

Bright Start UpDate

November / December 2010 ■ Volume 10 ■ Issue 6

Stress and the Holidays

Stress, Depression and the Holidays: 10 tips for Coping, an article on the Mayo Clinic website indicates that stress and depression can cause you to not only dread the holidays, but not enjoy them as well. Additionally, the same stress and depression can also affect your health in a negative manner.

Stress can be caused by many factors. For example, during the holidays families often have more expectations placed on them. The expectations may include more cooking, baking, shopping, traveling, and entertaining. Add these expectations to the everyday stressors of being a parent, and holidays can become overwhelming!

As a parent, how can you decrease your stress? According to the Mayo Clinic, the first step is to recognize important holiday stress triggers. These triggers can include:

- **Relationships.** Extra stress can cause already strained relationships to be even more strained. Always remind yourself of the positives of your relationships and try to focus on those. Also, keep in mind that holidays can become stressful if someone has recently lost a loved one. Finally, remember that your family loves you and they want you to enjoy your holiday!
- **Finances.** Plan ahead. Holidays can be expensive. Extra entertaining, food, gifts, and traveling can make holidays fun and exciting, but they can also make them stressful. Spend only what you can afford. Remember, holidays should be about positive relationships, not about food or gifts.



Stress can be caused by many factors.

- **Physical and Mental Health.** Take time to take care of yourself! Remember that with all the extra activities, you also need extra rest and relaxation. Don't let the holidays stop your healthy habits, such as, exercise and good nutrition.
If you do find yourself stressed, try these tips to help decrease the stress and depression.
- **Acknowledge your feelings.** It is OK not to feel jolly every moment of the holidays! You may be missing your family or may be extremely tired. Recognize the feelings and address them as soon as possible. You can do this by calling your family or a friend, or accepting that you may not be able to do everything!
- **Remember it is OK to say no!** Make sure to take time for yourself. You will be amazed how much a fifteen minute break can decrease your stress level.
- **Be realistic.** Remember not everything will be perfect, or even the same as in the past.

Times change, families change, and even expectations change, and your holiday rituals may reflect this. Decide as a family what traditions are important to keep and what could be changed. For example, in this economy, the tradition of giving a gift to every family member at Christmas may need to be changed to drawing names. This will help family members financially, and still enable your family to have the tradition of opening gifts on Christmas day.

- **Seek professional help if you need it.** If you find that stress is causing you not to function in a normal manner, or is affecting you physically, be sure to talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Prepared by Dr. Ann Michelle Daniels, Family Life, Parenting, and Child Care Specialist, South Dakota Cooperative Extension

Source: Mayo Clinic: Stress, Depression and the Holidays: 10 Tips for Coping (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>)



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From a Parent's Perspective – The True Meaning of Christmas

Do you remember what you received for Christmas when you were five? While there are some gifts that are cherished throughout the years, I'm willing to bet that it was cherished because it had a special significance attached to it, rather than for the item itself.

Last year, my husband and I discussed how we would like our family traditions to look, and ideally how the boys would approach the holidays, specifically gifts. Instead of gifts, we decided to put money away for a really nice swing set once the boys were old enough. We also talked about having them choose gifts for a child in need.

But what about extended family members that want to shower your child with gifts? Where do

you draw the line? As tempting as it is to overindulge, there are two important reasons not to.

1. If children receive everything they ask for, it can be difficult to teach gratitude.
2. A lot of gifts are overwhelming for young children.



My belief is that gifts should not be the focal point of a holiday or birthday. Traditions that center on family are an excellent way to put meaning back into the holidays or any special occasion. These are the times that you are never going to get back, and the ones that your children will treasure the most (even more than the gifts). A couple of ideas may be:

- **Decide which family traditions you love the most.** What can you do to put more emphasis on these traditions?
- **Find out what the holidays mean to others.** Some holiday traditions that used to be strong, such as neighborhood caroling, are all but lost today.
- **Build some new traditions.** If you don't have any family traditions, it's never too late to start. Get together around activities that you all enjoy, such as, cooking or ice skating.

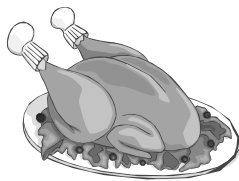
Prepared by Amanda Larson, Cooperative Extension Educator/Family and Consumer Sciences, South Dakota State University

Source: Are the Holidays Too Materialistic? at <http://kidshealth.org> & Raising a Thankful Child at <http://www.zerotothree.org>.

Balanced Meal Time – Give Your Family the Gift of Healthful Eating

What does healthful eating have to do with gift-giving? Parents who have a healthy attitude about food and eating can raise a child who is a healthy eater. According to Ellyn Satter, a dietitian, parent, and family therapist, who specializes in family eating dynamics, parents should relax and remember that children learn, “bite by bite, food by food, and meal by meal.”

As a parent, you make all the difference in your child's eating beliefs, values and habits. By the time a child is six years old, most of his eating attitudes and behaviors are in place, and the evidence of healthful eating can



be seen. Evidence of healthy attitudes and habits can include your child liking to eat a variety of foods and feeling good about eating.

Parents should also remember that eating together regularly promotes adult-child communication and important skills, such as, listening patiently to each other, and expressing one's opinion in a respectful manner. Since children thrive on routines, family meals can also foster a sense of security and stability. So how are busy families expected to fit this important "to-do" item into their daily list? Consider it a family gift everyone gives to each other, and make family mealtime a

priority. Choose a time and put it on the calendar. Just as you would schedule basketball practice or time for dance lessons, plan ahead for family mealtime.

So this holiday season, enjoy the gift of a family meal. Spending time reconnecting with your children, having pleasant conversations, strengthening family values, and teaching healthy habits are gifts that last a lifetime.

Prepared by Ann Schwader, Cooperative Extension Educator/Family and Consumer Sciences, South Dakota State University

(Source: Kansas State University Research and Extension, Give Your Family the Gift of Healthful Eating, Sandy Procter, 2007. Iowa State University Extension Nutrition, Say Yes to Family Meals, Revised by Ruth Litchfield, 2009.

Pet Gift Giving

Kids love the thought of getting an adorable little puppy or kitten for Christmas. They dream of coming downstairs to see a darling little animal with a big red bow tied around its neck waiting for them under the tree. This seems to be a portrait of happiness! In some cases this may be true, but more often people purchase pets as gifts with the best of intentions only to discover that the recipient wasn't as thrilled as they had hoped. A new pet takes lots of time and care to become a loving member of the family. Giving pets as a holiday gift is something that takes a lot of thought and consideration.

First and foremost, ALWAYS get permission when purchasing a pet for someone else's child. Many times children are too young to care for a pet alone and will need a lot of help from their parents to make sure it is receiving proper care.

Second, make sure the person receiving the pet **really** wants one. An animal is a long term commitment, and he or she may be particular as to a certain breed or species of animal.

Money and Books

Toddlers and preschool age children, even babies, learn basic concepts from books. For example, parents often talk about the connection between books and child development, such as, potty training or sharing toys. Parents should also recognize that books can help children understand the concept of money.

Children can learn many things about money through literature. One important money concept to teach children, even very young children, is that "saving is not optional." Other basic money management concepts include how to allocate resources, decision making and goal setting, problem solving, and recognizing resources and success. All of these concepts can be introduced and learned at a very early age through books!

After reading a story book with your child that promotes or emphasizes a money management concept, it is important to follow up with some discussion or activity that will reinforce the idea. For example, a

Make sure you are matching a pet's needs and temperament to the person's lifestyle. Many animals end up in shelters each year because someone didn't want the pet, either because of the responsibility involved, or it did not meet the owners' expectations.

If the pet is for your family, make sure you are researching all of the pet possibilities. The last thing you want is to discover you don't know how to properly care for an animal after bringing it home. Not caring for an animal properly can cause the animal to suffer and become unmanageable. Discipline problems with animals can make the owner stressed out and unhappy with the pet.

Ask yourself these questions before purchasing a pet for yourself or friend:

- Is there enough time to spend properly training the animal?
- Who is going to train the animal?



preschooler can understand the idea of saving when they can see and touch the amount of money. If they are earning

"responsibility rewards or dollars" for completing chores, have a jar or piggy bank set aside just for saving these rewards. Help your child with basic counting as the money is placed in the jar and watch it grow. From time to time, you and your child can count the money for added reinforcement and success. Other follow up activities might include playing grocery store or bank with play money, letting the child pay for an item when you shop, or putting money into a parking meter, or washer/dryer at the Laundromat.

Please remember that young children under the age of three should not be given small objects, such as coins, for risk of choking. Preschoolers should be supervised with such activities and objects as well.

While teaching money concepts and values, be sure to explain to young



- Is the type of animal appropriate for the age of the children?
- Is there enough space or room for the pet?
- Will the owners be home enough for the pet?

Instead of purchasing a pet for the holidays, look into buying a gift certificate to a shelter. This will allow the recipient to purchase the exact animal he/she wants. Take a photo of different animals in the local shelter or pet store and have the recipient pick out the one he/she wants. This way they will have time to devote to the animal after the holiday chaos has settled and the house has returned to normal. Perhaps look into buying supplies for an animal instead. Getting all of the necessary equipment as a gift will help prepare a new pet owner for what lies ahead.

Prepared by Holly Reis, Cooperative Extension Educator, South Dakota State University

children that people don't get paid for everything they do, that is, certain chores are expected, or volunteering for no money is appropriate. You are your children's role model, and they will imitate what they hear and see you do. By starting early to set a good example to teach basic money management skills, you will be helping prepare your children for a secure financial future.

Sample book titles to get you started include:

The Bernstein Bears & Mama's New Job by Stan and Jan Berenstain
The Bernstein Bears' Trouble With Money by Stan and Jan Berenstain
Just Shopping with Mom by Mercer Mayer
Sheep in a Shop by Nancy Shaw

Prepared by Deb Rombough, Cooperative Extension Educator/Family and Consumer Sciences, South Dakota State University

Sources: *Money on the Bookshelf: A Family Financial Literacy Program/University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Reading Makes Cents: Learning About Money Concepts Through Children's Literature/4-H Curriculum*

Web Wise – Tis the Holiday Season

With the holiday season fast approaching, you might be wondering how to stretch your time and money to get through all your holiday events. Learn some tips on organizing your shopping and meal preparations by visiting these great web sites:

- Spend Smart Eat Smart -
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings>
- Cook it Quick! -
<http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciq.shtml>

Prepared by Lavonne Meyer Cooperative Extension Educator/Family and Consumer Sciences,
South Dakota State University

**We wish safe
and happy
holidays to
South
Dakota's
youngest
citizens and
their
families!**

The **Bright Start UpDate** is a monthly publication for South Dakota parents with young children under the age of five. It is brought to you as part of Governor Rounds Bright Start Program, an early childhood initiative with a number of different programs. **Bright Start UpDate** is published by the Office of the Governor 4,470 copies of this publication were printed at a cost of \$.46 per copy. You are welcome to make copies and distribute as needed. You can reach us by calling **1-800-305-3064** or check our web site at: <http://www.sdbrightstart.com>

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Bright Start Program
Office of the Governor
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