

## Managing Holiday Excitement in Children

It's the most wonderful time of the year. . . " At least, it's supposed to be. To increase the chances that this will be wonderful for all of you, evaluate each event's possible effect on your child and be selective with holiday commitments; choose events that are likely to be successful.

Remember that this month, without adequate planning, your children can easily spiral out of control with excitement, anticipation, over-stimulation, and plain-old fatigue. Visits to Santa can become disasters, caroling might degenerate from singing to chasing your child around other people's dark yards, shopping delays can result in tantrums and overall behavior may sink to new lows--for the kids and for the adults, who are just as likely to be exhausted.

**Tools** – The good news is that it doesn't need to get to this point. Linda Budd, Ph.D., psychologist and author of *Living with the Active Alert Child: Groundbreaking Strategies for Parents*, recommends taking a serious look at your activity level, your child's temperament, and your own limits before you make holiday dates.

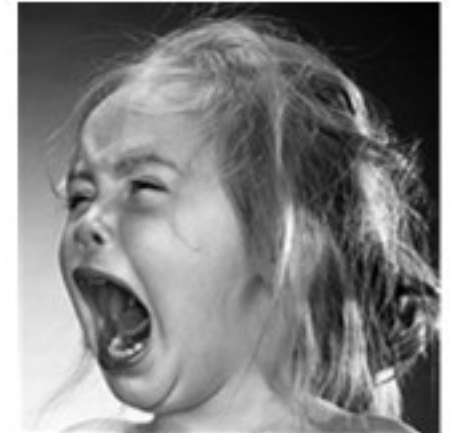
**Be selective in your commitments.** Dr. Budd points out that active, sensitive children don't always differentiate your stress from their own. If you are over-committed and stressed, they feel it and react to it – some anxiously, some with wild behavior.

Many children are simply unable to cope with their own excitement and a parent's stress at the same time. Plan for some quiet evenings at home.



**Evaluate length and quantity.** Limit how long and how often your child must behave during seasonal parties. Again, you don't have to do everything. Identify what is most important to you (and your child) and say no to all else. If an event is likely to go late, plan to bring two cars so that one parent can take a child home before he gets too tired or over-stimulated. Another option is to plan for a time-out spot where you can sit and wait for an over-stimulated child to calm down (Grandma's spare bedroom, perhaps?)

**Set limits for behavior.** When you are participating, make the rules clear to your child beforehand – "We're eating Hannukah dinner at Nana and Papa's house. We'll light the Menorah before dinner – only grownups can use the matches, but you may watch. I expect you to eat the meat and vegetables before you have dessert. After dinner we'll open some presents and then you can play dreidl with your cousins." Focus on what the child is to do, instead of what not to do. For example, say, "Use your inside voice in the house," instead of "No yelling."



**Emphasize the order of the events.** Many children can't handle anticipation because they don't know exactly when the presents will be opened, or when candy canes will be handed out. If you have told him ahead of time that gifts will come after dinner, you're less likely to field the "When can we open presents?" question 53 times during appetizers.

**Keep routines as regular as possible.** Your child will do so much better during the holidays if meals, naps, and bedtimes all continue to happen at the regular times. Bring nutritious snacks with you if dinner is likely to be served late. Be prepared to leave early if bedtime is an issue.

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