and helps keep them feeling safe and secure.
2. Avoid extra snacks, cookies and candies. The rush and fall of sugar in a child's diet can cause both bursts of energy and fatigue as the sugar wears off. These highs and lows can lead to behaviour difficulties. If you want to give your child a treat, limit the size and consider

offering it as a special dessert – after an appropriate meal.

3. If you take your child on shopping trips, limit the amount of time you are out and consider taking the stroller or allowing for breaks. Although you may think kids have more energy than you, they really do tire quickly from walking about a shopping mall. Also, consider going out early in the day, before the stores get busy and crowded. Being in a noisy crowded space can be very overwhelming to young children.
4. Think safety. Use non-flammable and non-breakable decorations. With young children in the home, you may consider a special room for festivities with a door that can be closed to prevent the child from wandering in.

T'is the season for fun and excitement. Parents who follow these tips may just find the season a little more manageable for themselves as well as their young child.

Do make it a safe holiday season!

When someone talks with you about a personal issue or a family issue, remember to tell them that you know someone with almost 50 years experience as an individual, couple and family counselor who would be a good person to talk with. Ask if you can have me call them and certainly give them my card and invite them to call me.

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