

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose - Australia's leading parenting educator

Making the most of these holidays

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You don't need an instruction manual to make the most of the school holidays. After all, holidays are about kicking your feet up, relaxing and getting away from the usual routines. Right?

But the festive season can be stressful for many. For parents the prospect of keeping children occupied for up to six weeks can be daunting.

Christmas can also be a difficult and lonely time for some. Sole parents and step-parents usually experience particular challenges at this time of the year as family catch-ups cause conflict, and disputes can arise over who children spend their time with.

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Here are some ways to help reduce tension over the festive season and make the holiday season enjoyable and fruitful for all:

1. Be creative with how festivities are organised.

If you are flexible with your arrangements as well as your thinking then the potentially tricky times will flow more easily. For instance, two or more Christmas dinners may be needed so everyone is included.

2. Mix up the routines.

The best part about holidays is the change from the routines of school-life. Some kids feel comfortable with the routines of school-life and can feel a little lost until the new holiday routine kicks in. Be patient with these routine-junkies! Also make sure you begin adjusting the routine as returning to school comes closer so kids are prepared for going to bed and getting up at earlier times.

3. Mix 'me' time with 'them' time.

Plan a mixture of outdoor activities or trips with quiet at-home activities where you can relax and recharge your own batteries. The holidays give you a chance to spend time as a family but you also need to take some time for yourself each day. It helps to let your kids know that you are having some timeout too.

4. Resist being your child's home entertainment machine.

Give children opportunities to keep themselves occupied or think of inexpensive, fun ways to keep themselves amused. "I'm bored" is an invitation for kids to keep themselves occupied rather than for you to keep them amused.

5. Team up with other families.

Whether it is sharing celebrations with other families or just holidaying with friends, holidays offer the chance to broaden your child's social circle.

Make sure you provide the three types of activities that children want with their parents – i.e. **rituals and celebrations**, including family mealtimes; **one-on-one activities** where you spend some time alone with each child; and **unstructured, impromptu activities** such as playing simple games, storytelling and walks around the neighbourhood. These are important relationship-building activities that bind families

together and enable you to build up emotional collateral with kids as they move into adolescence.



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