

## TIPS FOR EASING STRESS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The holidays are a joyous time and can also be a time of stress and frustration, sometimes unintentionally resulting in an increased risk of child abuse and neglect. Here are some tips to help you enjoy the holidays while keeping tension to a minimum:

1. Establish a budget for holiday spending. Be realistic about what you can afford to spend on gifts, decorations for the home, special foods, etc.
2. Hold a family meeting to talk about holiday plans. Ask for ideas from the children for family activities that are special to them.
3. Post a calendar in a place where family members will see it. Ask each person to remind you of school events, church activities, parties, etc.
4. Remind yourself that a gift's importance is not determined by the amount of money spent on it. Handmade gifts and freshly baked cookies are welcome and appreciated by friends and relatives. Maybe even more appreciated than a store-bought gift!
5. Check community calendars and local lists of events to find inexpensive or free activities for children. Write all possibilities on individual slips of brightly colored paper and put them in a "holiday fun jar." When children have been especially cooperative, allow them to choose a slip of paper from the jar. Then, the family can enjoy an afternoon of skating, sledding or other fun activity together.
6. Have your children make a list of grandparents, special friends and neighbors. Plan to share a meal, some of your time, or run errands for at least one person on the list. Explain to children that helping and sharing are important elements of special holidays.
7. Find time to relax and reflect on the simple joys of the holidays. When you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed, take a break to get a better perspective on what *needs* to be done and what *can* be done.
8. If you find that it is becoming difficult to avoid being verbally or physically harsh with your children, STOP. Don't take out your anger on your kids. Instead, try the following:
  - Take a deep breath and count to 20.
  - Phone a friend.
  - Take a walk outside, or use another form of exercise.
  - Laugh. Even a comedy show on television will help relieve stress.
  - Spend one hour doing something you really enjoy.

Enjoy the hectic holiday season, but remember: less stress is the best holiday gift you can give.

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