



# A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

## Holiday Harmony

Tips for Parents to Manage Households During the Festive Season

### Magical Mayhem

The holiday season, while magical, can be tough for children due to the disruption of their usual routines and the heightened busyness around them. With late nights, irregular meal times, and a packed schedule of activities, kids can easily become overstimulated and emotionally dysregulated. The excitement of gifts, visitors, and festive events can overwhelm their ability to self-regulate, leading to meltdowns or fatigue. Additionally, the expectations for “perfect behavior” during gatherings can add pressure, especially for younger children who thrive on consistency and familiarity. For many kids, the excitement is a double-edged sword, requiring extra patience and understanding from parents to help them navigate the season smoothly.

### Holiday Tips

- **Prioritize family traditions over perfection** – picture perfect moments create pressure. Instead, focus on simple, meaningful traditions such as decorating a tree, baking cookies, or a night time holiday story.
- **Involve children in preparations** – choose age-appropriate activities and have your children join you as you move through the to-do list. This could include wrapping gifts, sticking bows on presents, or drawing holiday cards.
- **Maintain a (flexible) routine** – holidays are disruptive and routines often go out the window, leading to overstimulation and meltdowns. While flexibility is inevitable, try to keep some activities consistent such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Remember that set periods for downtime are also just as important as those busy moments, as they allow you and your children to recharge.
- **Set realistic expectations** – open conversations are important, especially about giving and gratitude. Gift giving can be overwhelming, and “wish lists” unattainable. Reminding your children that holiday periods are about being together with loved ones, being grateful for what we have and enjoying experiences rather than material things.
- **Manage screen time** – from holiday movies to video games, screen time can spike during the festive season. Set clear boundaries regarding screen allowances and remain consistent.
- **Encourage giving and kindness** - teach children the joy of giving by involving them in acts of kindness by donating toys, participating in community events, or making handmade gifts for loved ones.
- **Prepare for travel** – have conversations ahead of time regarding the upcoming travel and what it will entail. Show younger children pictures or create charts and timelines to help them understand the process. Pack essentials like snacks, games, and comfort items to keep kids entertained. Plan breaks during long journeys to avoid restlessness. Involve older children in packing their bags to give them a sense of control.
- **Be mindful of overstimulation** - festive lights, loud music, and crowded gatherings can overwhelm young children. Keep an eye on their behavior and be prepared to leave early or find a quiet space for them to regroup. At home, create a cozy, calm corner for kids to decompress.
- **Plan kid-friendly festive activities** – find ways to engage your child’s interests like being creative or getting out and about by visiting festive markets. These will not only keep kids entertained, but also create lasting memories and strengthen family bonds.
- **Give yourself grace** – parenting during holidays can feel like an endless to-do list. Remember that it’s okay to ask for help, simplify things or even say no to certain activities. Prioritize your well-being, as a happy and relaxed parent is the best gift for your children.

# 10 Simple, Cost-Effective At-Home Child Activities

**-Holiday craft/card making station:** make homemade cards, paper snowflakes, or decorations for the house or to gift to family members.

**-DIY ornament making:** gather simple materials like salt dough, clay, paper, material, old buttons, or felt to create personalized ornaments.

**-Indoor holiday scavenger hunt:** hide small holiday-themed items, ornaments, or figurines around the house; create a checklist and let the kids search for them.

**-Indoor obstacle course:** time to burn some energy using household items like cushions, chairs, and blankets; add holiday themes like “jump over the snowbank” or “slide under Santa’s sleigh.”

**-Baking and decorating treats:** fun and delicious!



**-Build a blanket fort:** transform your living room into a magical fort using blankets, pillows, and fairy lights; add books, board games, or snacks for extra fun.

**-Create a holiday countdown chain:** make a paper chain to count down the days until a big holiday event, decorate each link and tear one off daily.

**-Storytime with a twist:** write your own holiday story as a family by taking turns adding to the tale, or letting the kids illustrate it.

**-Snow or no snow play:** bundle up and have a snowball fight, build a snowman, or create snow angels or if there’s no snow, make “snow” using materials like shaving cream or cornstarch and water for sensory play.

**-DIY holiday parade:** let kids create costumes with a holiday theme, add music and let them march around showing off their creations.

## When Things Feel Challenging: Sensitive Approaches

The excitement and chaos of the holiday season can sometimes overwhelm children, leading to emotional dysregulation. Sensitive parenting can help children feel safe, understood, and supported during these challenging moments.

1. **Stay calm and grounded** - deep breaths, a soothing tone of voice, and patient body language can help diffuse heightened emotions.
2. **Validate their feelings** - phrases like, “I see that you’re upset” or “It’s okay to feel this way” show empathy and let them know their feelings are valid.
3. **Create a quiet retreat space** - designate a cozy, quiet area where your child can go to decompress when they feel overwhelmed.
4. **Offer choices to empower them** – asking “would you like to take a break or sit with me for a minute?” empowers a child to take steps toward calming down in a way that feels manageable.
5. **Use predictable routines and time warnings** - where possible, maintain consistent mealtimes and bedtimes, and provide advanced notice of transitions, like “In 10 minutes, we’re going to leave for Grandma’s house.”
6. **Engage in co-regulation** - offer co-regulation by staying physically close, breathing deeply together, or using calming touch (if they’re receptive).
7. **Reflect and reconnect** - revisit the situation gently to help your child identify triggers and brainstorm coping strategies together.



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