

Tips for Enjoying the Holidays with Kids & Teens

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Breaks from school are great – right? It’s interesting that sometimes kids struggle the most during the times they most anticipate. Here are some tips to help us slow down and enjoy the little things.

Architect your time together for SUCCESS... not all kids are up for battling the holiday shopping crowd, and going to see the newest Disney movie might not make your teen’s top 10 things to do. Take time to think about what REALLY works for your family. Be realistic. Though flexibility increases for most kids as they get older, don’t expect teenagers to love the things that they did when they were five years old. Find activities that everyone can enjoy (I know that this sounds like an impossible feat!). Remember: it’s the little moments together that create connection. Try to live in THIS moment.

Be realistic and LET GO OF PERFECTION... having realistic expectations of everyone – kids and adults – means that although plans might not be as grand as you hoped, they’ll definitely be more fun. When you recognize your kids’ limitations, everyone’s stress will decrease. When you have a clear understanding of your kids’ ability to stay focused or patient, your time together will become more enjoyable. Forcing too long of a day, going too long between meals, or cramming in too many activities (and people) in your holiday break can contribute to a crummy situation. Remind yourself that there’s no such thing as a perfect parent, child, or family.

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Let kids know that routines might change... the school break naturally changes a family's normal schedule. Changes in routine can send some kids into a tailspin. Communicating with them about upcoming changes will help head off meltdowns. Have a plan, but **BE FLEXIBLE**. Family life is an unpredictable ride, so buckle up!! You will sometimes be late, your teen will sometimes be snarky, your child will throw a fit at the worst possible moment. Buckle up and breathe.

EMBRACE BOREDOM... there's nothing like being bored out of your mind to get you thinking about diving into that old bin of Legos or busting out the flute you played in the sixth grade. Research suggests that boredom breeds creativity. "Did you just say you're bored? Fantastic! I can't wait to see what you come up with!" I know this sounds too good to be true, but allowing for unscheduled time is gift we give our kids. On the flip side, for the sake of parental sanity, make sure to have a few planned activities that get you out of the house. The great thing about this time of year is that there are many inexpensive family-friendly activities that are happening around town – the perfect distraction for children who are complaining about not having aaaaaanything to do.

Don't forget to laugh... Our children are often a mirror to our own stress and emotions – if you're stressed out and irritable, expect them to be as well. If you maintain a sense of humor, enjoy your kids for who they are, and understand that they will remember the **FEELING** of your time together (and not the fancy dinner itself), your kids will likely feel relaxed and accepted. When feelings of frustration start to show up, pause, and then sing, dance, and look for the humor in the situation.