

# Handling Holiday Stress

Holidays can be a stressful time for most families, and can be even more troubling for children in single-parent families or families that are struggling financially. The holidays can remind children of times when their parents were together or when the family situation seemed different. The uncertainty or unpredictability of family plans can cause worry and anxiety for children during this time of the year.



The best remedy for holiday blues is just letting your student know that you care about them. If expressing your feelings isn't your cup of tea, consider getting them a holiday card. (Even though they may not respond the way you expected, your words or the gesture will stay with them).

## Tips for Creating a Stress-Free Holiday

**AWARENESS** - When you talk with your student about the holidays, be sure to be aware of your own associations to the holidays and how they might be different than your student's. Take the opportunity to acknowledge that there are different types of families and a wide variety of family customs and traditions that are celebrated.

**CALM** - Try to take the "hype" out of the season and think of relaxing and low-key ways to be together during this time.

**PREDICTABILITY** - Stick to your typical schedule and routine, and continue to set good boundaries and limits. Familiar routines and rules help kids feel calm and stress-free.

**KEEP LISTENING** - As always, listen carefully to your student's concerns. Remember that they just need someone to listen and to care about what they say.

**EMPATHIZE** - If your student seems upset, encourage him or her to express his/her feelings and to talk about any disappointment. For example, if they are disappointed because they aren't going to see a distant parent, or don't receive a message or gift from that parent, let them know you care. Reflect back their feelings to them and let them know you understand their disappointment.

**START NEW RITUALS** - The holidays provide a great opportunity to start a new ritual or tradition for you and your student. Starting something new can change what the holidays mean for your student.

Finally, be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Creating a safe, predictable environment for them when you spend time together and being sensitive to their needs is the best gift of all!

## Talking Points/Conversation Tips

By having students focus on others, it helps take the commercialization out of the holidays and puts them in the mindset of the importance of giving rather than receiving.

Explain that a gift doesn't have to be a present that you unwrap. It can be something as simple as someone spending extra time with you, reading you a story or just being a friend).

Here are some discussion/topics or questions:

- Ask who they are thankful for and why? Talk about what you are grateful for.
- What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why was it so special?
- What is the best gift you have given someone? Why was it so special?
- If you could give any gift to anyone you wanted who would you give the gift to and what would you give them?
- If you could give one gift to every single child the world, what gift would you give?

**Remember to Share Your Answers!**

## Activity Ideas

Draw a turkey together using the outline of your student's hand and list things you are grateful for on the feathers.

Have your student draw a picture of a gift they would like to give to someone. (Then they can give the drawing to that person).

Color gratitude rocks and play tic tac toe.

Here are some other **Thanksgiving**, **Christmas** and **Hanukkah** activity ideas.