

TIP SHEET FOR GRANDFAMILIES

TIPS FOR MANAGING HOLIDAY STRESS

Christmas and New Year's are usually happy times, but for many grandfamilies the holidays may also be stressful and confusing. Caregivers and children may experience a sense of loss during the holidays as things may not be as we hoped. Here are some useful tips to help your family manage holiday stress. *(Remember to adjust any of these tips to fit your child's individual needs or what will work best for your family.)*

- **Give yourself permission to feel emotions** – Reflecting on one's own grief is common during the holidays. Unfulfilled expectations may lead to feelings of sadness and disappointment in families. Allow yourself to experience and process these feelings. Know when to reach out and carefully choose individuals who can offer you support and comfort.
- **Be prepared to talk with your children**– Expect your child to have mixed feelings at times during the holidays—excitement, nervousness, sadness, and anger. They may show these feelings by acting out or becoming withdrawn. Help them explore and identify these feelings by being ready to listen.
- **Keep realistic expectations** – The holidays do not need to be perfect in order for your child to feel loved. You can feel good knowing that you are able to support, protect, provide for, and love your child.
- **Maintain consistent routines** – Children who have experienced family stress are especially sensitive to changes in their routine. Consistency provides them with a sense of balance. Keeping regular meal times, nap, and bed times will help make the holidays less confusing and overwhelming for them.
- **Visiting with parents**– Talk with your children about how the time will be managed and give them time to adjust to holiday scheduling. Try to plan the holiday visits with the child's parents in advance.
- **Establish new traditions and decorate together**- You may want to talk with your children about your favorite traditions growing up, or even create new traditions together. Some examples of new traditions could include: sharing cups of hot cider or hot chocolate while reading stories, baking cookies together, making simple craft ornaments, stringing popcorn, making paper snowflakes, or making cinnamon ornaments.

How to make cinnamon ornaments:

Supplies: cookie cutters, drinking straw, ribbon, ¾ cup applesauce, 4 ounce jar of ground cinnamon

Directions: Preheat oven to 200F. Mix applesauce and cinnamon in a small bowl until a smooth ball of dough is formed (you may need to use your hands). Roll dough out to 1/3 – inch thickness between two sheets of plastic wrap. Peel top sheet of plastic wrap. Cut dough in desired shapes with 2 -3 inch cookie cutters. Make a hole at top of ornament with the drinking straw. Place ornaments on baking sheet and bake for 2 ½ hours. Cool on wire rack. (for air drying, carefully place ornaments on wire rack. Let stand 1 to 2 days, turning occasionally)

- **Add a little whimsy to your day** – Watch an old holiday movie or cartoon you haven't seen in awhile, wear a fun holiday sweater, have an indoor picnic, make snow angels.
- **Visit your local library** – Pick out some of your favorite holiday books, join in on some of the scheduled activities
- **Take care of yourself** – Try to avoid getting overloaded with obligations. Pay attention to your own feelings and needs. If you feel stressed, be kind to yourself and take a break. Maybe some holiday activities should be avoided so you have energy to pay attention to all that is happening.

Have a wonderful holiday season!

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