

Parenting Tips to Help Keep the Holidays Happy



ASK AN EXPERT:

PARENTING TIPS TO KEEP THE HOLIDAYS HAPPY

Keep your holidays happy with these six tips from USU Extension family life specialist David Schramm.

The holidays can be a magical time of year with great food,

movies, traditions and decorations. But they are also a busy time that can cause stress. And when the kids are out of school, they can become tired, argumentative and overexcited, which in turn can cause frustration for parents. It's important for parents to keep things in perspective so the holidays stay happy.

Consider these tips for dealing with holiday stress:

- **Set realistic expectations.** Not everything will go as planned around the holidays. The food may not turn out as planned and things can get spilled or broken. Be positive, flexible and open to changes and messes. Try not to overschedule activities to the point that it becomes more stressful than enjoyable.
- **Pay attention to bids for connection.** Children thrive when their parents give them attention, affection and connection – especially during the excitement of the holidays. Plan to give them your dedicated time at least once per day, offering full attention for whatever *they* want to do (board games, playing in the snow, reading books, etc.).
- **Hold up the emotional mirror.** Many parents will see a range of emotions from children around the holidays. Mirror their excitement, show understanding when they are sad, and express empathy when they are upset.
- **Grant in fantasy what you can't grant in reality.**

Instead of squashing your children's holiday dreams or their gift list, let them know you hear them and understand. Phrases such as, "Wow, that would be fun!" or "I wish we could do that too!" can give them the next best thing to what they want, and that is knowing you understand what they want.

- **Don't use unrealistic threats** such as "Christmas will be cancelled if..." or "Santa won't bring you toys if..." Strive to be positive, but still follow through with rules and unacceptable behavior.
- **Take care of yourself** or your happy holiday may turn into a Noel nightmare. When parents are stressed out, it often spills over and children feel it. Take time for yourself. Exercise, get adequate sleep, take some deep breaths and try to see the bigger picture. Make positive memories and enjoy the moments, because they don't last long.

This article was written by David Schramm, Utah State University Extension family life specialist. See more from Dr. Dave on Facebook.