

Children's Corner

Having a Joyful Holiday Season With Children

Holiday time provides the "stuff" of childhood memories. Parents want their children to look back at holiday celebrations and remember them as a time of wonder, joy, and fun.

Caring for children requires a balance between involving children in the excitement of the holiday season while giving children a break from the hectic holiday season.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Be mindful that all of your families may not celebrate the same holiday. Ask families what holidays they celebrate. How do they celebrate? Ask them to come to the program and share with the children a special book, a song, or a recipe.
- Help families to understand that children can be stressed by all the activities of the holiday season. Children do better when they have a regular schedule and enough sleep. Remind families that there will be many years of celebrating to come, and they don't have to do everything, everywhere this year.
- Don't expect that young children, especially infants and toddlers, will fully understand the meaning of the holiday season. It might take a few Christmases, Hanukkahs, and Kwanzas for the understanding to take shape. Keep your plans simple so the children won't be overwhelmed.
- Remember that most children become very exhausted during holiday time. The excitement, anticipation, parties, late nights, gifts, etc. are all wonderful, but tiring. A peaceful, slow-paced child care program can be a welcome break for children. You do not have to duplicate what is happening out in the world.
- Be aware of children's ability to deal with the excitement and emotions, and plan your holiday schedule with these limits in mind. Some children are very adaptable to changes in schedules, and others have a hard time coping with frenzied activity.
- Help families to understand that this is not the time to make any major changes in their child's life during the holiday season. This is not the time to wean him/her from the bottle, pacifier, or crib, toilet train, or change his/her bedtime or meal schedule.
- There does not need to be a project or activity every day in December. We want children to anticipate and then enjoy the holiday experience it.
- Spread out the holiday activities over the month so all the activity doesn't occur on one or two days.
- Older toddlers and preschoolers may have the "I want this or that" cry at holiday time. You can acknowledge the receiving presents is wonderful but that all of the holidays mean so much more.

- Involve the children in making, wrapping, and presenting a gift to their families. This will help him/her experience the joy of giving. For instance your preschooler and school-age children can make their own wrapping paper by using "stamps" which they dip into paint and then stamp on newsprint (this paper can be purchased from a crafts store).
- Give parents suggestions for selecting gifts for their child. We should be helping parents to choose toys that allow for hands-on exploration and creativity. Electronic toys may seem fun, but children do not learn from playing with them. Suggest books, blocks, LEGOs, dramatic play props, board games, puzzles, dolls, stuffed animals, etc. Help families to see that simpler, less expensive toys will hold a child's interest just as well as an expensive one.
- Help families understand that it is natural for young children to be shy around new people even relatives. Many children may naturally want to hug and kiss family members, friends, and neighbors, and that's lovely—but if a child is reticent, consider letting him/her choose what to do. Saying how much she's missed someone or thank you with a smile, a high-five, or even an air kiss are all ways children can express themselves. It is important that children know they get to choose which feels most comfortable to them. (Girl Scouts of America)