

Extension Education
12/19/18

Holiday Meltdowns
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The holiday season brings out the best in us. During the holidays, people are more generous, more forgiving, and more selfless. But let's be honest, sometimes the holidays also bring out the worst in us. When all of the stress combines, children and parents are often displaying less than their best behavior. Following are a few things that sometimes contribute to holiday meltdowns. Identifying specific triggers that might affect your family can enable preventative action.

Disrupted Schedules: Predictability brings a feeling of security. Children especially thrive in routine environments. During the holidays, our daily routines are disrupted with parties, programs, activities, and events. Our regular homework and chore schedules, as well as typical times to unwind and decompress, are all compromised as our schedules are filled with additional places to go and people to see. Making an effort to keep some routines in place during the holidays can help relieve the inevitable disruption.

Delayed Bedtime: One of the schedules that is regularly disrupted is bedtime. We all seem to try to run on a little less sleep during the holidays. Staying out late at parties, returning home late from concerts, and extended to-do lists often cut into our sleep time. When both children and parents are sleep deprived, all are less likely to be full of holiday cheer.

Under the Weather: 'Tis the season for the cold and flu. Not getting enough rest suppresses our immune systems. Eating lots of holiday goodies rather than fruits and vegetables does not give our bodies the resources we need to fight germs. Take extra precaution to ensure you're spreading holiday cheer instead of unwanted illness.

Entitlement: Oftentimes when we approach the holidays with a sense of deserving, we are disappointed with unmet expectations. This is true for children as well as parents. Children feel entitled to large quantities of specific gifts and are sometimes even culturally encouraged to think only of themselves and what they want. This can result in parents feeling unappreciated and resentful. Parents sometimes ask themselves, "Do they know how much I do for them?" or "Do they know how much that costs?" or "Do they have any idea what they are asking for?" The short answer to these questions, and many like them, is simply 'no.' Most children have a very limited understanding of money and sacrifice. Parents should not expect children to understand these complex ideas, nor feel entitled to lavish praise for all the effort expended on behalf of the children this time of year.

Making an effort to manage the schedule, get enough rest, stay healthy, and focus outside of oneself can go a long way to reducing the frequency and intensity of holiday meltdowns for both children and parents.