

Daily Union Article
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Title: Holiday Celebrations and Challenges

No doubt, the holiday season in the United States from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day has ample opportunities to join in celebrations. The season is magical for many while others experience many challenges during this time.

In this article, I wanted to look through the lenses of a child and parents in looking at the celebrations and challenges they may experience.

Children: When you ask an adult about their memories from the holiday season, you will get a very mixed bag of responses. The ideal is that they remember spending time with family, perhaps traveling to see grandparents, and enjoying the festive frenzy of both giving and receiving gifts.

For children who live in an emotionally and financially stable home, there are more positive memories being creative than negative ones. Families develop and share rich traditions that members look forward to from year to year. However, when the home environment has shifted, the traditions often require adjustment if not complete dismissal.

Perhaps a grandparent passed away, or one of the parents is now absent from the family for any number of reasons, or the family has made a physical move during the year. Events such as these can make the holiday season more challenging for children.

What can parents or other adults do to help children move through the holiday season with positive memories? First, give advance notice and talk to kids on how their holiday season may look and feel differently. Using words that they can understand, try to describe what you are expecting: "Your grandma might be really sad when we get there. She is really missing your grandpa and this is a tough time of the year for her." Give them some tips on what they can do to help. "I think grandma might really like a special card from you to help her know how much you love her."

Next, as their parent or guardian, try to do as much as you can to keep the celebration similar to those traditions you've had in the past. Some familiarity will help make the event more enjoyable and give children security in knowing that not everything has changed.

When children have questions, do your best to answer them truthfully. Depending on their age, they may have many questions that they will likely ask multiple times. Be patient with them and do your best to answer their questions in a way they can understand.

Be prepared for some behavior extremes. Perhaps kids will begin grieving again the loss of a loved one or moving from their old neighborhood. They may simply show moodiness because of the stress they feel due to coping with the changes the family has experienced. They are trying to navigate their feelings and you can help by listening to them and helping them see what positives they have in their life, as well.

Parents: There is no doubt that the holiday season is full of fantastic memories for most families. However, the season brings with it a significant amount of stress, too. A recent “Stress in America” survey commissioned by the American Psychological Association (APA), reports that adults are more stressed about family responsibilities than in years past. When there have been significant changes in a family’s pattern or structure, there is bound to be stress. Parents are just as vulnerable as children are to reacting to life changes and challenges with high or unpredictable emotions. Perhaps it is merely the crazy schedule that is giving them fits. More likely, it might be the financial strain they experience as they buy more gas to run to different events, purchasing more food to feed an extended group of people, or the pressure to buy newer, more impressive gifts for their children and/or family members.

What can parents do to handle this high-stress season with poise and emotional balance? The APA offers these tips to parents who are need to manage their holiday stress:

- 1) Strengthen social connections. The holidays offer an excellent opportunity to reconnect with the positive people parents know and love. These supportive relationships offer an outlet for facing all kinds of challenges – including holiday stress. When parents ask for and receive support from their family and friends it will help alleviate stress.
- 2) Initiate conversations about the season. Parents need to talk about their own positive holiday memories with their kids, their families, and friends. The key is to focus on the positive events and experiences.
- 3) Set realistic expectations. Parents shouldn’t try to compete with other family’s holiday traditions or spending levels. Depending on the age of the children in the family, parents can use this opportunity to talk about the value of money and responsible spending. Parents also need to set realistic expectations for themselves and not take on too much – socially or financially – during the holiday season.
- 4) Keep things in perspective. Remember that the holiday season is relatively short and is simply one of many holiday seasons to come. The energy and resources consumed should be proportionate to what the family has to offer.
- 5) Take care of yourself. Parents have their own needs and feelings, too. Finding ways to have fun and relax, will help parents navigate their emotions and stress. Remaining physically active is a great release for stress and can offer time well-spent with children who are also dealing with the “new normal” of a family in transition.

Slow down, take deep breaths, think good thoughts, and seek to find joy and peace during this holiday season. That’s good advice for parents and children alike! Wishing you the best the season has to offer! Until next time, keep living resourcefully!