Busy Families Can Simplify the Holidays

The holiday season has arrived for many Florida families. Parents are often overwhelmed by the hectic pace and enormous demands on their time and money to buy presents and attend every program and celebration with their children. To eliminate stress for yourself and your children, try to focus your efforts on making connections with your family rather than fulfilling obligations and spending money.

Ask yourself: “What part of this holiday is most meaningful to me and what do I want my children to cherish about our family celebration?” Slow down and focus on the activities and family traditions that matter the most to you and your family. Let go of the other things. Here are some simple suggestions to help you plan a less hectic celebration.

* Focus on meaningful family traditions or make new traditions that are simple and fun.
* Talk with your family about the traditions they love most and keep something special for each family member.
* Focus on the process and not the outcome when you and your children are decorating, making treats and wrapping presents for family. Your children will remember baking cookies together as a family even if the cookies aren’t picture perfect.
* Celebrate the holiday as a time to give of yourself to others. Spend time with your family singing songs, making cards for friends, taking food to the sick or elderly in your community. Your children will begin to understand the joy of giving to others.

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Celebrating Holidays in Child Care

If your child is enrolled in a child care center or family child care home, you may find learning activities centered around a holiday theme at this time of the year. Children find these activities exciting and engaging.

What types of holiday activities are appropriate in a child care setting?

Parents can look for specific things that indicate the provider or teacher is sensitive to differences among children and their families while respecting the families’ culture or heritage. The activities should be connected to the children and families in the group. The meaning and tradition of the holiday should be

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Special Points of Interest

• Find a variety of family activities parents can do to keep their children engaged and learning during the holidays. Page 2
• Traveling to visit relatives or friends during the holidays? Use these apps to capture the attention of tired, cranky kids. Page 2
Holiday Activities for Home

Create a healthy snack with your child! PBS Parents has lots of ideas for healthy snacks and lunches, like the reindeer sandwich or the Christmas tree, that your child will love making and eating. Talk to your child about shapes and textures. Ask him to count the grapes or the pieces of cheese as you create these tasty, healthy treats.

Watch videos together as a family, such as Chanukah: The Missing Menorah or Baby Bear Plays Dreidel from the Shalom Sesame series on Sesame Workshop’s Shalom Sesame website.

Make a dreidel with your child and play some dreidel games. Get an empty egg carton and cut out one of the egg cups (one cup per child if each child wants a dreidel). Your child can color the cup with crayons or use glue and glitter or stickers to decorate the egg cup. Write or glue the four Hebrew letters needed for the dreidel, one on each of the four sides. Make a hole in the center of the bottom and put a pencil through it. Use the pencil to spin the dreidel.

You can use nine empty thread spools to make a menorah. Let your child color the spools with crayons or washable markers or just cover the spools with foil. Have your child arrange the spools in the lid of a shoebox to look like your family’s menorah or any other arrangement she likes. Put large birthday candles or special Chanukah candles in the holes of the spools. Use playdough to secure the candles if the holes are too big. Each night when the family lights their menorah, light your child’s menorah too.

For more Chanukah activities go to Holiday Arts and Crafts or PBS Kids Crafts.

Tips for Traveling with Young Children

Holidays include visiting relatives and friends. Traveling with children can be quite challenging unless you are prepared.

When traveling with toddlers, factor extra time into your schedule for frequent stops. Toddlers need toileting stops, getting-out-of-a-child-seat-and-running-around stops, and time-to-cuddle-when-tired stops.

Be prepared for the climate especially when traveling to a different part of the country. Take extra sweaters and jackets. Have multiple outfits handy in case of the occasional accident or spill.

Bring a small bottle of hand sanitizer and a package of baby wipes to use for quick clean-ups and wiping toilet seats or restaurant tables as needed. If traveling on a bus, train or plane, bring along “surprise” treats and activities for your child that you can give him when tiredness or boredom sets in. A new book or small toy will spark her interest when she gets grumpy or restless.

Apps for Your Family

* Set limits on the time children spend online. Remember children model their parents’ behavior so consider the amount of time you spend online when you are with your child.

Parents use apps on their phones, tablets and computers daily. There are many family-friendly apps that your child can use while you shop, travel or visit relatives during the holidays. PBS Parents list these tips for parents on choosing apps for their children:

* Consider whether the content is age-appropriate and educational.

* Make sure the app is interactive.
Simplify the Holidays cont’d.

- Have a family conversation about giving and receiving fewer gifts but spending time together as a gift to the whole family.
- Keep the focus on the family and the most meaningful traditions that bring family members closer together.
- Start new traditions such as reading a favorite holiday story together or baking special treats to give as gifts to friends and family.
- Begin a tradition of giving a special book as a gift to each family member. Write the date and a note inside the cover (ex., 12/25/2014—Sarah, this book is a special gift for you because you love butterflies). Years later the child will love reading the message and remembering that special holiday.
- Make special ornaments or decorations together.
- Have the children make place cards or decorations for the family dinner table.
- Call relatives who live in other cities and let everyone talk or have the family sing them a song.
- Collect old towels or blankets and take them to your local animal shelter for the animals that are there during the holidays.

Remember that once you focus on the meaningful activities and traditions your family loves, there will be less stress and more time to enjoy the holidays!

Holiday Activities for Home cont’d.

- Write New Year’s resolutions together as a family. Make a New Year’s Tree out of a small branch or paper bag. Give each family member a paper “leaf.” Ask them to write a New Year’s resolution on the leaf. Children can draw a picture or dictate a resolution for a parent to write.
- Hang the resolutions on the tree and display in a special place. Encourage preschoolers to focus on activities such as washing their hands, brushing teeth or picking up their toys. Each week look at the resolution leaves as a family and talk about ways to help each other accomplish the goals on the leaves.
- Celebrate the successes of each family member.

“Each week look at the resolution leaves and talk about ways to help each other accomplish the goals.”

Celebrating Holidays cont’d.

- The focus and teachers should make connections to the children’s experiences at home. The teachers and staff should be mindful of every group represented by the families. This does not require all holidays be celebrated, instead it means that the holidays selected will be representative of the group and will not be treated as “unusual.” The goal should be that the children learn that these holidays are important and meaningful to the families who celebrate them.
- Families should be encouraged to take part in the celebrations and share their unique traditions. Teaching children games or songs associated with the holiday helps them connect with the families and children who also celebrate it. The activities will lead children to discover that different families celebrate holidays in different ways.
- Teaching children to make gifts and decorations from inexpensive or recycled materials show children that it is the giving, not the price of the gift, that is special to their families. (For more information, see NAEYC Parents.)
Apps for Your Family cont’d.

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* Avoid apps that contain advertising. You don’t want companies marketing commercial products to your child.

Zero to Three has a free mobile app that helps parents support early language and learning through fun activities that are organized by age and everyday routines.

“Let’s Play” provides parents and grandparents with fun ideas for keeping babies and toddlers entertained and learning, especially during daily routines like commuting time, chores, bedtime and bath-time, mealtime, and shopping. All of the activities reflect children’s typical skills at each age and are designed to support development in the context of play and family routines.

Baby Karaoke is a free mobile app from the Raising Children Network that allows parents to sing along with their children in the car, waiting at the doctor’s or dentist’s office, riding on a bus or at home. It displays lyrics along with engaging graphics that represent the song selected. There are 20 songs that babies, toddlers and preschoolers love.

Free apps for young children (for iOS and Android phones and tablets):

Three Little Pigs Lite
Animal Pants (2+)
Read Me Stories (3+)
Friendly Shapes
Time to Go to Bed
Little Reader Touch
Baby Finger Kids Song
Colorful Balloons
Build It Up
Toy Repair Workshop (3-6)

Free apps for parents:

WebMD
iReward Chart
MamaBear
Is It Contagious? (Center for Disease Control)

Traveling with Children cont’d.

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your device before you leave home. Some places may not have access to Wi-Fi or may be in “dead zones” for Internet access. Make sure your child has your name and cell phone number pinned to the inside of a jacket or shirt in case he wanders away from you.

Make reservations for motels, campsites, plane or bus tickets and restaurants well ahead of time so there is minimal wait time. Find a park or rest area along the way where your child can walk or run around for a short time. As your child gets older, include him in planning the trip and let him pack his luggage and snacks. Encourage him to keep a travel journal and take pictures of the trip. Give him a map and let him track the route and calculate the mileage. Bring books that talk about the areas you will travel through for your child to read.

When you are well prepared, your family will have a more relaxed trip.

Coming soon from Zero to Three is “Babies on the Homefront,” a free, downloadable app designed specifically for military and veteran parents of young children. The app, made possible by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, offers an array of written and video information to share with families, including behavior tips, parent-child activities and parental self-care strategies. The app will be available in both English and Spanish.

The Personal Learning Scholarship Account (PLSA) is a new program that helps families customize educational plans for their children with special needs. Scholarship amounts vary according to grade, county and disability. To qualify, students must be diagnosed with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Spina bifida, Williams syndrome or an intellectual disability (severe cognitive impairment). Also, kindergarteners, up to age 5, deemed high-risk due to developmental delays may be eligible.

The PLSA allows parents to direct scholarship funds toward a combination of approved programs and providers including approved private schools, therapists, specialists, curriculum, technology – even a college savings account.

Families interested in the PLSA for the August 2015-16 school year can apply now by visiting the website at www.StepUpForStudents.org.

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