

Tips to Manage Holiday Stress

Adapted from last year's similar article and supplemented by
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Being the person in charge of another human being has some incredible benefits. You are there for the happy moments, the triumphs, the goals that are met, the heart-melting smiles and giggles. However, being that person is not always an easy task, especially during the holidays. In addition to the good times, there are also frustrating, sad and incredibly stressful times. When, as a parent and/or guardian, we see our children struggling with their emotions, enduring major routine changes, and generally finding little joy in the "holiday cheer", we try to do what we can to help and to make them feel better. We try to build structure and activities they are accustomed to; we allow space and time for engaging in new experiences; we anticipate their needs because we know what is best for our child. Identifying the emotions of others can be a simpler process than identifying and managing our own.

As parents and/or guardians, we need to follow the rule presented by flight attendants: put on your own oxygen mask first before helping others with theirs. In other words, in order to best help those around us, we need to help ourselves.

There are a number of ways a person can manage his or her stress, and not everyone manages their stress in the same way. It's important to find tactics that will work for you in the moment, as well as in the long run. Whatever you decide to do, when you need help, ask for it!

Consider these 7 tips to help you manage your holiday stress:

1) Exercise

Nothing compares to the release of endorphins after a good exercise, but don't worry if you don't have the time to run a marathon... just keep yourself moving to improve your mood. Take a brisk walk around the block or get some stretches or muscle building repetitions in during commercial breaks, and use an activity tracker to increase your daily steps and activity. [Click here](#) for some other ideas on easy ways to get in 10 minutes of exercise.

2) Relax your Muscles

Take time for you! Whether it's stretching, formal yoga practice, getting a massage, or simply soaking in a warm bath -- your body and mind will thank you for allowing yourself the time to decompress.

3) Breathing and Meditation

Have you ever tried meditation? According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), meditation can wipe away the day's stress, bringing with it inner peace. It is a free, portable, flexible, and equipment free form of stress release. Not sure what to do to meditate? Look on YouTube videos for 'Guided Meditation' videos, or consider downloading a phone app that helps you to free your mind from the day's worries -- if even for a few minutes.

4) Make Time for Hobbies

Hobbies help you take a break that is purposeful, think about other tasks, typically have a logical order (or one that you determine), and usually have an ending or a product that brings you pride or fulfillment. Give yourself opportunities and tasks to succeed because accomplishment is not only important for your child but for you, as well. [Check out these](#) ideas for hobbies that might help you unwind.

5) Eliminate Triggers

Let's face it, the holidays are frantic for most people so try and avoid triggers when you can. Avoid shopping centers in the middle of the rush; schedule less time with that relative or neighbor who really drains your patience; and schedule time that you know will be light in stress and demands. It's ok to turn down activities or invitations if in the end, they will leave you sapped and frazzled!

6) Seek Respite

Everyone needs a break! Check out [Erica's Schoolhouse News article](#) on ways to find respite for your kiddo(s).

7) Talk to Others

Don't be afraid to reach out to others. Whether it's a neighbor, trusted family member, friend, therapeutic professional, or your Advocate at The Arc of Aurora, people want to help. Often times just verbally expressing your frustration or exhaustion to an objective ear is what you need to start assessing how you might handle the triggering situation.

And after all of that – HAPPY HOLIDAYS!