

Don't let stress destroy the pleasure of the season

With the holiday season in full swing, families are busy and stress levels are high. Parents are tired, overscheduled and stretched to their financial limits. Children, who should be getting the most enjoyment out of the holidays, may be overstimulated and irritable.

When we dream of a picture perfect Christmas, it is usually very different from our reality.

It is easy to become so caught up in all the things we "need" to do, that the pleasure of the season is completely lost.

Here are some tips to help make the most of the holidays:

- **Keep your routines.** Sometimes during the holidays, late nights cannot be avoided, but try to stick with regular bedtimes as much as possible. Days tend to go smoother when everyone is well rested. Try to have meals together at regular times as well, with a focus on healthy foods. Candy, baking and other goodies seem to be everywhere this time of year, so it is important to fill up on good, wholesome food at mealtime.

- **Play.** Take your children and go outside for a play in the snow. The fresh air and activity

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will re-energize everyone. On a cold evening, ask your children what they would like to do and join in their play.

After an especially hectic day, take some quiet time to read together, play board games, or just talk and cuddle. A chance to unwind and just have fun together is a great stress reliever. After a break, the to-do list doesn't look quite as daunting.

- **Involve children in holiday traditions.** Do as much as you can together. Putting up the tree, baking, selecting and wrapping gifts all may take a little longer when children help, but these things can develop into family traditions. Your house may not look like a page out of a magazine, but the memories you are making are all about

the process, not the product.

As children grow, hopefully they will feel a connection to the family through these traditions and will want to continue to be involved.

- **Define the holidays.** Try to reconnect with what Christmas really means to your family. Read a story or watch a movie together that captures your idea of the Christmas spirit. Talk with your children about what they can do to give, rather than just receive, at this time of year. Help them to go through their clothes and toys to find items that are no longer used or needed, then go together to

donate them to a second hand store.

Help them make gifts for the special people in their lives. Try cutting shapes out of construction paper and let children decorate them. Punch a hole in the top for a ribbon or string, and you have a Christmas ornament that will be a cherished keepsake for a family member or friend.

By slowing down and really focusing on what matters most as a family, you may find that Christmas doesn't have to be stressful. Enjoy each other's company and discover what the true meaning of Christmas is in your home.