

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Making the most of these holidays

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You don't need an instruction manual to make the most of the school holidays. After all, holidays are about kicking your feet up, relaxing and getting away from the usual routines. Right?

But the holiday season can be stressful. For many parents the prospect of keeping children occupied for up to six weeks can be daunting. Kids who kept busy with school, after school activities and weekend sport suddenly have time on their hands and look to you to keep them busy.

Christmas can also be a difficult and lonely time for some. Sole parents and step-parents usually experience particular challenges at this time of the year as family catch-ups cause conflict, and disputes can arise over who children spend their time with.

Often family differences are contained during the year but spill over when normal routines cease over the holiday period. High maintenance children who's behaviour is bearable when they are at school can suddenly seem very challenging indeed when you spend 24/7 time with them.

Here are some ways to help reduce tension over the festive season and make the holidays enjoyable and fruitful for all.

1 Be creative with how festivities are organised

For instance, two or more Christmas dinners may be needed so everyone is included. If you are flexible with your arrangements as well as your thinking then the potentially tricky times will flow more easily.

2 Mix up the routines

The best part about holidays is the move away from the routines of school-life. Some kids feel comfortable with the routines of school-life and can feel a little lost until the new holiday routine kicks in. Be patient with these routine-junkies! Also make sure you begin adjusting the routine as a return to school comes closer so kids are prepared for going to bed and getting up at earlier times.

3 Mix 'me' time with 'them' time

Plan a mixture of outdoor activities or trips with quiet at-home activities where you can relax and recharge your own batteries. The holidays are a chance to spend time as a family but you also need to take some time for yourself each day. It helps to let your kids know that you are having some timeout too.

4 Resist being your child's home entertainment machine

Give children opportunities to keep themselves occupied or think of

inexpensive, fun ways to keep themselves amused. "I'm bored" is an invitation for kids to keep themselves occupied rather than for you to keep them amused.

5 Team up with other families

Whether it is sharing celebrations with other families or just holidaying with friends, holidays offer the chance to broaden your child's social circle. Create opportunities to spend time with other families preferably with children the same age as yours.

Make sure you provide the three types of activities that children want with their parents – i.e. **rituals and celebrations**, including family mealtimes; **one-on-one activities** where you spend some time alone with each child; and unstructured, **impromptu activities** such as playing simple games, story-telling and walks around the neighbourhood. These are important relationship-building activities that bind families together and enable you to build up emotional collateral with kids as they move into adolescence.

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