

ADHD and Christmas

The holidays can be stressful for children with attention deficit. Traveling and visiting relatives may disrupt their day-to-day routines, and all the excitement can be overwhelming. Follow these real-family strategies to prevent holiday havoc, keep your ADHD kids feeling good, and create happier memories:

Plan Ahead

During the holidays, [routine and structure](#) go out the window: A child might have to endure travel time by car, train, or plane; sitting politely at the dinner table for extended periods; less control of diet and sleep. Planning for these holiday side effects is helpful for an ADHD child and his parents.

Decide how the days will be spent -- parties, decorating, visiting relatives, preparing holiday treats -- and [set up a schedule](#), building flexibility into it in case your child needs downtime.

Sketch out each phase of the holidays, including all "free" time when your child may be playing with other children or relatives. Now, given what you know about your son or daughter, flag the activities that may be a problem for him or her. Amend the schedule if necessary, and discuss with your child the following coping strategies.

Tip: If your son or daughter is on [ADHD medication](#), talk with your doctor about possibly extending the coverage to 24 hours during the holiday season. Increasing time on medication can maximise your child's enjoyment of the season during this high-energy period.

Teach Self-Control

Giving a child some tools for self-control can prevent an overreaction from becoming a temper tantrum. [Relaxation techniques](#) -- yoga, breathing exercises -- can help a child who is easily upset by a highly charged atmosphere. Also, give your child some verbal cues to keep him in a positive state of mind.

When facing a crowd at a relative's house or the task of sitting politely at the table, whisper to him, "I know you can do this. It'll only be a short time out of the day."

Rehearse Calming Techniques

Some ADHD children need to practice calming down at home before venturing out into holiday bedlam. Rehearsing the "stop, relax, think" technique with a child or [role-playing a scenario that has given him trouble in the past](#) are excellent strategies. You can teach your child to ask for help at the onset of conflict with a relative or friend. In time, just walking toward you may help your kid calm down.

Tip: To avoid conflicts with peers, encourage your child to bring along a game or toy to share with the other youngsters.

Schedule Time Wisely

Too many events can overstimulate an ADHD child. Decide which occasions are most important, and [don't overload the schedule](#). Include private playtime or an outing to a child-friendly restaurant with a friend, to provide some one-on-one fun for your child. Also, spending time together in a quiet corner of the house or taking a short walk can head off a tantrum in a child.

Tip: If you're planning to spend several days visiting a relative, stay at a motel instead of sleeping over. This will give your child built-in breathing space. To avoid hurt feelings, explain to your family why you're not bunking with them.

Encourage Good Behaviour

[Commending a child's good behaviour](#) reminds him of his strengths and increases his confidence that he can manage whatever the holiday throws at him. One parent mentioned to me that her child became the hit of the party when he read a book of riddles to family members. Another dad told me that his child amazed the crowd with his magic tricks. Reminding a child of his past successes will set him up to succeed this year.

Involve Your Child in Activities

Build happy memories by enlisting your child to help cook the holiday meal with you, create decorations, or wrap packages. Such activities strengthen the bond between