



If there were a stress meter attached to parent's arms during the holiday season, we could see that parents have reached and even gone beyond the meter's maximum limit. Being a parent is busy and demanding. You have to manage and balance the demands of your children, partner, household, work, friends and family. It is normal to feel stressed as a parent, whether it is the holiday season or not. When parents often feel a high level of stress, it can be hard to deal with their children's behavior calmly and consistently.

Parents who are overly stressed may not have enough energy to spend time with their children or can become irritable and impatient. Sometimes parents feel so worn out that they are not able to recognize their children for positive behaviors.

If you are a parent feeling overly stressed, you are not alone! There are several steps that parents can take to manage stress levels so that parenting can be more natural and easy. Here are some things you can try right away.

Have realistic expectations of yourself. This will make it less likely that you will set yourself up for unnecessary stress. For instance, it is not reasonable to think that you can always maintain a tidy house, or that your children will always do as you ask, or that you can always say "yes" to people who ask for help. You may also want to lower some of the "holiday expectations" that you have for yourself. For example, if your list of people to buy gifts for feels overwhelming, consider alternatives that are not as expensive such as your children's art, or certificates for a fun outdoor activity like exploring the season's low tides.

Include your children in holiday preparation activities. Explain to them what the holidays mean to your family and describe the traditions that you grew up with. When children are included, it will make the holiday preparations fun for them. Some ways to include children are:

- Creating decorations that can be put around the house or on the Christmas tree
- Creating home-made holiday cards
- Wrapping gifts
- Making placemats or centerpieces for the holiday dinner table
- Assisting in making special holiday foods or drinks

Some examples of coping statements are:

- I can do this, I've done it before
- It's OK to make mistakes
- It will be over soon• It's ok to feel nervous, I can cope with this feeling. I'll get through this.

As we enter the frenzy of the holiday season, come up with a plan for yourself. Think of something you can simplify about the holidays, include your children in the plans, come up with a relaxation technique and a coping statement that you and your children can use together and get back to the core of what the holidays are for...enjoying time with your family!