

# 9 Tips to Prevent Holiday Stress and Anxiety in Children

How to avoid child anxiety and holiday stress during the busy holiday season

By [Katherine Lee](#) • Updated September 30, 2015



To reduce holiday stress in children, get them to bed on time.

Updated January 30, 2016

The holidays are a fun and joyous time but also a very busy one, and holiday stress and anxiety in children can and does happen. During the holidays, there are lots of fun activities and events going on, both at home and at school. And while that can be a good thing, the reality is that all that hustle and bustle means schedules are often out of whack, bedtimes get pushed back, and routines are disrupted.

As a result, it's inevitable that kids may feel some degree of holiday stress.

## **Holiday Stress and Anxiety in Children: How Parents Can Help**

**1. Set a calm example.** The most important way parents can help [ease anxiety](#) in children during the holidays is by trying to keep things relaxed as much as possible. As with so many situations, the way parents handle an issue can set the tone for how their kids will behave. If you let holiday stress get to you, your kids will definitely pick up on it, and child anxiety is more likely to be a problem in your house. To minimize anxiety in children during the holidays, take steps to [handle your own stress and anxiety](#).

**2. Set up conditions for good behavior.** Avoid taking your child to places such as the mall or holiday gatherings when he is hungry or tired. It's hard even for grown-ups to deal with noise and lots of stimulation when they're not feeling their best; kids get hungry more often and become tired more easily, and may understandably have a tough time being on their best behavior and are more likely to experience holiday stress when they're exhausted or hungry.

**3. Remember the importance of routines.** The holidays can throw a big wrench into household routines, and that can play a role in anxiety in children. To minimize holiday stress in your kids, try to get routines back on track once an event or party is over. For instance, if a school holiday concert

or a church gathering goes past your child's bedtime, try to stick to quiet, calm activities the next day and get your child to [bed on time](#) the next night.

**4. Watch what she's eating.** Another thing that can fall by the wayside amidst the holiday hubbub is healthy eating. Between all the extra sugary holiday snacks and the lack of time to sit down to regular meals, it can be all too easy for kids to eat less healthy foods, which can contribute to holiday stress and anxiety in children. Try packing healthy snacks when you have to go shopping or run other holiday errands and try to minimize the amount of sweet treats at home. Whenever possible, offer [healthy snacks](#), such as air-popped popcorn or apple slices with cheese and crackers and limit cookies and candy to after-snack treats.

**5. Get your child moving.** Fresh air and exercise are essential for boosting mood and re-setting the spirit, which can alleviate holiday stress and anxiety in children. Make sure you schedule some time to get your child [outside](#) to run around and play.

**6. Avoid overscheduling.** As tempting as it may be to accept every invitation from friends and family, try to limit your holiday parties and activities so that you and your child are not overwhelmed.

A couple of events a week may be fine, but having an obligation every day can lead to holiday stress and anxiety in children.

**7. Have your grade-schooler help you.** Big kids love to help mom and dad, especially if they get lots of praise for being responsible and helpful. If you have to shop, ask your child to help you look for an item at the store (fun stocking stuffers for cousins, for example). Giving your child a task will not only boost her self-esteem, it'll distract her and help prevent any holiday stress and anxiety.

**8. Schedule some quiet time.** Having some peace and quiet with your child is more important than ever during the busy holiday season. Find a quiet

corner and read a book with your child or create holiday pictures for grandma and grandpa. Take a walk outside in nature, away from noise and crowds and obligations.

**9. Remind your child -- and yourself -- what the holidays are really all about.** A great antidote for holiday stress and the bloated commercialism of the season is helping others, whether it's by shoveling an elderly neighbor's sidewalk or by wrapping presents for needy kids at your local church. Helping your grade-schooler [become a charitable child](#) will help alleviate her holiday stress and anxiety.



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### **7 Ways to Reduce Your Holiday Stress**



The holidays can be a joyous and wonderful time, but there's no denying that holiday stress can sometimes creep up on even the most calm and organized among us. Holiday parties, family get-togethers, and other holiday activities can all be fun, but the added demands on our time, energy, and attention can all contribute to stress at holiday time.

Add to that the disruptions in regular schedules, travel, preparing meals, managing and take care of houseguests, and having less time for yourself and voila!

Yoga and meditation are excellent ways to relieve holiday stress. Commercial Eye/Getty Images

You have a perfect recipe for stress and anxiety.

Here are some common causes of holiday stress and what you can do try to be more relaxed:

#### **Holiday Stress Management: Biggest Causes of Stress and Anxiety**

**Less time, more obligations.** Among the biggest causes of holiday stress are the additional events and activities that are added to often already-busy schedules. Christmas parties at school, work and church; Christmas shopping, whether online or in stores; and preparing to either travel to see family or getting your house ready for guests are just some of the many extra things on the to do list that people have to contend with during the

holiday season.

**Fatigue.** All that running around can often mean that you don't have time to [get enough rest](#). Physical exhaustion and lack of sleep can lead to increased stress and anxiety, and one of the best ways to reduce stress and anxiety is - - you guessed it -- getting enough rest.

**Financial worries.** Another major contributing factor to holiday stress can be financial strain. The holidays can pack a wallop on the wallet and lead to stress and anxiety. Besides gifts, many people spend money eating out, traveling, going to shows, and participating in other [holiday activities](#). All that added expense can add up to holiday stress.

**Family get-togethers.** While not being able to see family during the holidays can often be a source of sadness, spending lots of time with family -- especially when packed together in one house for days while, say, visiting grandparents -- can be a big contributor to holiday stress.

**Unrealistic expectations.** Expecting perfection in holiday activities and events is asking for the impossible, and will only set you up for disappointment and holiday stress and lead to post-holiday letdown. To alleviate stress and anxiety, try to accept the fact that things will go wrong. Kids may have a meltdown, Christmas dinner may not come out as perfectly as you hope, people may be disappointed by their presents. Being prepared for imperfection can help reduce holiday stress.

## **Holiday Stress Management: How to Handle Stress and Anxiety**

1. **Identify the specific causes of your holiday stress.** What are the factors that are causing the most stress and anxiety for you? Money worries? Underlying [tensions with certain family members](#)? Then do what you can to address those issues. Try to find free holiday activities or gifts you can get on sale or make yourself. Come up with ways you can either resolve or temporarily set aside conflict with a feuding family

member.

1. **Let go of perfection.** Don't put too much emphasis on making everything perfect. Those magazine spreads showing gorgeous holiday decorations and feasts were prepared by teams of designers and assistants. Since you probably don't have a full-time staff at your disposal, set more realistic expectations for yourself.
2. **Make a list.** [Santa](#) isn't the only one who should be making a list. Write down your wish list of things you'd like to accomplish and be ruthless about whittling it down to things you must do. Would it be great to hand-make gifts and give out gorgeously-decorated cookies baked from scratch to friends, family, your child's teachers and the mailman? Sure. Is it realistic for you to try to do that and still be able to do things like, oh, sleep? Only you can decide for yourself.
3. **Talk to a friend.** Take a break from holiday shopping and preparation to call a friend or meet her over a cup of tea. Letting out your feelings to a supportive friend can be an invaluable, and an important way to relieve holiday stress or any kind of stress and anxiety.
4. **Let others help.** If you're feeling overwhelmed by the idea of having to cook an entire meal for Christmas or decorating for a [party](#) or tending to houseguests, have others pitch in. Why not make Christmas meals pot luck and have family members bring something to the table? If you have a relative who is crafty, ask that person to organize the decorations. Grade-school age children can also help by doing [age-appropriate chores](#) such as vacuuming or sweeping floors and tidying up rooms. You can even hire a neighborhood teen to come and lead your kids as they clean and organize the house so that you can tend to other holiday preparations.
5. **Get in some exercise.** Hectic holiday schedules can often throw a wrench into regular routines, such as [making time for exercise](#) and

eating a healthy diet. Ironically, not taking care of yourself can cause more stress and anxiety, leading to a vicious circle of holiday stress. So hit the gym and take a [fitness class](#), go for a power [walk](#), or just spread out a mat and do some [yoga stretches](#).

6. **Recharge.** Even if your hectic holiday schedule only allows you to spend a few minutes on yourself, take that time to go someplace quiet to recharge your batteries. Wherever and however you refresh your spirit depends on your individual preference. It could be a few minutes of quiet in a church, or a walk in a park. You could even take yourself to a day spa for a manicure and quick neck massage. Another quick and no-cost idea: Go into an empty room in your house, hang a “do not disturb” sign on the door, and do some stretches while listening to some soothing music or sounds of nature.



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