

Mom and Dad's Holiday Survival Guide

Take physical safety precautions:

Young children are at-risk of eating poisonous holiday plants (mistletoe, poinsettias, and holly berries). Keep your local poison center's number near the phone. Small table decorations and ornaments can be harmful if swallowed. Try to keep small objects, including hard candies and nuts, out of reach. If a child eats too much, read the medication label before treating upset stomachs. Fire-proof your home. Natural and artificial trees can catch fire and while roaring fireplaces may look festive they can be dangerous if proper safety measures are not in place.

Take mental safety precautions:

Your sanity is as important as your family's physical safety. Expect some amount of stress and plan ahead as much as possible to keep it to a minimum. Organize your shopping list and spread your shopping activities out over a few weeks. Have the holiday dinner at someone else's house if having it at yours is too much stress.

Involve your children in the preparation of the festivities:

Have your children help you with all of the various aspects of preparing for the holidays. Brainstorm menu items from a stack of holiday recipes. Make holiday decorations together from ideas gathered in family magazines or special holiday craft books. Some craft ideas make excellent gift ideas. Start a holiday memory box. Save all of the cards, bits of wrapping paper, special pictures, and other odd assortments to review later in the year. Get excited about looking in the mailbox for Christmas cards and let the children help decide the best location for them. Make up a list of people to send your holiday greeting. If you're really ambitious make them up by hand.

Create special traditions and rituals:

Traditions and rituals are patterns of behaviors that have symbolic or spiritual meaning. They build firm foundations and reduce children's holiday hyperactivity by creating a sense of family identity. Dinner menus, religious observances, advent calendars, gift wrapping parties, ornament collecting, sing-a-longs, and special holiday stories are just a few ways that parents can develop more intimate relationships with their children.

Reduce your expectations:

If you expect to have no problems, perfect children, or accident proof holidays you will be in for a major disappointment. Remember that children are often over-stimulated by the sights, sounds, and incredible number of television commercials about the holidays. Think positively, optimistically, and rationally.

Give yourself a gift:

The greatest gift you can give yourself is the gift of taking care of yourself. You have to take care of yourself before you can start taking care of everyone else. Delegate some of the shopping and preparations to other family members and take frequent breaks to regain lost energy. Do something for someone else that doesn't involve writing a check. It's amazing how doing a selfless act can renew your inner strength. Call a few nonprofit organizations in the phone book to see how you can help. Valuing yourself and helping others less fortunate is also a good model for your children of what the holidays are really about!