

The Holiday Break Challenge: A Survival Guide for Parents

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The holiday season can be such an exciting time of year for parents and children alike. In many households, it means school breaks, shopping, cooking and family time. Parents and children who experience these seasonal privileges also experience challenges along the way, such as changes in routine, changes in eating and sleeping habits and too much stimulation.

How to Survive:

Create a Routine for Each Day

As a parent of a spirited 5-year-old, I understand these challenges all too well. The change in routine is a big one. You don't realize how important routine is to your children (and parents) until it's gone. Once school is out, it's every man for himself. Starting any new routine is stressful for any adult; for a child this is amplified. Children need to know what to expect in their day. Without routine, parents will typically see more anxious, irritable and whiny kids.

The first step in making the holidays pleasant and enjoyable is to establish a routine your children will understand and stick to it the best that you can. It is possible you will need to change the routine day-to-day, and that's OK. The key is to have a plan for each day, make sure you explain the plan ahead of time and remind them of the plan throughout the day. If you have a younger child, you can make a picture schedule (it doesn't have to be fancy) for the day; for older children, you can write a schedule. If the schedule has to change, it's not the end of the world. Just make the change for them visually on their schedule and explain why. This works wonders.

Keep Healthy Snacks on Hand

Changes in routine inevitably mean changes in eating and sleeping habits. One simple fix is to have healthy snacks on hand when you are out and about to limit the temptation and necessity of your children eating foods that are not good for them. Foods with too much sugar and dyes can really affect mood, behavior and sleep. Incorporate sleep into the schedule idea suggested above to make an effort to keep the same sleep schedule, or at least one you planned in advance.

Pay Attention to Stimulation in the Environment

While children often love the sights and sounds of the holiday season, some things may overwhelm them. As a parent, it's important to pay attention to your children and how they react to these things. If there is a situation with a lot of stimulation and your child seems upset, honor their feelings. Take them to a quiet spot until they calm down. Distract them with another activity. Seeing Santa this year isn't worth it if it causes extreme distress to your little one.

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