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Counsellors' Corner

Home For the Holidays

"It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year".....or is it?

We are on the countdown! How many more sleeps? For some this brings joy and excitement and for others: worry, stress, and anxiety are experienced. The holiday season is portrayed as a time of happy families, celebration, and traditions. It can also be a time of great family stress: expectations of family traditions, pressures of creating magical memories, financial pressures, work/childcare concerns, sibling conflict, family disagreements as well as grieving those who are no longer with us or traditions that no longer bring us joy. This experience of anticipation partnered with underlying pressures is a common experience. You are not alone. In this newsletter, we want to share an understanding of what is happening for your children from a social/emotional perspective as well as some suggestions for how to decrease holiday stress and make this season more enjoyable.

What's Happening for Children and Youth

- Kids are tired! Anticipating the holidays while following routines and school protocols is draining.
- Society starts the celebration of the holiday season early. Our children and youth have observed the focus turn towards Winter concerts, decorating, gift-buying, community gatherings, and everything "December" early on.
- Changes in temperature, "snow days," shorter days, can all contribute to different moods, patience, energy, and ability to be resilient.
- Schools, malls, parades, family photos, etc. can become over-stimulating for some – which leads to a need to avoid and/or decompress.
- Some children and youth enjoy the structure of school as well as the connections; for them, they are sad to say goodbye to friends and routines for a few weeks.
- For families where "Santa lists" and "I wants" are part of the holidays; expectations, demands, and perhaps disappointment is experienced.
- We all feel a level of stress and/or peace during the holidays; our children pick up on the emotional tone of the home. It's important for family members to look after themselves and check in with each other ("I notice....how can I help?")
- Depending on the age and stage of children and youth "boredom" may become a factor, leading to increases in screen time and/or challenging behaviours.

Suggestions for Decreasing Holiday Stress

- Have a family meeting to discuss and decide on your family values: where do you want to put your efforts? Do you value outdoor time/adventure, exchanging gifts, following family traditions, making lasting memories, religious celebrations...?
- Set a budget for whatever it is that you value. Will you spend this budget on going up the mountain skiing, taking a trip, exchanging gifts, decorating the house, hosting company? Including your children in these decisions in an age-appropriate way can help set reasonable expectations for the season and decrease the possibility of disappointment. A holiday celebration can turn into resentment and arguing if each of your family values (and expects) different things from the season.
- Set boundaries for company that fit with what you can do and afford. Allow yourself to have dinners and clean-up as collaborative family activities. If you can start your children young in participating in the work, it can become one of your family traditions so that all the work doesn't fall on parents' shoulders. For example, grandma makes the salad, the youngest stirs the cranberry sauce, dad makes the turkey, etc.
- Consider how long you want the season to last. When will you decorate (if that is one of your traditions), when will you take down the decorations? Think about returning the house to its pre-season state a few days before returning to school so you aren't stressed about clean-up after your regular routines are back up and running.
- Sleep, rest, engage in some activities that you enjoy as well.
- Set a "top-5" list that you want to accomplish over the holidays that is reasonable and light. It might be as simple as, "Play holiday music on the stereo for an hour a day," "Go for 2 family walks over the break," etc.

- If you are feeling financial stress, please consider accepting help. There are many organizations in the community who love to contribute to ensure everyone has a happy holiday. The counsellor at your child's school can work with you (confidentially) to help you access the support you need. School district counsellors can be reached by phone or email (firstname.lastname@sd71.bc.ca).

Preparing For the Return to School

- Start the process of adjusting the sleep schedule back to what it was before the holidays. You can begin this process 3 -4 days before school starts back up. You will likely have a day or two of tired mornings and resistance to going to bed on time at night, but it will make the first day back much easier!
- Start returning to having mealtimes back where they were before the holidays.
- Begin to limit tech time to the expectations you have during the school year (for elementary students, we recommend 1-2 hours maximum as appropriate; for high school, $\frac{1}{4}$ of their age up to a maximum of 4 hours per day.
- Consider having a small get-together with a best friend to get back into "social" mode.
- If your kids haven't been reading through the holidays, encourage some book time before bed, just to get the focus working again.
- If you exchange holiday gifts, find a home for each of them before the return to school. Some families have their children donate or hand-down an item for every gift they receive, to keep the closets from over-filling.
- Contact your child's teacher, administrator, or school counsellor if there have been any significant changes over the break that may impact how we support your child at school.



"You've got this!"

Tara and Bridget

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