



**Programs for Parents, Inc.**  
 Comprehensive Services for Families & Children

# Childcare Matters

## A Child's No Stress Holiday



Newsletter 121  
 Parent Edition  
 December 2008

### *This Month's Theme:* **Just Celebrate**

The holidays can be stressful for adults. Make holidays a celebratory time by forgetting the stress and focusing on having fun with your child.

#### What's Inside?

*Holiday Stories* ..... 3  
*Holiday Activities* ..... 4,5  
*My Last Edition* ..... 6



It's that time of year again. There's a mixture of excitement and frivolity in the air. There's also some stress and that tension can ruin what otherwise could be a wonderful holiday for you and your family. While it's important for you to control the stress levels in your life, it's even more important for your child. While he can't voice his feelings, he can feel stress. However, his stresses are very different from yours and can affect the way he develops and learns.

Your child has stress hormones, just like an adult. When under stress his body produces a hormone called cortisol. (Kolb and Wishaw, 2001) You may have heard of this in relation to weight loss, but it has many other implications in the body. Small amounts of cortisol allow us to react to situations and solve problems. But large amounts released over long periods of time can be detrimental to learning, leading to memory problems and your child's ability to self regulate or control himself. Unlike an adult, your child is not stressed by shopping, finances, work pressures or trying to please everyone around him. He has his own set of stresses. Transitions, a rushed schedule and difficulties relating or communicating all stress young children.



### **Transitions**

Moving from parent to provider can be stressful for toddlers. A study conducted in 2002 (Snider, 2002) found that fifteen month old toddlers have double the cortisol levels in the first hour of a new child care situation. They also found that parents can reduce that stress by spending more time at child care during the first weeks of care. This is why it's so important for Moms and Dads to set up care before they start back to work. Toddlers also react to other transitions, like changes in their normal routine. Even the little changes, we think are exciting, like replacing their normal play time with a holiday party can cause stress. It's important that you always give your child the time he needs to

move from one activity to the next, especially if it's something new. Give him plenty of advance notice that a change is coming and allow him the time to adjust. Tell him in the morning if you have a special activity planned. Use language he understands such as, "after playtime" or "after lunch." Ten to fifteen minutes before the activity, tell him again. If your child has difficulty making changes, you've given him time to make any adjustments he needs to cope.

### **The Holiday Rush**

Over-stimulation or the constant exposure to planned activities also stress your child. This can be true at home or child care. Make sure your child care situation is peaceful and moves at a child's pace, rather than using prescribed curriculum stuffed with holiday activities that your child has to keep up with. Even though it's a festive month, you need to keep the celebration under control. Your child will be perfectly happy if you keep your simple routine and just inject a little holiday spirit into his activities. For instance, don't upset his normal routine with a blowout day of crafts and cookie baking. Use his normal art time to do holiday crafts and make sure he gets his full free play time. Your child need this. While all the activities seem fun in themselves, young children don't have the vocabulary to tell you when they've had enough. Unfortunately, you won't know until his tears are flowing.

### **Peer Problems**

There is some evidence that raised cortisol levels from stressed lives can lead to difficult peer

relationships in young children. (Watamura et al., 2003) Although, it can't be said for sure if it's the raised cortisol level that causes the relationship issues or that the cortisol level is being raised by a difficult relationship. You need to stay close when your toddler is playing with friends, especially during this exciting time. Any extra stress he is experiencing can exhibit itself through his play and toddlers simply don't know what to do when conflict arises. If you observe a group of toddlers, you'll find some children have an especially difficult time understanding how to navigate the social landscape of relationships. They need to be taught. Parents can help toddlers, especially when they are in small group situations. Practicing their social skills with their best friend can help them with their relationships at child care. In a one-on-one play time they only need to figure out the complexities of one friend's personality, instead of dealing with the challenges of a group dynamic.

### **Difficulties Communicating**

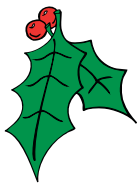
We're all aware of the terrible twos or sometimes terrible threes. Much of that stress comes from the frustration your child feels because he can't communicate with his friends or family. Help him decrease his holiday stress by allowing him the necessary time to show you what he needs and always say the words out loud when you discover what he wants. Learning to communicate effectively won't happen overnight, but he is anxious to speak to you and it will happen faster in a home that is filled with talking and reading. Do

your best to understand him and translate his wishes to his friends when he is having difficulty getting his point across. Soon he will pick up the words he needs to ease his own stress.

### **Celebrate the Important Things**

The most important thing you can do for your child is to celebrate the simple things. Watch the snow fall outside the window, sit under a blanket and read a book and use this month to actually slow down and simplify your schedule. The quiet time at home will help you appreciate each party and get together. The alternative is mindlessly accepting every invitation and having your child grumpy and exhausted on the very day you're supposed to be celebrating. Take some time to stay in your pajamas all day and enjoy a cookie and some hot cocoa while watching a family movie. And remember, you deserve vacation days. Hopefully, you've scheduled some time to relax and enjoy your life before the start of the new year. You deserve it.

*Wishing Every  
Family  
The Happiest  
Holidays and the  
Very Best in the  
New Year.*



# Favorite Holiday Stories

## **Fredrico and the Magi's Gift** by Beatriz Vidal

This is the story of a Latin American Christmas. To celebrate the end of the Christmas season (January 5th) the Latin American people celebrate the coming of the Magi, the three wise men. Every year the wise men, who originally brought gifts to baby Jesus, ride through the sky and deliver gifts to children. Fredrico waits in the night staring at the brightly lit constellations and finally sees the Magi soaring through the dark sky. Deeply colored illustrations help to tell this authentic Latin American tale, similar in spirit to the American Christmas, but not quite the same. (Ages 2 - 8)

## **A Confused Hanukkah** by Jon Koons

The people of the village of Chelm have always celebrated Hanukkah. However, this year the Rabbi is away and the villagers have forgotten their traditions. So they send out Yossel, a likable young man, to get them the information they need. But Yossel ends up in the wrong town and returns with Christmas traditions. When the Rabbi returns he sees the error and gathers the village to tell them the real story of Hanukkah. This is a wonderful story for children who have blurred the lines between Christmas and Hanukkah and need to delineate between the winter celebrations. (Ages 3 - 10)

## **Moishe's Miracle**

Moishe's family is having a tough year and there may not be enough money to make the Hanukkah latkes. But Moishe receives a gift, a magic frying pan, for his own personal use. This frying pan makes latkes, and lots of them. But unfortunately when someone else uses the pan the results are not to be celebrated. A fun tale with a happy ending. (ages 3 - 8)

## **Olivia Helps With Christmas** by Ian Falconer

Olivia wants to be the best helper of all, but she doesn't always do things quite so perfectly. But when all is said and done it's still a festive holiday with singing, cookies for Santa and of course, the wait at the window for his arrival. The little piglets finally fall asleep and wake up to a morning of presents and play in the fresh white snow. The perfect family holiday. (Ages 2 - 6)

## **'Twas the Night Before Christmas** illustrated by Matt Tavares

The poem is so familiar, it's easy to forget how lovely it is to read aloud. The illustrator will remind you with these old fashioned charcoal drawings that bring you back to simpler times. The book is designed in simple green and red, with a touch of gold to add sparkle. A perfect edition to your permanent holiday library. (All ages)

## **Potato Latkes**

1 pound potatoes  
1/2 cup finely chopped onion  
1 large egg, lightly beaten  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
Olive oil for frying  
Accompaniments: sour cream and applesauce

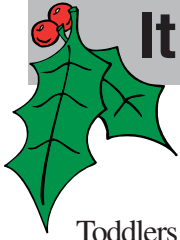
Peel potatoes and coarsely grate them by hand, transferring to a large bowl of cold water as grated. Soak the potatoes 1 to 2 minutes after the last batch is added to water, then drain well in a colander.

Spread the grated potatoes and onion on a kitchen towel and roll up jelly roll style. Twist the towel tightly to wring out as much liquid as possible. Transfer the potato mixture to a bowl and stir in the egg and salt.

## **DO NOT ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO HELP FRY THE LATKES**

Cover the bottom of a nonstick skillet with olive oil and heat over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking. Spoon two Tbls. of potato mixture per latke into the skillet, spreading into 3-inch rounds with a fork. Reduce heat to moderate and cook until browned, about 5 minutes. Turn the latkes over and cook about 5 more minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain and season with salt. Add more oil as needed. Latkes should cool before serving to infants and toddlers. Serve with a side of applesauce.

[epicurious.com](http://epicurious.com)



# It's Time to Celebrate

## Ring My Chimes

Toddlers and babies love bells. And why not? All they have to do is move and they make the most festive sound. Toddler-safe bells are a great investment. You can find them in any store that carries rhythm instruments or look online at [www.liveandlearn.com](http://www.liveandlearn.com), which has very reasonable prices. Please check to be sure all instruments are child safe. For now, do not use any toys imported from China, due to the possible lead content. Babies especially like to hang on to these all day and will chew them.

There are many types of bells. A favorite at story hour was wrist bells. These bells can be held in your hands or on your wrists and ankles. They are soft and flexible, yet make a big sound. There are bells on sticks, single bell chimes and even bells on long strip that you can hang around the house. The choice is yours. The following are some activities that have no age restriction. Everyone can participate.

### Jingle Bells

Jingle Bells is a classic winter tune. If you don't remember the song, ask a friend or find it at numerous web-sites. Toddlers love the chorus, which makes the song perfect for teaching "quiet bells" and "noisy bells." Sing the verse using a very soft voice, showing your child how to keep her bells soft and quiet. When it's time for the chorus, have her ring and sing with everything she's got. She'll love the contrast.

### Wrist Bell Activities

Take out a number of wrist bells and see how creative your child can be about where she places them and how she can make a noise. She can put them on her head, hang them on her ears and nose, place them on her wrists and ankles and dance up her jingles. She can shake them in boxes or clang them together. There are endless ways to make a joyful noise.

## Holiday Bar Cookies

This is a perfect recipe for your child because she can do most of it and the result is quite impressive.

10-inch by 15-inch jelly roll pan lined with heavy duty aluminum foil. Leave some extra foil at the ends to help pull the bars out of the pan.

- 18 ounces of white chocolate chips
- 12 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups of graham cracker crumbs
- 1 1/3 cups shredded coconut
- 3 cups of chopped almonds
- 1 2/3 cups sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup of crushed candy canes

1. Melt the butter and pour it into the jelly roll pan spreading it evenly over the bottom of the lined pan.
2. Have your child take handfuls of graham cracker crumbs and spread them all over the bottom of the pan. When she is done, use your hand to press them firmly into the butter.
3. Have her sprinkle the coconut on top of the graham cracker crumbs and then do the same with the white chocolate chips.
4. Pour the sweetened condensed milk over the entire pan. You can have your child do this using a small measuring cup.
5. Bake for approximately 30 minutes at 350 degrees, watching carefully that the nuts don't burn. Remove from the oven and immediately sprinkle the crushed candy canes over the top.
6. Cool for 20 minutes. Grab the edge of the foil and slide the bars out of the pan. Allow them to cool completely.

# Gifts From A Toddler's Heart



## Gifts From A Toddler's Heart

Toddlers love to give gifts, just like the rest of us. Nothing is as precious as the look on your toddler's face as they present their homemade gifts to their family and friends. The gift should be an expression of their creativity with as little help as possible from you. The following are some ideas that allow them creative expression with an end result they can wrap up to present to loved ones on their special holiday. You need to have a full collage box. Take a trip to the craft store or collect scraps from family and friends to liven up your collection.

### Picture Frames

You can purchase cardboard picture frames for very reasonable prices at your local framing store. If you have a larger budget, you may also purchase unfinished wood picture frames. Make sure you have plenty of Elmer's Glue. Give your child one frame, glue and the collage box and let her decorate. After she's done, if she likes, help her add a bit of sparkle with some glitter, keeping it under your control. Toddlers don't have the motor control to keep the glitter contained and you'll find sparkles around your house until 2010.

When your child is done, trim the inside edges so the decorations are not covering the picture opening. Take this a step further by using your camera to take photos of your child to be placed in the frame.

### Storage Box

You can use the same process as above to make a decorated storage box out of shoeboxes. You'll have to take some time the night before to cover the shoebox in white paper. If you have a larger budget you can purchase white boxes from *The Container Store*. This will save you the trouble of wrapping. Your child can decorate tops and sides using scraps and doo dads from the collage box. Boxes also look nice when decorated with the myriad of stickers available at craft stores. Buy these in bulk whenever possible. Your child will go through them quickly.

Once the boxes are decorated, fill them with homemade cookies, line them with felt or fur or present them as is. Below are two online sources for stickers.

[www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com)

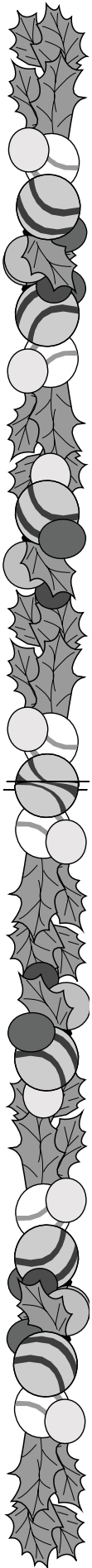
[www.stickersgalore.com](http://www.stickersgalore.com)

## Children's Stories

In issue 119 we talked about your child sharing her stories with you. If you have been writing these down over the course of the year, you have the most precious gift to share with grandparents. They will appreciate hearing what their grand-child has to say while they are not there. Wrap up their writing journals and start a new one immediately, so you're ready for next year.

If you have not started, it's not too late to have your child write a story. Every day take a small amount of time and ask them what they want to say in their book. It can be very simple things, "Hello Grandma," or it can be an elaborate story from their imagination. The most important thing is that it's their words. If you do this year after year, grandparents will have a very special memento representing their grandchild's growth.





Dear Parents,

*This will be the last edition of Childcare Matters that I write. For those children I got to know, it was an honor to have the chance to read to them. When I could no longer visit, it was a pleasure to speak to you through this newsletter. And now, that too comes to an end. From the very beginning, one hundred and twenty one issues ago, I have written about child development, early education, the importance of play and child care regulations. These subjects change as we learn from new research. However, the most important thing never changes. Happy and healthy children are raised in an atmosphere of love and kindness. As we grow, we learn to learn without that emotional connection. But, preschool children do not. For them, the world is all about love. So..... first love them and then..... treat them with kindness. If all you teach comes from that place, you've made a huge step toward becoming an outstanding parent.*

*With Great Respect,  
Elizabeth Allen*

## WARMLINE

Providing you with practical, accurate information on health, behavior issues and regulatory information relating to the children in your care.

**1-800-713-9006**



### **Directory**

Montclair Office  
973-744-4050

Newark Office  
973-297-1114

### **Childcare Matters**

December 2008  
Newsletter 121

#### **Writer/Editor**

Elizabeth A. Allen

#### **Copy Editor**

Susan Boyle

#### **Page Layout**

Elizabeth A. Allen

#### **Distribution**

Simona Bana  
Family Child Care  
Department

#### **Published by**

Programs for Parents  
Beverly Lynn, CEO  
20 Church Street  
Montclair NJ, 07042  
973-744-4050

Childcare Matters is a monthly newsletter published for Registered Family Child Care Providers and parents using their services.