



Desert Mountain Children's Center

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## **How Holidays can be Stressful for Children**

Steering Committee

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The holidays can be a difficult time of the year for many individuals, including kids. The reasons that the holiday season can be stressful are as varied as the individuals affected – the stress can come from individual experiences, family dynamics, relationships, etc. In a survey conducted in 2021, 3 of 5 respondents stated that their mental health was negatively affected by the holidays.<sup>1</sup> While the respondents in this survey were adults, we know that the holidays can also be stressful for kids.<sup>2</sup>

Some common factors contributing to holiday stress for children include:

### 1. Disruption of Routine

- The holiday season often disrupts their daily schedules, with changes in school routines, sleep patterns, and activities.
- Since children thrive on routine and predictability, this disruption can be unsettling for some children.

### 2. Academic Pressure

- For students, the holidays may coincide with exams, assignments, or projects, leading to academic stress.
- Preparing for end-of-semester exams or managing homework during a time when they expect to relax can be challenging.

### 3. Missing Loved Ones

- The holidays may evoke feelings of sadness or grief if children have lost loved ones or if family members are absent due to work, military service, or other reasons.

#### 4. Family Dynamics

- Family gatherings during the holidays can bring both joy and stress.
- Conflicts or strained family relationships can cause anxiety for children.
- Children may also experience stress due to changes in living arrangements if parents are divorced or separated.

#### 5. Overstimulation

- The holiday season often involves sensory overload, with bright lights, loud music, and crowded spaces.
- For children who are sensitive to sensory stimuli, this can be overwhelming and lead to stress.

#### 6. Media and Commercialization

- The holiday season is often portrayed in the media and advertising as a time of perfect happiness and abundance.
- Children may feel pressure to meet these unrealistic expectations.

#### 7. Time Pressure

- With numerous holiday activities and commitments, children may feel rushed and time stressed.
- This can contribute to anxiety and overwhelm.

#### 8. Travel and Disruption of Home Life

- Traveling during the holidays or hosting visitors can disrupt a child's sense of home and security.
- Changes in sleeping arrangements and daily routines can be unsettling.

#### 9. Financial Concerns

- Children may pick up on financial stress in their families related to holiday spending.
- They may worry about the cost of gifts or the family's financial well-being.

#### 10. Gift Expectations

- Children may feel pressure to receive or give gifts, and they might worry about disappointing others or not receiving what they desire.
- This can be particularly stressful if their expectations are not met.

#### 11. Social Pressure

- Holiday parties and gatherings may expose children to social situations where they feel pressured to socialize with relatives and/or peers they are not comfortable interacting with.

#### 12. Peer Comparisons

- Children may compare their holiday experiences, gifts, or family celebrations with those of their peers.
- This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and/or stress.

#### 13. Cultural or Religious Expectations

- For children from families with strong cultural or religious traditions, there may be additional expectations and responsibilities during the holiday season, adding to their stress.

Schools can play a crucial role in helping students deal with the stress of the holidays. Here are some practical tips for schools to support students during this potentially stressful period:

1. Create a Safe and Supportive Environment

- Encourage an open and non-judgmental atmosphere where students feel comfortable discussing their holiday-related stress.
- Train staff, including teachers, counselors, and support personnel, to recognize signs of stress and offer support.

2. Holiday-Themed School Activities

- Plan holiday-themed activities that are fun and engaging, such as decorating the school, holiday music, and special events.
- Make sure they are inclusive of diverse cultural celebrations.

3. Cultural Sensitivity

- Respect and acknowledge the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of students.
- Promote understanding and inclusivity by highlighting the various holiday traditions and celebrations.

4. Anti-Bullying Initiatives

- Continue anti-bullying efforts and reinforce the importance of kindness, empathy, and respect among students.

## **References:**

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2. <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mental-health-and-the-holidays-stress-for-kids/>

## **Resources:**

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