

Ask the Pediatrician: What are some ways to cheer up kids during unusual holiday season?

December 17 2020, by Dr. Arwa Nasir



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Q: How can I cheer up my kids, who are sad we can't do some of our normal holiday activities?

A: Holiday traditions may be different for many families this year, and [children](#) might not fully understand why. Many parents I talk with feel

torn between keeping up traditions and following the latest advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Parents also must weigh if it is worth the risk to travel, attend parties with relatives, gather for worship, shop for gifts, go caroling, or visit Santa Claus.

To help manage stress during the holidays, I advise sticking to routines as much as possible. Exercising, regular meals and bedtime routines also help. Pay attention to how much time your kids—and you—spend on screens. Avoid the pressure to spend a lot on gifts and focus on the simple joy of spending time together.

Your child's stress this [holiday season](#) is influenced by the level of stress of the adults in the [family](#). Think about getting extra support this year if your family:

- Is dealing with [job loss](#), housing issues, not enough food, problems with remote work and learning and/or a parent or caregiver with [mental health](#), [substance use](#) or health issues.
- Has frontline workers, such as a police officer, firefighter, doctor, nurse or restaurant worker.
- Has children with special health care needs or mental health conditions.
- Is grieving the loss of a loved one.

If a child is struggling for more than two weeks, it might be time to get help. Here are a few symptoms to watch for:

- An infant or young child clings to [parents](#), has [sleep problems](#), doesn't eat as much, or a preschooler starts thumb sucking or bed wetting.
- An older child or adolescent acts fearful, anxious, or withdrawn or argues more or seems to be more aggressive. He or she also

might complain more about stomachaches or headaches.

- A teen or young adult gets into trouble, can't focus, or hides problems because he or she is afraid, feels bad about the problems or feels like a burden to the family.

Spend a few moments each day enjoying the company of your children this holiday season. It can bring your family closer and boost your mood. Try using extra downtime to do these things together as a family:

- Use your talents to help others, volunteer and give back to the community.
- Talk about your family's culture, heritage, values, and spiritual beliefs. Cook together, for example, making favorite family recipes.
- Find ways to play and laugh together. Consider making special cloth face coverings to wear during the [holiday](#) season
- Aim to be present in the moment. Teach kids to use mindfulness and relaxation to cut down on stress.
- Practice gratitude as a family.

Call your pediatrician if you are worried that your child might hurt himself or herself, or someone else. Your pediatrician can help determine if any mood problems are caused by underlying health conditions or medications. He or she can put you in touch with psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers.

Although this time is presenting families with new challenges, especially during the holidays, trying to maintain a nurturing connection with your children and engaging with them through positive activities can help in navigating the stressful times and in building resilience.

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