

Tips to guide your children to a happier holiday

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Tips for keeping the reins on holiday stress:

Exercise chases away holiday blahs and instills a sense of togetherness, says Charlotte Reznick, author of "The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success" (Perigee, 2009, \$14.95).

Have fun with your children. Give them a treat by cranking up some family-friendly tunes and dancing wildly.

Also, give distress a voice. If this is the first holiday without a loved one, a younger family member may feel deep loss, Reznick says. Provide art supplies so your child can illustrate whatever is making her sad or mad.

"Often, putting a face on an emotion and letting it speak makes the child feel better and gives the parent a way to understand what's going on," Reznick says.

Family roadtrip advice

Are you traveling with your kids over the winter break? To keep stress in check, check your own attitude, says David Swanson, author of "Help! My Kid Is Driving Me Crazy: The 17 Ways Kids Manipulate Their Parents and What You Can Do About It" (Perigee, 2009, \$14.95). According to Swanson, if you dislike traveling, so will your children.

If you're impatient and cranky, they'll pick up on your mood and reflect it right back.

For parents, stress is usually rooted in finances or family drama. For teens and preteens, travel is where the stress comes from. They're being pulled out of their routine, so a difficulty with making the transition, combined with boredom and their sensitivity to their parents' moods, fuels the stress, says Swanson, a psychologist who works with children and teenagers.

Spontaneous rest stops, interesting detours, surprise treats, scenic hikes are all good ways to break up a long trip. More time allotted for travel means a calmer parent.

Budget, and stick to it

Another big way to keep stress down: Make your budget and stick to it, says Michele Borba, author of "The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries" (Jossey-Bass, 2009, \$19.95).

Kids can create cards on the computer or by hand, and make wrapping paper by decorating brown butcher paper or grocery bags turned inside out with drawings or cookie cutters dipped in paint.

Other ideas:

Recycle newspaper comic pages and your children's preschool paintings as wrapping paper.

Cut up old holiday cards into tags, punch a hole and run a cord or ribbon through it.