

Here's How To Tell If The Holidays Are Stressing Your Kid Out

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As parents, we try our hardest to make the holiday season a magical, exciting, and joyous time for our children. But despite our best efforts, there are moments when it seems that our kids are having less of a Hallmark Channel holiday and more of a Charlie Brown one: tense and disillusioning. How can you tell when [your child is stressed out by the holidays](#)? Knowing what to look for is key to beating the December blues.

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Ironically, all the special holiday activities and rituals are the very things that can make a child anxious and upset. As VeryWellFamily pointed out, the parties, sightseeing, and visits to Santa villages [throw off the regular daily routines](#) that make children feel secure. Often, the time off from school also means later bedtimes, giving kids less of the sleep their bodies and minds

need to [decompress from a busy day](#).

The key to making the season merry and bright for both you and your children is to stay alert for the signs that the [celebrations are becoming more of a hassle](#) than a joy. Since kids don't usually come out and say, "Mom, I've had a little too much excitement today," it's up to us to read between the lines and be ready to step in when we see our children exhibiting symptoms like these:

1

They Whine (A Lot)

Most kids are pretty well fluent in this language. But around the holidays, the volume and frequency of the "NOooooos" and "PLEEaaaaaaases" tend to go up dramatically. That's a sure sign that [a child is in emotional overdrive](#) and needs comfort or attention, Dr. Jessica Michaelson explained to *Psychology Today*. The whining may drive parents berserk, but it's meant to: Research published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* showed that [whining gets adults' attention faster](#) than using a low, calm tone. (Yes, people actually *volunteered* to listen to whining for the sake of science!) If you notice more whining than usual, it may be that you need to cut back on the holiday activities: Don't plan an entire afternoon around the mall, and maybe just one visit to a holiday light show is enough.

2

They Don't Feel Well

The mind and body are closely connected, so when kids are feeling stressed by holiday hassles, they may [complain of physical symptoms like headaches and stomachaches](#), child expert Charlotte Reznick, Ph.D., told *Parents*. Eating rich holiday food and spending hours in overheated stores doesn't help the situation. If your child seems to be mentioning little aches and pains frequently at holiday time, but you've ruled out any serious illnesses, that could be a cue that it's time to spend a day or two taking it easy at home. Watching *Rudolph* with Mom and Dad (and a cup of cocoa) can be just as nice as running off to yet another tree-lighting.

3

They Eat Less

Stress affects the appetite (as the empty candy jar on your desk can tell you), and that goes for little ones, too. Your child may react to a too-rushed holiday schedule either by becoming a suddenly picky eater or a bottomless snack monster. To combat the problem, [keep to your regular meal and snack schedule](#), recommended Children's Health. Offer small portions and lots of

vegetable and fruit options, and stick to an agreed-upon daily limit for sweet treats.

4

They Get Grumpy

Too much sensory stimulation and heightened expectations can turn your little elf into more of a Grinch. You can help keep the irritable spells at bay by [letting kids know in advance what to expect](#), said the experts at Harvard Medical School. Once the holiday season gets underway, talk with your children about the activities you'll be doing, and give them a heads-up about gifts: "Santa will be bringing one large present and a few little ones."

5

They Have Trouble Sleeping

When Santa peeks through kids' bedroom windows shortly before Christmas, he probably doesn't see a lot of sleeping going on. Just like adults, children can react to stress and anxiety by [developing sleep problems](#) such as trouble falling or staying asleep, or having frequent nightmares, according to VeryWellFamily. A child who's been toilet-trained for ages may even start wetting the bed again. If this sounds like a familiar scenario, keep in mind that children still need a lot of sleep, even during the holiday hubbub. Keep to a regular bedtime schedule as much as possible, and schedule naps for toddlers and preschoolers. Staying active as a family is not only a healthy habit, but also one that helps promote sleepiness at bedtime. Go for daily walks or outings to the playground, or enjoy athletic winter activities such as ice-skating, and you'll be rewarded with a lot more silent nights.