



# 'TIS THE SEASON FOR JOY & CHEER OR STRESS & ANXIETY?

## HELPING YOUR CHILD MANAGE HOLIDAY STRESS

by Ayme McCain, MSSA, LSW, OCPC

Is it just me or does it seem like we can't get through one holiday before the ads and store displays for the next holiday begin to pop up? In the current fast-paced world we live in, we often find ourselves unable to enjoy one holiday without worrying and stressing about the next one. And let's be honest, as much as we may love spending time with family, these times can also be filled with increased expectations, cooking, cleaning, family drama, and children wanting more of our time, attention, and money!

The time of the year that is supposed to be filled with joy and cheer can quickly become overshadowed by stress and anxiety. Now if we as adults experience stress during the holidays, just imagine the impact it has on our children as well. As the holiday season quickly approaches, keep these tips in mind to help maintain the joy of the season, and minimize your children's stress.

**1. Manage Your Own Stress** The better we are at taking care of ourselves, the better we are at taking care of our children. Children are very perceptive and can sense when we are stressed which in turn increases their stress. By successfully managing our stress we also provide a positive example to our children on how they should manage their own stress.

**2. Maintain a Routine (as Much as Possible)** Although it may be difficult to avoid some changes in routines during the holidays, the more you can keep routines consistent the better. Try not to throw bedtimes completely out the door, because a sleepy child is often a cranky child.

**3. Manage Expectations** Kids often place the most expensive items on their wish list or have large expectations around everything they are going to do during break. Talking honestly about what the family can afford and including them as plans are made for the holiday break can help minimize disappointment when reality does not live up to their imagination.

**4. Spend Time Together** Spend time engaging in interactive activities such as playing board games, baking cookies, a family dance break, decorating, wrapping gifts or family karaoke.

**5. Create Family Traditions** Turn family activity time into a family tradition. Take time to share with your children the traditions you had as a child, while also creating new traditions to look forward to every year. Family traditions help to build a connection to the past, the present, and the future.

**6. Advocate for Your Child** Children may not feel comfortable participating in all of the activities with their extended family or may be anxious about family displays of affection. As much as we may love to give hugs, not all children want to be hugged. Children may be hesitant, and even anxious, about advocating for themselves with adults, so it is important to know your children's limits and make sure family members respect their boundaries.