

Managing Holiday Excitement in Children

Tip – Remember to plan for a transition time between exciting holiday events and the return to the daily routine.

We suggest a strategy for managing your child's behavior at a holiday celebration. We'll also consider an often overlooked part to the holidays—the aftermath and attendant feelings.

All children get excited during the holidays. It's natural, but it's also important to keep your child from escalating out of control. Dr. Linda Budd, psychologist and author of *Living with the Active Alert Child*, recounts one party where a highly-excited 4-year-old stripped down to her super-heroine underwear and began jumping on the couch, shrieking all the while. Let's avoid that point, shall we?

Tools – Dr. Budd describes a game she recommends parents use with their children as a way to motivate them. She suggests using it on vacations or on other occasions that can be demanding – such as the extended family holiday celebration.

- **The Game.** Begin by giving your child ten of something he really likes. She suggests dimes or quarters. Younger children might respond better to tiny cars, pencil erasers or other small items. Tell your child about the upcoming event and spell out the behavior you expect of him. Make it clear that the ten coins or trinkets are his unless he behaves inappropriately. Each time he breaks the agreement, he loses one object.

The game works because it puts the child in control. He is in charge of whether or not he gets to keep the entire treasure. Most often, he will try to keep as much of it as he can. It also provides immediate gratification for a job well-done and thus works better than the promise of a reward.



Dr. Budd points out that life does not immediately return to normal for your child after a big event like the winter holidays. The child may need some transition time to adjust to having less excitement or attention. And further, she adds, parents are typically exhausted and have little patience for arranging the needed transition time. A board game date with Mom or Dad would be fun, but minimal in terms of preparation and adult energy outlay.

"Children have to learn," says Budd, "that normal time



at home is not a constant stream of 'good times.' " She recommends talking over the fun parts of the holiday with your child as a way to signal closure – "What was the most special part of the holiday for you?" "This is what I liked the best. . ." Then remind your child about returning to normal life – "Remember, it's important to get to bed tonight at 8 because school starts again in the morning. You'll need to get your backpack ready. It'll be fun to see your friends again and tell them about winter vacation, won't it?"

You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Living with the Active Alert Child: Groundbreaking Strategies for Parents* by Linda Budd, Ph.D.

