

Handling Holiday Stress

Holidays can be a stressful time, but especially for children who have lost a parent, live in single parent homes or have families that are struggling financially. Holidays may remind them of a time when their parents were alive, together, or the family situation was different. The uncertainty or unpredictability of family plans can cause worry and anxiety for children during this time of the year.

The best thing you can do to support your Elevatees during this time is just let them know that you care about them. Consider getting them a holiday card. (Even though they may not respond the way you expect, your words or the gesture will stay with them).

Tips for Creating a Stress-Free Holiday

- 1 AWARENESS** - When you talk with your student about the holidays, be sure to be aware of your own associations to the holidays and how they might be different from your student's. Take the opportunity to acknowledge that there are different types of families and a wide variety of family customs and traditions that are celebrated.
- 2 CALM** - Try to take the "hype" out of the season and think of relaxing and low-key ways to be together during this time.
- 3 PREDICTABILITY** - Stick to your typical schedule and routine, and continue to set good boundaries and limits. Familiar routines and rules help kids feel calm and stress-free.
- 4 KEEP LISTENING** - As always, listen carefully to your student's concerns. Remember that they just need someone to listen and to care about what they say.
- 5 EMPATHIZE** - If your student seems upset, encourage them to express their feelings and to talk about any disappointment. For example, if they are disappointed because they aren't going to see a distant parent, or don't receive a message or gift from that parent, let them know you care. Reflect back their feelings to them and let them know you understand their disappointment.
- 6 START NEW RITUALS** - The holidays provide a great opportunity to start a new ritual or tradition for you and your student. Starting something new can change what the holidays mean for your student.

Finally, be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Creating a safe, predictable environment for them when you spend time together and being sensitive to their needs is the best gift of all!

Happy
Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas
and Happy Hanukkah!

Talking Points/Conversation Tips

Having students focus on others and gratitude helps take the commercialization out of the holidays and puts them in the mindset of the importance of giving rather than receiving.

Ask who they are thankful for and why?

Talk about what you are grateful for and ask your student to talk about what they are grateful for as well.

Explain that a gift doesn't have to be a present that you unwrap. It can be something as simple as someone spending extra time with you, reading you a story or just being a friend.

Here are some questions you could ask:

- What is the best gift you have ever been given? Why was it so special?
- What is the best gift you have given someone? Why was it so special?
- If you could give any gift to anyone you wanted, who would you give the gift to and what would you give them?
- If you could give one gift to every single child in the world, what gift would you give?

Remember to Share Your Answers!

Activity Ideas

Draw turkeys using the outline of your student's hand and your own. List things you and your student are grateful for on the feathers.

Have your student draw a picture of a gift they would like to give to someone. (Then they can give the drawing to that person). You can do the same!

Look for rocks in the playground and paint them. Play tic tac toe using the rocks you each find.

Draw a pumpkin and write what you are thankful for inside.

HERE are some other activity ideas to promote gratitude.

Here are some other **Thanksgiving**, **Christmas** and **Hanukkah** activity ideas.