

MORE TIPS FOR EASING STRESS DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

The kids are wired. They are racing around the house. They are shaking with crazy laughter. They repeat "I want I want I want." You are going crazy. What to do?!

The holiday season can make children behave in ways that are very challenging. All the expectation and hope of getting new toys and presents can be overwhelming. Kids that get super-excited have a hard time controlling their behavior. Here are some tips that can help you calm your children and your household without resorting to hitting and yelling:

1. Control the amount of television your child watches. This sounds crazy, but it is effective. The t.v. commercials are chock full of toys - and what child wouldn't be attracted to all of the newest gizmos? That doesn't mean you can't have the t.v. on. Let's face it, t.v. is a pretty good babysitter (used moderately, of course). So instead of t.v. programs with their incessant commercials, march down to the local library and borrow videos, or go to the local video store if its within your budget, and rent a favorite show. Or, if you own a VCR, tape a few programs of Barney, Sesame Street, or whatever your child likes.
2. Insist on regular bedtimes. Do everything in your power to maintain your typical evening routine. If kids typically go to bed at 7:30 p.m., tape the holiday program for another viewing (see above!) and do your typical bedtime routine. Kids that are well rested are much better to be around.
3. If you don't have a regular routine, start one today. Start a routine of supper, ½ hour of playtime, bathtime, reading, bed. It may be harder for you to get used to the routine: kids will love it. Even if your children are school aged and never had an evening routine before, starting one now can help them not only get through the holiday season, but with school days also.
4. If your child is begging for an expensive toy, and you know you can't get it, tell them. Hey, it's life to live within a family budget. Help them to be interested in the things you can afford (or the items you think your local Xmas for Kids program may be donating to you) like basketballs, smaller versions of the expensive toys, etc. Tell your kids that when they are older and have part-time after school jobs, they will be able to afford the expensive toys.
5. Try to do as many inexpensive fun things as you can. Here are some ideas:
 - Pop popcorn and string it with a needle and thread. It looks fantastic on the tree, and the birds love it after the season;
 - Make home-made decorations with flour, water, and salt. Make a dough and let the kids mush it and form it into decorations. Add cinnamon to the dough if you have it.
 - Take the kids for nature walks. Maine has so many pine cones, acorns, rose hips, dried grasses, pretty stones that beautiful arrangements and decorations can be made.
 - If it snows, get outside! Jump, slide, fall, run, slip in the snow! If you have a sled, use it!
 - Go to the library and choose some children's books. Heat up some low-fat milk and chocolate syrup for fairly nutritious hot cocoa, cuddle on the couch, and read a book with your children each night. This is a tradition your children are sure to remember!
 - Go to a local playground. Children love to climb and swing and new playgrounds are fun.
 - Go window shopping. You have to know your children to do this one; children that are too excited or anxious won't be able to handle this. Pretend you have a hundred dollars and are going to spend it, and see what you would get!
1. It's important to put the holiday season in perspective. In the rest of the world, many children are starving and without adequate shelter and clothes. When we as parents begin to feel bad for ourselves, or our children for not having the best of everything, its helpful to know that we really do have a lot - and a safe, secure and hopeful household is the best gift we can give our children.

compliments of Advocates for Children, 157 Main Street, Lewiston, ME 04240. Ph: 783-3990 and Community Concepts, Market Square, PO Box 278, South Paris, ME 04281. Tel: 743-7716, 364-3721 or 795-4065.