



Remember last holiday season, when you vowed—"never again!" When the pressure of the season and so many things to do really got to you? Well, those days are back.

How to Stay Cool through the Yule

A Parent's Primer by Clare B. Jones, Ph.D.

PARTIES! RELATIVES! PRESENTS! No school! Weather changes! New plans! Visitors! Traditions! Social gatherings! The holidays are upon us, and most families have begun to feel the excitement and yet the pressure of too many things to do and too little time.

Families coping with the challenges of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) may find the holiday season even more stressful. The marked variability in behavior patterns of individuals with attention disorders, from day to day and moment to moment, seems to escalate during the celebration season when the inconsistency of schedules becomes the status quo. Parents and relatives can help children with AD/HD by understanding that the frenzy of the holiday season will affect their kids' daily lives and by expressing some empathy for what they are going through.

Many behavior problems with active children can often be improved by explaining new situations before they occur. When there is to be a change in the routine, children with AD/HD need to have the change described in detail and in advance. Tell children what is coming, offering encouragement before and after the change. For example, "We're going to have to go back to the grocery store; you will sit in the cart. I need you to carry this list for me, so I don't forget anything this time. If you do a good job, you can pick out your own fruit from the counter."

Model behaviors you expect from the child when you know a challenging time is ahead. Example: "The

guests will be coming around 6:00 p.m. Let's practice how you will greet them and how you can help with their coats when they come in the door." Act as if a real guest has arrived. When you see the child exhibiting an appropriate behavior, praise the child immediately. Example: "It is so nice to see what a big helper you are. Thanks for being such a great host."

You have some idea what is ahead for your family during the coming season. Think ahead to social situations that may be difficult. Try to plan in advance a variety of "cooling off" activities that can help you gain control of your active child during these stressful times and make it a more enjoyable experience.



Here are some suggested cooling off children's activities to review and prepare before the chaos sets in.

For Young Children

- With a small child, the cooling off activity could be as simple as "come and sit on my lap." Put on some seasonal music and sing along softly stroking the child's neck and shoulders.
- Turn on some music and encourage the child to dance or march. Provide colorful silk scarves, fabric or crepe paper streamers to wave as part of the dance.
- Leave an extra bowl of cookie batter (that you do not intend to cook) in the refrigerator and let the child mix and work with it.
- Give your child a special treat that they particularly enjoy. You might make a game of giving the treat and then sitting down and enjoying it with your child as a cooling off activity.

- The use of a massage or warm bath can also be helpful. Let the child apply lotion or talcum powder to his or her arms and shoulders.
- Have a marshmallow fight using small bite-size marshmallows. Clear a room of breakables and allow kids to toss them at one another. Play music and stop it sporadically. When the music stops, kids must sit down and eat any marshmallows they have caught.
- Plan one cooking event where the child helps you prepare the item.
- Most highly active children love water play, so let them splash a bit with a bar of floating soap in the kitchen sink.

For Older Kids

- Make a series of "busy time" envelopes for anticipated difficult periods. For example: *The Office Pack*—fill a large manila envelope with office supplies, pens, stapler, tape, labels, colored dot stickers, paper clips, stamp pad and date stamp; or *The Sticker Pack*—fill the envelope with all types of stickers including mailing labels, animal stickers or story board stickers.
- Have an audiotope of your child when he or she was younger singing, reading or reciting a poem. Let the child listen to what he sounded like as a younger child. Or have your child record an audiotope for fun.
- Let children "pack" their lunches in a paper bag and take lunch to a different spot. Example: park bench, bleacher seats in a high school stadium, by a statue, across from a waterfall or water feature.

For All Ages

- Use a special book or CD that you borrow from the library or buy for the holiday season (see book reviews, page 18–19). Bring it out as a distraction when behaviors are just beginning to escalate.
- Purchase a master seasonal calendar for the family and one for each child; hang the family calendar on the refrigerator. Color code and highlight special events and dates. Let each child cross off the day on his or her own calendar nightly with a favorite colored pen.
- Record a favorite television program or find an old video and replay it when necessary.
- Introduce a unique, highly visible timer to set limits and to enforce quiet times.
- Try art. Let the child make a large mural with butcher-block paper and colored markers. Let your child wet brush a chalkboard. Or give your child a box of colored chalk and let him or her color a square of sidewalk by the front door or in the garage. Provide materials to make a paper or popcorn chain for the

Christmas tree or Hanukkah bush.

- Make a grab bag of things to do on a boring afternoon when you have lots to do and your kids are underfoot. Fill a paper bag with small squares of paper. Each paper has an activity to do for your youngsters. They reach in and do the activity until they are bored, then choose another. Examples of activities could include: call your grandma, sweep the front steps, take a walk, count all the windows in the house, count all the doorknobs in the house, line up all the cans in the pantry in alphabetical order, clean the mirror in the bathroom, make a snowman out of cotton balls.

Last but not least, think about yourself. You will need quiet time to regroup and to refresh. Include small pleasures like a walk alone, a call to a treasured friend or just quiet time with a book. Mark these private times on your holiday calendar in advance. Your positive attitude and your careful planning can make this holiday season a success for your entire family. Enjoy the YULE! ■

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