

12 Tips to Keep Joy in the Holidays

By JOHN M. GROHOL, PSY.D.

The Christmas season is upon us once again, and once again we find ourselves balancing between our work or studies, hanging out friends, scheduling time with family, and maybe even attending a party or two. The Christmas tree stands are up down at the corner, where they magically appear every year, full of the usual perfect, green triangular symbols of the season.

At some point though, in-between the parties, the family gatherings and the endless shopping crowds, the cheer of the holidays can quickly leave our rosy cheeks and send us into a downward [depressive](#) spiral. How do you keep that [depression](#) from affecting not only your mood, but the mood of others around you? And how can you keep the joy in the holidays and stop them from turning into yet another year of an endless parade of materialism?

12 Tips to Keep Joy in the Holidays

1. Be realistic and put the “ideal” Christmas out of your head. Too many people have an idealized version of what the holidays *should* be like, instead of what they really are. Nobody, and I mean *nobody*, has an ideal, picture-perfect holiday. By setting expectations up-front — and keeping them realistic — you won’t be disappointed that your family gathering devolves into another eating free-for-all, when it has happened every year since you can remember.

2. Take a time-out from materialism and do something spiritual, family-oriented, or non-materialistic this season. All too often we get caught up in the shopping, the endless sales, the “need” to make sure we buy something for everyone, that we lose sight of things that really matter — our friendships, our family, our spirituality, our fellow man (and woman) who may be less fortunate than us. Even in tough economic times (some might say, *especially* in such times), others need our help even when we feel we have little to offer. Volunteer at a food bank, do something additional for your church, adopt a family in need this season. If you cut just 10% of your spending on gifts and donated that [money](#) to charity, you’d be surprised at how much a difference such giving would help.

3. Take a time-out from family arguments, simmering feuds, and unhappy relationships. In an ideal world, we’d be friends with everyone and everyone would be friends with us. But in the real world, we get into disagreements or sometimes full-fledged arguments with others we care about. In the spirit of the giving season, give something that is priceless — your compassion and forgiveness (even if only temporary) to those in your life you feel have wronged you in some way.

4. Schedule sooner and often. Feeling overwhelmed by too much to do and too little time to do it all in? Schedule it all out right now on your favorite calendar or planner, then stick to it. Too many people get into trouble accepting last-minute invitations, or by trying to accommodate a last-minute visit with someone they hadn’t planned on seeing. If your schedule allows for it, fine, but if not, you’ll know in an instant.

5. Check your coat — and guilt — at the door. Everyone has likely felt the pang of guilt due to not being able to meet some holiday obligation or feeling bad about a gift gone awry. But this is the season of joy and celebration, not one where every misstep is meant to make us feel badly for our choices. Leave the guilt at home for a change and if you find yourself going down the guilty road in your head, simply tell yourself, “Yes, I feel badly about that, but I’m going to let it go and enjoy myself anyway, because time is short and this moment only lasts right now. There’ll be time enough to feel guilty next week!”

6. “No” is not a four-letter word. We’re all human (yes, you too!), and we humans get ourselves into more trouble than you know because we simply don’t know when to say, “Thank you, but no.” I suspect it’s tied closely to guilt (see Tip 5), but at some point, the sooner we learn that it’s okay to say No, the sooner we’ll feel less stress and [anxiety](#). You can’t do everything, every year. Choose carefully, schedule well (Tip 4), and then say No to the rest and you’ll rest better at night.

7. Give yourself a break. While rushing around the holidays, we often put ourselves last on the “To do” list. We also feel guilty when we indulge in things we wouldn’t ordinarily indulge in (“Another piece of pie? Why, thank you!”). Give yourself a break this season, forgive your transgressions, and be kind to yourself. That means taking some time out for yourself and your needs, even if it’s just a few minutes of solitude in the morning or before you go to bed that you can relax, catch up a crossword puzzle or some reading, and just enjoy your own company. It also means not beating yourself if you step off your diet or can’t get to the gym for a few days. More people cause themselves more anxiety and stress about beating themselves up over such decisions, when the resulting difference is almost always negligible.

8. Be aware of your breaking points. Rarely does a holiday season pass without someone realizing they’ve reached their “breaking point,” the point where if one more thing goes wrong, they’ll simply breakdown or just lock themselves up in their bedroom and only come out in the new year. Know yours, and when you’re coming close to it. Then stop, take a break, and make sure you avoid those things in the future which bring you closer to it.

9. It’s okay to ask for help, often and directly. Part of the reason we sometimes get into trouble around the holidays is that we simply attempt to do too much on our own. Ask for help from your significant other, children, friends or family when you need it, and be direct and honest with your requests. Don’t expect others to read your mind, either. If you decorate the tree every year, but this year find you won’t have the time, ask someone to do it for you (don’t just assume people will see the bare tree and offer their help). Don’t stop at a single request if you need help with a dozen different things, either.

10. Connect with your significant other on the things that matter most. One of the people we often leave out of our holiday plans is our significant other. Not physically, but often emotionally and directly checking in with them and their expectations for the holiday. Too many couples get into an escalating tug of war about reading each other’s minds, or keeping score on what happened last year, that they don’t start with a clean slate each and every year. Check in with your partner and see what his or her expectations are, and share with them yours. You might be surprised to learn something you didn’t know.

11. Moderation in all things. Aristotle knew a thing or two of what he was talking about a few thousand years ago, and yet it’s a lesson many of us forget. While the holidays are a good “excuse” to stop being moderate in our drinking or eating, we should resist the urge to overindulge. Sure, you can have an extra piece of cake or one extra drink more than you

might usually enjoy, but that shouldn't open the floodgates to eat the remaining half of the cake or finish off a half bottle of Jack Daniels on your own. In the same way, even buying presents for your kids can be taken to an unhealthy extreme ("Always leave them wanting more"). Celebrate, but not to the point of excess.

12. Remember your friends and those forgotten. Because we get so busy, we sometimes lose touch with our friends and people whom we normally rely on to be our sounding boards. Don't be tempted to go into a communications blackhole and resurface only after the holidays, as such regular communication is often one of those touchstones that keep us grounded. And while not an ideal time to renew old acquaintances, the holidays are a good excuse to do so if you'd otherwise feel awkward in getting back in touch with old friends.

* * *

The holidays, luckily some would say, only come once a year and last for a few short weeks. Being aware of these kinds of things may help you better keep the joy in the season, and the happiness in your heart. But you have to take the first step and be vigilant during the next few weeks to keep these tips close at hand. Follow even just a few of them, and you'll likely find yourself enjoying the holidays more this year than in any year past.



2011 HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

The holidays are an exciting time of year for kids, and to help ensure they have a safe holiday season, here are some tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Please feel free to excerpt these tips or use them in their entirety for any print or broadcast story, with acknowledgment of the source.

Trees

1. When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles. When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces, radiators or portable heaters. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways. Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will help keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.
2. Be sure to keep the stand filled with water, because heated rooms can dry live trees out rapidly.

Lights

1. Check all tree lights--even if you've just purchased them--before hanging them on your tree. Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires, broken sockets or loose connections. Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted. Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. To hold lights in place, string them through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. Never pull or tug lights to remove them. Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.
2. Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Decorations

1. Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked over. In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable. Keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to prevent them from swallowing or inhaling small pieces. Avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a young child to eat them. Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.
2. Remove all wrapping papers, bags, paper, ribbons and bows from tree and fireplace areas after gifts are opened. These items can pose suffocation and choking hazards to a small child or can cause a fire if near flame.

Toy Safety

1. Select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills and interest level of the intended child. Toys too advanced may pose safety hazards for younger children. Before buying a toy or allowing your child to play with a toy that he has received as a gift, read the instructions carefully. To prevent

both burns and electrical shocks, don't give young children (under age 10) a toy that must be plugged into an electrical outlet. Instead, buy toys that are battery-operated. Children under age three can choke on small parts contained in toys or games. Government regulations specify that toys for children under age three cannot have parts less than 1 1/4 inches in diameter and 2 1/4 inches long. Children can have serious stomach and intestinal problems – including death -- after swallowing button batteries and magnets. Keep them away from young children and call your health care provider immediately if your child swallows one. Children under age 8 can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons; do not allow young children to play with them. Remove strings and ribbons from toys before giving them to young children. Watch for pull toys with strings that are more than 12 inches in length. They could be a strangulation hazard for babies.

2. Parents should store toys in a designated location, such as on a shelf or in a toy chest, and keep older kids' toys away from young children.

Food Safety

1. Bacteria are often present in raw foods. Fully cook meats and poultry, and thoroughly wash raw vegetables and fruits. Be sure to keep hot liquids and food away from the edges of counters and tables, where they can be easily knocked over by a young child's exploring hands. Be sure that young children cannot access microwave ovens. Wash your hands frequently, and make sure your children do the same. Never put a spoon used to taste food back into food without washing it. Always keep raw foods and cooked foods separately, and use separate utensils when preparing them. Always thaw meat in the refrigerator, never on the countertop.
2. Foods that require refrigeration should never be left at room temperature for more than two hours.

Happy Visiting

1. Clean up immediately after a holiday party. A toddler could rise early and choke on leftover food or come in contact with alcohol or tobacco. Remember that the homes you visit may not be childproofed. Keep an eye out for danger spots. Keep a list with all of the important phone numbers you or a baby-sitter are likely to need in case of an emergency. Include the police and fire department, your pediatrician and the national Poison Help Line, 1-800-222-1222. Laminating the list will prevent it from being torn or damaged by accidental spills.
2. Traveling, visiting family members, getting presents, shopping, etc., can all increase your child's stress levels. Trying to stick to your child's usual routines, including sleep schedules and timing of naps, can help you and your child enjoy the holidays and reduce stress.

Fireplaces

1. Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from fireplace area. Check to see that the flue is open.
2. Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children.

Do not burn gift wrap paper in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

ADHD Holiday Help: House Rules for Children

Traveling or expecting house guests this holiday season? Here's why - and how - parents should define house rules for ADHD children... and visitors.

by [Carol Brady, Ph.D.](#)

For the Norman Rockwell family, the holidays are a quiet time of peace, love and togetherness. However, several weeks of school-free kids, cooped up in cold weather along with [visiting relatives](#) and in-laws never seem to paint the same pretty picture!

This is not to say that each family has exactly the same dynamic at holiday times, but rather, often we become paralyzed by our own expectations of the 'ideal' family get-together.

That's why I'm never surprised that as the season approaches, apprehensive attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD) families ask how they'll ever "get through it". While parents often hope for the best, it is wise to revisit problem areas from holidays past.

[Children with ADHD](#) can find holiday and family occasions over-stimulating beyond their tolerance level. Knowing this, you can better understand your family's difficulties and begin employing a few simple strategies that will help make the holidays a happier time for everyone.

Prepping For Specific Problems

Set aside time before visiting with family to review with your child what your expectations of their [behavior](#) include. Depending on the children's developmental level, some reminders of polite behavior that are specific to your family can help.

For example, "Aunt Sue loves to give you big kisses, but you did not like that last time. Instead, ask her for a big hug." Or "Grandma really likes your please and thank you words. Maybe I could give you a wink to remind you."

Sometimes this strategy is difficult with older kids and teenagers because they have the added resentment of being away from friends during family gatherings. After you define your expectations of behavior, try promising a special activity with their friends after the company leaves as a reward. Not only will it improve their cooperation, but also help clarify your expectations in their mind.

Making a "Plan B"

Before the holiday begins you may want to work out a back up plan. If you know your child cannot make it though a long meal, make arrangements for a cousin or relative to excuse themselves and the child to another room for a book or game.

To prevent potential meltdowns, develop some cues for your child to tell you when they are feeling overwhelmed or [impulsive](#). When they give the signal, remove them from the party or gathering to help talk to them or calm them down.

If they are unable to recognize or communicate their over-stimulation, and their behavior becomes painfully difficult to witness or control, you and your spouse may work out a plan for an early departure. At best, if you plan for the worse case scenario, you may end up pleasantly surprised; or at worst, you won't be caught "off guard" by the meltdown.

When Relatives Just Don't Understand

The most difficult part of orchestrating a peaceful holiday may be your relatives. It is difficult even for parents who are well acquainted with ADHD to really understand what degree of self-control a child may have. This is complicated by the fact that many children may have more than one area of difficulty.

For example, Tourettes children may not be able to suppress tics for a long time. A child with some OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) characteristics may not be able to put down the Gameboy during prayer time. A child with verbal blurting may not be easily corrected when inappropriate language occurs. In addition, depending on [medication levels](#) or on how tired, hungry, or worried you or your child may be, the situation may spin out of control.

Considering all of this, imagine how hard it is for grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or friends to understand exactly why your child does not "behave." Some relatives may be well versed in ADD information, but others may simply not understand.

Depending on their receptiveness, some comments and instructions before visiting can help. For example, you may say, "John has some trouble calming down at times so if we leave the table, please go on and we will return when able." If necessary, you may want to use the doctor as the one responsible for the intervention. It may be acceptable if you say, "the doctor said to talk to him in private, if he/she has a problem."

Take Time for Yourself

There are really no hard and fast rules that will guarantee "perfection," but making plans ahead of time has given parents a better sense of control over the unexpected holiday stressors.

It is also important to know your own limits, and take care of yourself so that the kindness and patience of the season will not be spread thin. Remember the simple rules of structure, clarity, and positive incentives can go a long way in helping you to make your holiday season calm and bright!



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Surviving the Holidays

From Autism Society of Greater Cincinnati

While many happily anticipate the coming holiday season, families of people on the autism spectrum also understand the special challenges that may occur when schedules are disrupted and routines broken. Our hope is that by following these few helpful tips, families may lessen the stress of the holiday season and make it a more enjoyable experience for everyone involved. The following tips were developed with input from the Autism Society, the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Easter Seals Crossroads, the Sonya Ansari Center for Autism at Logan and the Indiana Autism Leadership Network.

1. Preparation is crucial for many individuals. At the same time, it is important to determine how much preparation a specific person may need. For example, if your son or daughter has a tendency to become anxious when anticipating an event that is to occur in the future, you may want to adjust how many days in advance you prepare him or her. Preparation can occur in various ways by using a calendar and marking the dates of various holiday events, or by creating a social story that highlights what will happen at a given event.

2. Decorations around the house may be disruptive for some. It may be helpful to revisit pictures from previous holidays that show decorations in the house. If such a photo book does not exist, use this holiday season to create one. For some it may also be helpful to take them shopping with you for holiday decorations so that they are engaged in the process. Or involve them in the process of decorating the house. And once holiday decorations have been put up, you may need to create rules about those that can and cannot be touched. Be direct, specific and consistent.

3. If a person with autism has difficulty with change, you may want to gradually decorate the house. For example, on the first day, put up the Christmas tree, then on the next day, decorate the tree and so on. And again, engage them as much as possible in this process. It may be helpful to develop a visual schedule or calendar that shows what will be done on each day.

4. If a person with autism begins to obsess about a particular gift or item they want, it may be helpful to be specific and direct about the number of times they can mention the gift. One suggestion is to give them five chips. They are allowed to exchange one chip for five minutes of talking about the desired gift. Also, if you have no intention of purchasing a specific item, it serves no purpose to tell them that maybe they will get the gift. This will only lead to problems in the future. Always choose to be direct and specific about your intentions.

5. Teach them how to leave a situation and/or how to access support when an event becomes overwhelming. For example, if you are having visitors, have a space set aside for the child as his/her safe/calm space. The individual should be taught ahead of time that they should go to their space when feeling overwhelmed. This self-management tool will serve the individual into adulthood. For those who are not at that level of self-management, develop a signal or cue for them to show when they are getting anxious, and prompt them to use the space. For individuals with more significant challenges, practice using this space in a calm manner at

various times prior to your guests' arrival. Take them into the room and engage them in calming activities (e.g., play soft music, rub his/her back, turn down the lights, etc.). Then when you notice the individual becoming anxious, calmly remove him/her from the anxiety-provoking setting immediately and take him/her into the calming environment.

6. If you are traveling for the holidays, make sure you have their favorite foods or items available. Having familiar items readily available can help to calm stressful situations. Also, prepare them via social stories or other communication systems for any unexpected delays in travel. If you are flying for the first time, it may be helpful to bring the individual to the airport in advance and help him/her to become accustomed to airports and planes. Use social stories and pictures to rehearse what will happen when boarding and flying.

7. Know your loved one with autism and how much noise and activity they can tolerate. If you detect that a situation may be becoming overwhelming, help them find a quiet area in which to regroup. And there may be some situations that you simply avoid (e.g., crowded shopping malls the day after Thanksgiving).

8. Prepare a photo album in advance of the relatives and other guests who will be visiting during the holidays. Allow the person with autism access to these photos at all times and also go through the photo album with him/her while talking briefly about each family member.

9. Practice opening gifts, taking turns and waiting for others, and giving gifts. Role play scenarios with your child in preparation for him/her getting a gift they do not want. Talk through this process to avoid embarrassing moments with family members. You might also choose to practice certain religious rituals. Work with a speech language pathologist to construct pages of vocabulary or topic boards that relate to the holidays and family traditions.

10. Prepare family members for strategies to use to minimize anxiety or behavioral incidents, and to enhance participation. Help them to understand if the person with autism prefers to be hugged or not, needs calm discussions or provide other suggestions that will facilitate a smoother holiday season.

11. If the person with autism is on special diet, make sure there is food available that he/she can eat. And even if they are not on a special diet, be cautious of the amount of sugar consumed. And try to maintain a sleep and meal routine.

12. Above all, know your loved one with autism. Know how much noise and other sensory input they can take. Know their level of anxiety and the amount of preparation it may take. Know their fears and those things that will make the season more enjoyable for them.

Don't stress. Plan in advance. And most of all have a wonderful holiday season!

Avoid Holiday Havoc: Help for ADHD Children

Six ways for parents to help their ADHD children enjoy holiday celebrations without behavior problems, family conflict, or ADD symptom flare-ups.

by [Carol Brady, Ph.D.](#)

The holidays can be stressful for attention deficit children. Traveling and visiting relatives may disrupt their day-to-day routines, and all the excitement can be overwhelming. Follow these real-family strategies to prevent holiday havoc, keep your ADHD kids feeling good, and create happier memories:

Plan Ahead

During the holidays, [routine and structure](#) go out the window: A child might have to [endure travel time by car](#), train, or plane; sitting politely at the dinner table for extended periods; less control of diet and [sleep](#). Planning for these holiday side effects is helpful for an ADHD child and his parents.

Decide how the days will be spent -- parties, decorating, visiting relatives, preparing holiday treats -- and [set up a schedule](#), building flexibility into it in case your child needs downtime.

Sketch out each phase of the holidays, including all "free" time when your child may be playing with other children or relatives. Now, given what you know about your son or daughter, flag the activities that may be a problem for him or her. Amend the schedule if necessary, and discuss with your child the following coping strategies.

Tip: If your son or daughter is on [ADHD medication](#), talk with your doctor about possibly [extending the coverage to 24 hours](#) during the holiday season. Increasing time on medication can maximize your child's enjoyment of the season during this high-energy period.

Next: [Teach Self-Control](#)

Giving a child some tools for self-control can prevent an overreaction from becoming a temper tantrum. [Relaxation techniques](#) -- yoga, breathing exercises -- can help a child who is easily upset by a highly charged atmosphere. Also, give your child some verbal cues to keep him in a positive state of mind.

When facing a crowd at a relative's house or the task of sitting politely at the table, whisper to him, "I know you can do this. It'll only be a short time out of the day."

Next: [Rehearse Calming Techniques](#)

Some ADHD children need to practice calming down at home before venturing out into holiday bedlam. Rehearsing the "stop, relax, think" technique with a child or [role-playing a scenario that has given him trouble in the past](#) are excellent strategies. You can teach your child to ask for help at the onset of conflict with a relative or friend. In time, just walking toward you may help your kid calm down.

Tip: To avoid conflicts with peers, encourage your child to bring along a game or toy to share with the other youngsters.

Next: [Schedule Time Wisely](#)

Too many events can overstimulate an ADHD child. Decide which occasions are most important, and [don't overload the schedule](#). Include private playtime or an outing to a child-friendly restaurant with a friend, to provide some one-on-one fun for your child. Also, spending time together in a quiet corner of the house or taking a short walk can head off a tantrum in a child.

Tip: If you're planning to spend several days visiting a relative, stay at a motel instead of sleeping over. This will give your child built-in breathing space. To avoid hurt feelings, explain to your family why you're not bunking with them.

Next: [Involve Your Child in Activities](#)

Build happy memories by enlisting your child to help cook the holiday meal with you, create decorations, or wrap packages. Such activities strengthen the bond between child and parents.

Next: [Encourage Good Behavior](#)

[Commending a child's good behavior](#) reminds him of his strengths and increases his confidence that he can manage whatever the holiday throws at him. One parent mentioned to me that her child became the hit of the party when he read a book of riddles to family members. Another dad told me that his child amazed the crowd with his magic tricks. Reminding a child of his past successes will set him up to succeed this year.

This article comes from the December 2004 - January 2005 Issue of *ADDitude*.

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Balanced Meals, Better Behavior: Treating ADHD with Diet

Changing your child's diet can be an effective alternative ADHD treatment -- choosing the right foods can improve symptoms.

by [Karen Barrow](#)

Choosing the right foods -- or cutting back on the wrong ones -- may help prevent symptoms from swinging out of control.

Hyperactivity has long been associated with sugary sodas and cheeks full of [candy](#). It is no surprise, then, that food seems to play a major role -- good and bad -- in attention deficit disorder (ADD / ADHD). Choosing the right foods -- or cutting back on the wrong ones -- may be an [alternative ADHD treatment](#) that can help prevent symptoms from swinging out of control.

"The role of nutrition in the treatment of any chronic condition is important," says Helen Rasmussen, Ph.D., a research dietician at Tufts University.

Faye Berger Mitchell, a registered dietician from Bethesda, Maryland, has a nine-year-old daughter who was diagnosed with ADHD five years ago. While her daughter takes stimulant medicine to control her ADHD, Mitchell concluded that a pill is not enough.

She finds that when her daughter eats a well-balanced [ADD-friendly diet](#), including vegetables, carbohydrates, fruits, and plenty of protein, her behavior tends to be more consistently under control.

"The biggest challenge is to get my daughter to eat protein," she says. [Protein](#) is key, says Mitchell, because it can prevent surges in blood sugar, which may increase hyperactivity. For Mitchell, something as simple as slipping a little chicken or lean beef into every meal (and even into snacks) has made a difference for her daughter.

[Dr. Edward Hallowell](#) advises all of his patients to think about their plates when preparing a meal. Half of the plate, he recommends, should be filled with fruits and vegetables, one-fourth with a protein, and one-fourth with carbohydrates. This combination is a balanced diet, and it may control swings in behavior caused by hunger, surges in blood sugar, or a shortfall of a particular nutrient.

In addition to the balanced plate, Hallowell advocates eating several servings of whole grains each day to prevent blood sugar levels from spiking and then plummeting and cutting back on foods that contain dyes and excess sugar. Several studies have suggested that [artificial food coloring](#) and sugar may cause increased hyperactivity in some children with ADHD.

This article comes from a special report on complementary therapies in the December/January 2008 issue of *ADDitude*.

Brain Injury - Surviving Holiday Stress

By Emily Axvig LMHC, NCC, Department of Neurology, University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics and our friends at the BIA of Iowa

For some people, the holidays can be an exciting time revolving around the hustle and bustle of baking, entertaining, welcoming out-of-town guests, shopping, and more. For others, the holidays can be a time of loneliness and isolation. Whether it is positive or not-so-positive, the holidays are usually a source of stress for all. For a survivor of a brain injury, however, the holidays can feel even more overwhelming and can lead to new daily challenges that can make not just the holiday season a struggle, but can also affect day-to-day living. The following tips can be useful for all individuals battling seasonal stressors, but can be especially good survival tips for those who have survived a brain injury (and their caregivers).

Leave the past in the past: The reason many brain injury survivors and their families may dread this time of year is because of not-so-pleasant experiences of years past. Others may feel disappointed because they tend to compare current holiday seasons with the “good old days”. Keep your expectations for the holiday season reasonable.

Predict: In the vein of keeping holiday season expectations reasonable, it is important to predict what sort of challenges and excitement you may face during this time of year. For example, you can predict that family gatherings or holiday parties may tire you more easily. You can also predict that when shopping for presents, shopping areas are going to be busier on the weekends than during the weekdays. Predict that preparing for so many seasonal activities will require some extra-special planning and organization.

Plan: Make a list and prioritize the important activities. You may even have to plan which activities you can attend, and which ones you cannot attend. Put these activities such as shopping, cooking, having house guests, attending parties, etc. on your calendar. Don't forget, you need to plan out your regular life as well. Make sure you are continuing to do things that are vital to your daily routine like taking your medications, exercising, and maintaining organization.

Pace: Save time for yourself! Not all the planning has to fall on your shoulders. Make sure you take special care to prepare for upcoming events by maintaining a good diet, sticking with your daily exercise routine, and setting aside time (whether or not you are tired) to rest. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Don't put the entire focus on just one day (i.e., Thanksgiving Day). Activities can be spread out to lessen stress and increase enjoyment. When you don't pace yourself, you may become easily overwhelmed, depressed, or simply exhausted, which does not make any part of the holidays enjoyable for you or for those around you.

Other tips that may help you survive the holidays include:

- Try something new: This could be as simple as sampling a new recipe or as exciting as starting a new holiday tradition.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people: Stick with those you know can help lift you up during holiday season. Talk to those you trust and ask for help if you need it. Despite the idea of “holiday cheer” some people are especially unpleasant to be around during the holidays. Try your best (if possible) to limit contact with unsupportive people.

- Do something for someone else: Try volunteering. It is a free way to give during the holidays. You could also make cards or write letters to friends, family and neighbors. It is an inexpensive and personal way to show others you care.
- Avoid excessive drinking: Drinking alcohol is not only known to increase feelings of depression, it can also be dangerous for individuals with brain injuries. If you must drink, please do so in moderation. It is also important to avoid excessive eating and maintain and exercise schedule if possible.
- Save money by enjoying free activities: The holiday season is a great time to seek out free activities. Checking your local newspaper or listening to the radio may help you find free music to enjoy, places to try a free treat, or more. It also is free to view holiday displays, whether these displays are in neighbor's yards or in store-front windows.

As the holiday season quickly approaches, a very important thing to keep in mind is the holidays go just as quickly as they come. If you are feeling overwhelmed, hang in there, the holidays do not last forever. Use some of the tips mentioned above, and you may not just survive the holidays, you may actually find more enjoyment in the season! *From our friends at the Brain Injury Association of Iowa*

Exerpt from:

Dread nots: surviving the holidays with spirit intact

Escape the holiday dreads: handling family and stress

Published on December 14, 2010 by Marcia Eckerd, Ph.D. in People Skills

Tips for banishing your inner Grinch:

- Be realistic about time and how much can be done in a day.
- Find ways to entertain that don't involve an entire sit-down meal where you are the cook, wait staff, busboy and dishwasher. One of the best holiday parties we ever had was a late evening party of desserts, coffee and champagne. You can invite people to bring a dessert if you want. Light some candles and enjoy your friends.
- Honor rituals you enjoy, and consider changing those you don't.
- Be choosy about how you spend your time. Don't feel obliged to please everyone.
- Spouses and partners can be helpful if you ask for help clearly and realistically. Be specific about how they can help.
- See the holidays as an opportunity to practice patience under pressure. Do mini-relaxation exercises in traffic jams or the airport waiting line. It's not a life and death situation.
- Maintain the routines that keep everyone steady. Kids get wilder when bedtime changes every day, and we all need the basics: [sleep](#) and food, pretty much on schedule.

Happy Holidays!

Focus on Meaning, Not Money: Christmas on a Budget

By MARIE HARTWELL-WALKER, ED.D.

When my grandmother reminisced about [childhood](#) Christmases, we were given a glimpse of a much simpler time.

Born in 1895, her early years were spent on Mt. Desert, Maine. Christmas was about cutting a tree and hauling it into the house to be decorated with cookies and popcorn. Her stocking was just that — one of her own stockings laid out carefully in front of the parlor stove after church services on Christmas Eve.

How wonderful it was to wake in the morning to find the stocking stuffed with an orange, a peppermint stick, and some nuts; treats made special because they were rare. Dinner was a stack of pancakes a mile high with maple syrup that had been saved especially for the occasion. Then the family would read the Christmas Story from the Bible and would sing carols.

The kids would compete to see who could make their peppermint stick last the longest. “Oh,” she’d say. “It was so tempting to bite it. But if you just licked it, it would last all day.” The youngest of eight, and the daughter of the town minister, the family didn’t have much [money](#) but she never felt poor. Her Christmases were made rich by family rituals that made the day special.

As I start planning for Christmas this year, I’m thinking about how we can recapture the simpler rituals and dreamy feeling that went with Grandma’s stories. The current economic situation and the accompanying need to cut back give us an opportunity to step back. Necessity may do what good intentions couldn’t. Necessity may help us all, finally, to rethink how we make Christmas.

Christmas Grandma’s Way

Christmas Grandma’s way means finding things that make the season meaningful without overstretching the budget. For a day or a season to be a holiday, it needs to be different from our day-to-day routines. It needs to be special. Fortunately, there are many inexpensive ways to make it so if we just pay attention to what is already happening in our communities and if we create special family rituals unique to this time of year.

Many churches have special services of Christmas music. Some communities have a Handel’s “Messiah” sing-along. Bring your own score and you too can sing the Hallelujah Chorus. Music can put you into the spirit of the season.

Find out when the local high school is giving its winter concert. You don’t have to be a proud parent to go. Enjoy being part of your community while listening to talented young people (and not-so-talented but enthusiastic young people) make music.

Consider a late-night ride around town to look at Christmas lights. It doesn't have to be Disney to be magic. For kids, riding around well past bedtime looking at lights is a treat.

Spend an evening making cookies. (See [Psych Central's article on holiday baking](#).) Make some with a hole poked in the top so you can thread them with ribbon for your tree.

Big trees cost big bucks. Consider a smaller tree this year. Think of a way to make it special.

Have a family campout under the Christmas tree. We've done this one for years. The kids spread sleeping bags out in the living room. We turn off all the lights except those on the tree and the kids drift off to a reading of "The Night Before Christmas."

House decorations don't have to be elaborate to be beautiful. This may be the year to keep the blow-up sculptures and 500,000 lights in the attic. Opt for more traditional displays like a wreath on the door or fewer lights more creatively placed.

Rent some Christmas classic videos and have a family movie night. A Charlie Brown's Christmas, The Year Without A Santa Claus, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and A Christmas Story (and don't forget the Grinch Who Stole Christmas!), are called family favorites for a reason. For older kids, try It's a Wonderful Life, Miracle on 34th Street and We're No Angels (an old Humphrey Bogart film). Search the web for Christmas movies and you'll be amazed at the selection.

Spend part of a day as a family helping out at a soup kitchen or thrift store. Help serve Christmas dinner at a shelter.

Giving Meaningful Gifts

The spirit of giving doesn't have to cost a lot of [money](#). Non-material gifts can be thoughtful and personal.

Limit purchased gifts to the young children of the family. Children under age two often are just as interested in the bows and wrapping paper as whatever came in the box. The three- to eight-year-olds often look for something from Santa. Preteens and teens are harder since one CD can cost over \$20, but we can still cut down without cutting out.

Encourage teens to think about creating gifts that have meaning for family and friends. They can burn a CD, give a "gift certificate" for help with some chore, write a poem, make some art, or bake a batch of favorite cookies.

If it doesn't feel like Christmas without some presents, consider having the adults and maybe the older kids in the extended family choose a name out of a hat at Thanksgiving so each will have one nice present under the tree. In one family I know, one of the computer-savvy aunts keeps a spreadsheet so people get a different "Santa" each year.

Think about buying one family gift instead of something for each person. Big-ticket items like [video games](#) and new electronics don't have to be entirely off the list if they can be shared. Small-ticket items like a new board game or jigsaw puzzle can provide entertainment for Christmas day.

Help kids make homemade gifts to give to relatives. Most of us older folk have more stuff than we will ever need but something made by a child is special. My office is adorned with lopsided clay pots, handprints in plaster, a pencil can decorated with cutouts, and picture frames made out of popsicle sticks. I wouldn't trade any of them in for expensive trinkets.

Give the gift of time to friends. Rather than exchanging material objects this year, slip a note into a card that promises a breakfast together or a visit to a local attraction or help with a project your friend has been putting off.

Get creative with wrapping. Gift wrap is expensive and is quickly tossed away on Christmas morning (unless you have a relative like mine who saves every bow and rescues paper that she irons for reuse.) Consider decorating kraft paper instead. Or how about using fabric remnants or even pillow cases with a bow?

Cards? Make your own. Send electronic greetings. Or start a "round robin" letter among people who know and care about each other.

Feasting

Food prices have been steadily rising. It may be time to rethink holiday meals too.

If you're the host family for the big family dinner, do encourage people to bring something to share.

Have a dessert or appetizer party instead of a whole meal. When our kids were small, we invited all the neighborhood families for an annual birthday party for baby Jesus. We'd make a big cake, load it with as many candles as would fit, and all sing "Happy Birthday." Cake and punch was enough to make it a party.

Christmas doesn't have to be financially stressful to be successful.

I'm not so naïve to think that kids who have been brought up with mega-Christmas will be happy with a peppermint stick and a stack of pancakes. But Grandma's stories remind us that Christmas doesn't have to be about elaborate decorations, piles of presents, or gourmet meals. Christmas doesn't have to be about racking up more credit card debt in order to make everyone happy. Some careful family discussion can get everyone on board to cut back at least a little and maybe a lot. By focusing on meaning instead of on money, we can redefine the season in a way that is satisfying for all.

Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker is licensed as both a psychologist and marriage and family counselor. She specializes in couples and family therapy and parent education. She writes regularly for Psych Central as well as Psych Central's [Ask the Therapist](#) feature, and has published the insightful parenting e-book, [Tending the Family Heart](#).

APA Reference

Hartwell-Walker, M. (2010). Focus on Meaning, Not Money: Christmas on a Budget. *Psych Central*. Retrieved on December 5, 2011, from <http://psychcentral.com/lib/2008/focus-on-meaning-not-money-christmas-on-a-budget/>

ADD HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

Solve your holiday planning problems with these 10 tips designed to help you enjoy the season and start the new year energized, refreshed, and happy.

1 REPLAY YOUR GREATEST HITS

Make a list of all the activities your family did last year—everything from attending a religious service to seeing local light displays. Have each family member rate them on a scale from 1 (very important) to 3 (unimportant). Do your best to fit in the 1s and some 2s, and forget about the 3s.

2 SAVE THE EARTH—AND YOUR WALLET

Set a date on your calendar to send out cards, and make the job fun and easy by using your computer to send cute, interactive e-mail cards.

3 STREAMLINE GIFT-GIVING

Keep shopping simple by buying everyone varieties of the same thing, such as books, gift certificates, or clothing from the same catalog or website. Stock up on decorative candles or bottles of wine to give out as hostess gifts, too.

4 SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

Find a few precious hours by deferring nonessential activities—like an oil change—until after the holidays. Another time-saving strategy is to spend fewer hours in the kitchen by buying prepared dinners at your grocery store or cooking, then freezing, double recipes when you have the time.

5 1, 2, 3...DE-CLUTTER!

One day in November—and perhaps again in December—set a goal to de-clutter your house in an hour. Supply everyone in the family with large garbage bags, and have them deposit unwanted or unneeded things into them. Label the bags with masking tape, so that you know which room the items came from, and place them in your basement or garage until the holidays are over.

6 GET MOVING

Exercise produces endorphins, brain chemicals that help you better handle stress and increase your sense of well-being. When you don't have time for a workout, write down your worries on paper—getting them out of your head will enable you to move on with what you need to do.

7 BREAK IT UP!

Expecting company? Divide preparations into daily chores you can accomplish in a week.

7 DAYS TO GO: Gather and wash formal dishes.

6 DAYS TO GO: Clear out the fridge for big dishes.

5 DAYS TO GO: Wash sheets and towels for guests.

4 DAYS TO GO: Vacuum and dust.

3 DAYS TO GO: Clean all bathrooms.

2 DAYS TO GO: Clean kitchen.

1 DAY TO GO: Do a quick de-cluttering trip (see Tip 5).

8 DELEGATE

It can be difficult for people with ADD to ask for help—they feel like it's an admission that they're not in control. But there are too many tasks during the holidays for one person to handle, so don't feel bad about asking others to pitch in.

9 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Carve out time to go for walks, take hot baths, meditate, pray, visit friends, take naps, or relax with your children or spouse.

10 LET PERFECTION GO

Do you need to throw a five-course feast, or would a potluck dinner do the trick? Relax your attitude—and you will enjoy the season.



www.additudemag.com/adult-adhd-add.html

Holiday Traditions

By MARIE HARTWELL-WALKER, ED.D.

"But we always have mixed nuts at Thanksgiving!"

"But we always have turkey for Christmas dinner!"

"But we always have the youngest child open the first Hanukkah present (this protested by the youngest)!"

"But we always go to grandma's for New Year's Day!"

Any parent who has ever tried to change anything on a holiday will hear a chorus of "always". Do something two years in a row on a given holiday and you're doomed to do it forever, or so it seems. If, like me, you thrive on novelty and change, the insistence of kids that you make every holiday a rerun can be exasperating. (I sometimes feel like I'm in that movie "Groundhog Day", where the main character has to do the same day over and over until he gets it right.)

Oh, all right, I have to admit it... This is an overstatement. The truth is that I enjoy certain rituals as much as the next person. But the kids' demands for continuity and sameness got me to thinking about what traditions associated with holidays are all about.

There seems to be something very basic in the human soul that craves some predictability and some recognition that we move in concert with the seasons. Name me a culture where there aren't markers for the passing of time. I can't think of any. We may do it differently — family to family, country to country, (planet to planet for all I know) — but, where there are people, there seems to be annual feast days, holidays, holy days, rest days. The need to ritualize them with predictable activities, foods, and/or objects seems to be universal.

My theory is that these markers of time are a fundamental way that we all have to make the unpredictability and stress of daily life bearable. At the most basic level, holidays give us some comfort and strength from the simple observance that we've made it once more around the calendar. On a more complex level, they provide a culturally sanctioned reason for everyone to stop, to take stock of ourselves, to acknowledge who we've chosen to be in our families and communities, to underline for ourselves how we are doing, to make new promises to self and others. There is no way for even the most jaded person to avoid it. To be cranky about a holiday and to decide not to observe it still observes it and brings to awareness one's relationship to others.

Kids intuitively understand all this complicated stuff. Sometimes what they latch on to as recognition of the event can be a little weird (like the mixed nuts) but the impulse to mark the passing of time with some kind of gathering and observance is a healthy one. Anything positive, done regularly, puts something important in the child's internal "security bank"; emotional steadiness that can be drawn on in more difficult times. Kids may not be able to explain it but they do know they need it. It's important that we understand that their requests for sameness aren't just inconvenient foibles but are a reflection of kids' legitimate needs for security.

As parents, we can do a great deal to make sure that that inner bank of love and security has a healthy balance by the time they leave our care. Family traditions around holidays are one of the means we have for letting children know that they are embedded in community,

for witnessing their growth over time, and for passing on important cultural and family values.

I wish I had thought more about this when my kids were younger. As in most families, our rituals and yearly observances have evolved over the years into what they are and we certainly do repeat them, and, mostly, enjoy them. But if I had it to do over again, I might more consciously think about just what it is that I want my children to carry with them into adulthood as a statement of their family's love and allegiances. My husband and I talk about it more. Gradually, we're introducing some new things into our yearly rhythm: less reliance on gifts and a perfectly clean house, more time with the people who matter, more attention to each individual child's development. If we do it gradually enough, and keep to some of our more obvious routines, perhaps the kids won't notice that we're trying to slip in some new rituals. If we get away with it two years in a row, we'll have a new tradition.

P.S. And, yes, we'll have mixed nuts every Thanksgiving.

Dr. Marie advises:

- Holidays are not an "extra". They are essential markers in the rhythm of life.
- Embrace holidays. There are never enough reasons to celebrate life.
- If you don't like the commercialism that's come to surround some holidays, make up your own traditions.
- Be thoughtful about the values and traditions that you want to pass on to your children through your holiday activities.
- Include your children in the planning, creating, cooking, story telling, gifting, visiting, etc. Kids who are part of it all will know how to carry it on when it is their turn.

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Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker is licensed as both a psychologist and marriage and family counselor. She specializes in couples and family therapy and parent education. She writes regularly for Psych Central as well as Psych Central's [Ask the Therapist](#) feature, and has published the insightful parenting e-book, [Tending the Family Heart](#).

APA Reference

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WHAT I WANT FOR THE HOLIDAYS

This form will help your family decide what really matters during the upcoming holiday season. Rate each activity listed in the left-hand column at right using the following scale: (1) for “very important,” (2) for “not so important,” and (3) for “unimportant.” If you’d like to add an activity, feel free to do so. Then pass the form along to the next family member.

		FAMILY MEMBER					
ACTIVITY	Traveling to see Relatives						
	Sending Gifts to Extended Family						
	Travel / Relax						
	Relaxing at Home						
	Religious Services						
	Decorating!						
	Charity Work						
	Entertaining at Home						
	Sending Holiday Cards						
	Holiday Baking						

How Beth Got Her Joy Back (Or Why I Downsized Christmas)

For years, I dreaded December -- the obligatory cards, the late-night baking, the shopping-list stress, the ADHD-fueled anxiety. Then I ditched it all... except the Christmas joy.

ADHD Coach Blog | posted by [Beth Main](#) | Wednesday December 21st - 9:38am

Filed Under: [Stress, ADHD and Anxiety](#)

My [childhood Christmas memories](#) include cookie baking, tree decorating, and carol singing. Yes, really -- it was perfect.

I remember all seven of us signing the dozens of cards sent to friends and family, and taking turns opening each day on the advent calendar. The [presents were always highly anticipated -- and usually perfect](#). My godmother hummed Christmas songs, and always had a hug or a kind word to share. She never once lost her temper.

Maybe the pace was slower then -- one wage earner, one car, us kids entertained ourselves all day -- or maybe I'm just remembering it wrong. Either way, for many years I invested [too much time and anxiety in reproducing that holiday magic](#) for my own family.

I kept shopping-list spreadsheets (with more than 100 gifts). I fretted over paying the credit card bills. I baked cookies after work, trying hard not to throw anything when they came out burnt. I scribbled our names onto [Christmas cards](#) for people I didn't make time to talk to during the year. I woke up in a panic some nights, worrying about what I'd forgotten.

I grew to dread the entire month of December. The holidays were way too much for my already-overloaded ADHD brain. I considered prescription medicine for [seasonal anxiety related to my ADHD](#), and self-medicated with eggnog.

Then one year, something magical happened. A co-worker sheepishly asked if we could stop exchanging gifts. I was elated! It got me thinking: How many other people would be relieved to lessen their holiday burden? The following year, I broached the idea with several enlightened relatives. Yes, they said, they too found gift giving to be stressful. "Thank you for asking!"

Today, I'm a minimalist when it comes to celebrating the yule. [I do only the holiday things that truly bring me joy](#).

I don't decorate for the neighbors, I don't send cards, and I don't mind that I don't get many either. I don't bake (it sabotages my efforts to stick to an [ADHD-friendly diet of protein](#), vegetables and whole grains anyway). Not even a Christmas tree (ick, those needles!), although I do have a lovely pink poinsettia on the dining room table. My gift exchange list is manageable: one person. He's fun to shop for, so I'll keep him on the list.

The point of all of this? We all have ideas of how the holidays should be celebrated, based on our childhoods, what we see on TV, and what our friends and neighbors do. But how much of it do we really enjoy? How much of it do our families enjoy? They probably do NOT enjoy being the recipients of our increased frustration level, that's for sure. It's hard enough to deal with the stress of daily living with ADHD. Do you know anyone who feels *less* stress during the holidays? I didn't think so.

So If we aren't enjoying it, why the heck are we doing it?

I invite you to consider your own traditions next year. What seems obligatory? What seems like madness? What would you rather do without? What can you reasonably do and still feel good about? That's what you should do. Give yourself permission to drop the rest. Then, you'll know the feeling of joy during the holiday season. And that, I believe, is the whole idea.

Prepare for the Holidays

Take care of yourself physically

Of utmost importance, you must allow yourself to get rest. If your body is weary, take an hour to sit or lie down. Your body will tell you what you need. Loss drains the body of energy and strength. Don't try to do what you have done at previous Christmases. If you want baking and decorating to be done, ask someone to help you. Don't be afraid to admit your physical weakness. Remember, at holiday time your emotions will play a large part of your everyday schedule. Take time to sit down and weep if necessary. Let the tears come; they are important. You and your family are the most important consideration. Remember, it is okay to put yourself first! It is okay to do things differently this year.

Celebrate Christmas in a simple manner

Christmas had its beginnings in the simple and lowly surroundings of a stable. This may not be the year to put up all the "extra" decorations and lights—perhaps just a tree and some trimmings, with the family joining in to help. A simple nativity scene on a table can help bring your attention to the meaning of the holiday. Don't send Christmas cards this Christmas. It's okay not to send cards! Everyone will understand. Don't do all the time-consuming Christmas baking you usually do at the holidays. Your family will be okay! Allow yourself to buy cookies from the bakery (even though they cost more) and just have eggnog and cookies for dessert. Christmas dinner can be special. It is usually better to have dinner at another person's home. Let a relative or close friend host dinner at his or her home. Don't feel responsible to bring anything. Or, go out to a restaurant for dinner; you might want to invite a same-sex friend who might be alone this Christmas. If you would like to have the dinner at home, then do a simple buffet with items from the deli, paper plates, etc. Put some candles and a pretty tablecloth on the table! Consider inviting friends from your church or neighborhood who might not have family nearby.

Surviving The Holidays

Silent night? We wish! Check out these tips to help you survive the holidays.

by [ADDitude Editors](#)

The activity of the holiday season seems to bring out the hyperactivity in our own little angels. Check out this collection of tips to help you survive it.

Create structure - and stick to it

"The symptoms of ADHD don't take a holiday," says Patricia Quinn, M.D., a developmental pediatrician in the Washington, D.C. area and author of several best-selling books on ADHD. "The good news is that parents can help manage their child through this disruption to the daily routine, while also making it less stressful for them."

In a national survey released last month by the New York University Child Study Center, nearly all (98%) parents of children with ADHD who participated in the survey said that a structured routine is important for their child's emotional, behavioral, or social development. Yet, only 13% reported that they keep their child on a school routine all year. Furthermore, two-thirds (66%) of parents agreed that getting their ADHD child back into a normal routine after time away from school is a hassle.

"One of the most important things a parent can do during the holidays is to create structure and stick to the child's regular routine as much as possible," advises Dr. Quinn. This includes following regular medication and behavioral treatment plans. "Adherence to routine may make the back-to-school transition easier for both child and parent. Talk to your child's doctor before making any changes."

Results of the Child Study Center survey, called I.M.P.A.C.T. (Investigating the Mindset of Parents about ADHD & Children Today), also revealed that children with ADHD face serious social development issues that affect their relationships with family and friends. Seventy-two percent of parents surveyed reported that their ADHD-diagnosed child has trouble getting along with siblings or other family members. Less than half (48%) said their child easily adapts to new situations. "Family gatherings, shopping trips to the mall, vacations to new places and other situations out of the normal school-year routine create additional challenges for a child with ADHD," says Dr. Quinn.

The disruption to their child's normal daily schedule can also affect parents/caregivers. According to the New York University survey, one in three (35%) parents of children with ADHD said they play a major role in their child's daily routine. Overall, more than half reported being frustrated while helping their child through daily activities. "Parents of children with ADHD face more challenges than other parents in helping their child complete everyday tasks," says Dr. Quinn. "The holidays can bring about added stress, so parents need to be more patient and understanding of what their child is experiencing."

Daily Tips: Surviving The Holidays

Dr. Quinn offers the following advice to parents to help make this holiday season a more harmonious one for ADHD children and their families:

Keep on schedule: Try to maintain your child's regular schedule, including medication and behavioral treatment, as closely as possible.

Warn about changes: **Anticipate and talk to your child about when and where changes to routine might occur. This may involve reminding your child a few days in advance as well as a few times on the day of an event.**

Use available resources: **Take time to teach your child how to use calendars, organizers, and written reminders to help them stay focused throughout the day.**

Develop a travel plan: **For plane rides, offer your child the aisle seat so he has plenty of room to stretch and move about. For long car trips, schedule frequent breaks or rest stops in order to get out of the car and move or run around outside. Pack plenty of novel games, toys, and snacks to keep your child occupied.**

Going shopping together: **Try to shop during off-peak hours when the stores are less crowded. Make sure you start off with your child well fed and well rested. Have patience even though your child may not.**

Gift giving suggestions: **Prepare your child for the excitement of opening multiple presents to help him focus. An alternative suggestion is to spread out the distribution of presents throughout the day or week.**

Recognize every win: **Celebrate accomplishments, small and large.**

Tips from the Ghost of Christmas Past

Save some toys for later

Don't hesitate to put a gift toy away for a later time. If a child is bombarded with new playthings, feel free to put some gifts aside and let her focus on one at a time. You may even want to reserve a few toys for bad-weather or sick days later on in the year.

From: The National Association for the Education of Young Children

When company comes to visit

Clearly state the house rules concerning visitors to your home and the behavior you expect from your child several times shortly before guests arrive. Be sure he understands the relationship between his actions and the consequences (time-out for inappropriate behavior, for example). Also, verbally rehearse alternative activities he may choose during the day when he gets bored or overexcited. (Make sure he knows his choices before he gets himself into trouble.)

Daily Tips: Surviving The Holidays

"Whether it's one visitor or ten coming to our home, Jamie gets extremely excited. When company enters the house, he practically bounces off the walls," explains Cindy from Brooklyn, New York. "Last Christmas Eve we put him in time-out several times immediately after our guests arrived. Each time he would rejoin the group, he'd lose control again and be sent back to his room. My sister-in-law followed him upstairs the fourth time he went to time-out. She gave him her undivided attention for ten minutes. When he came back downstairs, he was completely under control. Now when we know company is coming, I always ask someone beforehand to spend a few minutes with Jamie when they first arrive. I then tell Jamie, 'Aunt Sue is looking forward to seeing your rock collection (or whatever) when she arrives.' This never fails to work for us."

From The ADHD Parenting Handbook, by Colleen Alexander-Roberts.

Recovering from a childhood in a dysfunctional family

Changing family rituals can be one of the most painful, guilt-inducing risks we can take in our recoveries; but after a very short while, it can be one of the most powerful and healing moves we can make on behalf of ourselves and our families. Remember, regardless of your religion, the Holidays have come to mean warmth, love, fellowship, spirituality, recovery and renewal. Hold these principles dear to your heart. Take them seriously. Cherish these values. By doing so you will be showing by your actions and your commitments that you take yourself and your loved ones seriously.

Holiness is a virtue to which we can all aspire. Holiness is damaged by abuse, neglect, stress, hurt feelings, emptiness, anger, emotional dishonesty and fear.

Here are some suggestions:

- Take the family on a ski trip or a trip to a warm climate for the holidays.
- Spend two or three hours maximum with the extended family on Christmas Eve (or other celebrations) and leave it at that.
- Have everyone put their names in a hat, pick names and then each person gets one present from one other person.
- Get the whole family to work at a homeless shelter or food kitchen on Christmas Day.
- Spend Christmas Day with the extended family, then go on vacation for the rest of the week, returning New Year's Day.

From An Adult Child's Guide to What's 'Normal', by John Friel, Ph.D., and Linda Friel, M.A.

Daily Tips: Surviving The Holidays

ADD kids and gifts

Youngsters with ADD have an intense interest in acquiring material possessions, according to Dr. Melvin D. Levine, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. Many of these teenagers have difficulty feeling satisfied with their activities or possessions. They constantly want something else or something different. They may be bored with their presents a few days after opening them and want something else to play with or something else to do. On the surface, this behavior appears to reflect a teenager's lack of appreciation for his parents' generosity. But it is more likely related to his symptoms of ADD - short attention span, restlessness, and need for new and different stimulation.

From Teenagers With ADD, by Chris Z. Zeigler Dendy, M.S.

Overnight visit

Staying overnight in an unknown hotel can be great fun, or a horrible nightmare. The bed feels different, the room may "smell funny" to you, sounds are different, and it can be hard to sleep. Here are a few ideas to help the mom with ADD:

- **Bring your own pillowcase from home.** If you are hypersensitive, as some moms with ADD are, the feel and smell of your pillowcase can really help you relax and get to sleep.

- **If your children have ADD, bring their pillowcases too, as well as a small toy that is familiar.** Many preschool children like to bring their favorite blanket.
- **If you can afford it and your children are school-age or adolescents, get adjoining rooms at a hotel.** The kids can watch the programs they like and feel very grown-up. You can have some privacy and a chance to wind down. Your children will pop in and out of your room ever five minutes at first, but they'll usually settle down.
- **Don't seek the perfect planned vacation or let your spouse rigidly plan every minute.** A vacation is a good time to allow yourself some impulsive indulgences - to eat in a restaurant you notice from the highway, stop off in a park you didn't know, or suddenly decide to have a picnic. One year while driving our son to camp, we accidentally discovered Helen, Georgia, on the map, an entire town with a Bavarian theme. Intrigued, we drove there and enjoyed a stay of several days.

From Moms With ADD, by Christine Adamec.