

Mental Health and Well-Being Newsletter



Across the whole country, indeed across the whole world, families are finding the “jolly holiday season” very different from previous years. As if parenting during a pandemic wasn’t already hard enough, now we can add in the pressure that comes with managing the expectations of Christmas.

Many children, and adults are feeling incredible sadness and disappointment because of all of the changes that 2020 has brought and parents are feeling that they need to make the holidays even more special to make up for all the things their children would normally look forward to.

It is important to do only what is manageable and not take on too much - the biggest and best thing we are able to do right now is to listen to our children in terms of their feelings and emotions and talk with them about how this holiday might look.

Below are a few ideas to help you and your family manage holiday expectations:

Get creative

It may be difficult to give our children exactly what they want— but there are ways to make **new** memories.

Think about how you could create small, special moments with your children. Find “special” time where you can be totally focused on them and something they enjoy — whether that’s play, deep conversation, crafts, cuddling or a late night outing to look at the Christmas lights.

Actually say to your child: ‘This is a special moment we are having,’ or, ‘I’m excited that we get to have this time together,’ or, ‘How wonderful that we get to do this special thing together.’ Labelling the special moment you are having with them promotes mindfulness and awareness, helping them to realise ‘Oh, in this moment, I am with my parents and having a really good time.’

Consider what might only possible this year because we are usually so busy during this time. Things like eating breakfast all day or ordering Chinese food for dinner and watching movies all day in their pyjamas. Talk it up as special fun that comes from breaking the rules of the holiday in a silly way.

Although we may not feel as if we can control much in a global pandemic, the truth is that we **absolutely can** control the memories our children have when they look back on this time.

It’s an opportunity to focus on those positives as opposed to the negatives and find that silver lining – to remember that things don’t have to look exactly the same way that they used to for us to still be able to enjoy ourselves



Involve the whole family

Children love the opportunity to be involved, to feel connected and be a part of coming up with creative solutions – they are often much better at it than we are so challenge them to come up with a list of activities for themselves and the family to do.

If they are missing their friends and family, let them suggest ways to connect virtually. Cooking, baking, singing carols and reading bedtime stories are all activities that could be done virtually.

Decorating gingerbread houses or making holiday crafts? Consider having two families buy the same supplies, and make crafts together over video chat.

When it is impossible to re-create something, talk about what it was like and what you loved about it. It is a good opportunity to just talk about how that would have felt or how much they're going to love doing that the next time they get to. Write down the ideas and put into a "things I'm going to do once this is over.." jar.



Do not forget to tell your kids how proud you are of them. Be specific, and point out how well they are adapting and how great they are at coming up with their own creative or thoughtful ideas.

Move the focus away from gifts

Many children will probably experience change when it comes to receiving presents, whether that is because of job losses or not being near extended family. Talk to them ahead of time so that they are able to adjust their expectations. Explain that giving gifts will be different this year and consider hiding small gifts in multiple wrapped boxes inside of each other, or hide gifts around the house and create a scavenger hunt for them.

Remember that gifts do not have to be new to be special. Older siblings can give younger siblings a toy they have outgrown. Parents can also give a child something they used to play with when they were young or something the child has always admired but is rarely allowed to touch, such as a special keyring, purse or wallet.

It also helps to focus on what we are still able to do for others. Write letters or cards and send them to friends, relatives or people in nursing homes. Paint rocks and leave them for neighbours. Call friends and family who live alone. Talk to your children about how others may feeling this holiday season and what they can do to spread some cheer.



Have a wonderful break. We are looking forward to seeing you all on 4th January and hearing about all the new and different ways you have found to enjoy this time of year!

