



Psychiatry/Psychology, Psychosocial Issues

Don't let pandemic put damper on holiday season

by Trisha Koriath, Staff Writer



The holiday season usually is a joyful time. Families look forward to gathering with relatives and friends, exchanging gifts and celebrating traditions. But the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new kind of stress this year.

Even if your family does not know someone who is affected by the virus, your child's stress could increase this holiday season due to hardships from the pandemic. For example:

- Job loss, homelessness or not enough food. Find out if you can get food assistance at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/>.
- A parent or caregiver with mental health, substance use or health issues. For help with mental health and/or substance use disorders, call 1-800-662-HELP.
- Frontline workers (e.g., police officer, firefighter, doctor, nurse, grocery store or restaurant worker) and those who have problems with remote work and learning.
- Racial or ethnic minority groups, children with special health care needs or those with mental health conditions.
- Families grieving the loss of a loved one.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges parents to watch for signs that your child is struggling. Get help if symptoms last more than two weeks.

- An infant or young child clings to parents or has feeding and sleep problems.
- A preschooler starts sucking her thumb or wetting the bed.
- An older child is fearful, anxious, withdrawn, argues more, is more aggressive or complains of stomachaches or headaches.
- A teen gets into trouble or can't focus. Teens might hide problems because they are afraid or don't want to burden their family.

Often, a caring adult or friend can help a child or teen manage stress. The AAP suggests sticking to routines as



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much as possible, exercising, eating healthy foods and getting plenty of sleep. Limit how much time you and your kids spend on screens. And avoid the pressure to spend a lot on gifts.

To keep the season positive during the pandemic, talk with kids about culture, heritage, values and spiritual beliefs. The AAP also suggests parents show children ways to give to others. When children learn to share their time or talent with those who have less, they build resilience that will last long after the pandemic is over.

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