

A Child's No Stress Holiday



Newsletter 121
Provider 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 the children.

What's Inside?

<i>Holiday Stories</i>	3
<i>Holiday Activities</i>	4,5
<i>My Last Edition</i>	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 the children. While it's important for you to control the stress levels in your life, it's even more important for the children you care for. While they can't voice their feelings, they can feel stress. However, their stresses are very different from yours and can affect the way they develop and learn.

Children have stress hormones, just like adults. When under stress their bodies produce 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. 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 a child's ability to self regulate or control themselves. Unlike adults children are not stressed by shopping, finances, work pressures or trying to please everyone around them. They have their 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 and that you welcome them in your home during this difficult time. 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 children the time they need to move from one activity to the next, especially if it's something new. Give them plenty of advance notice that a change is coming and allow them the time to adjust. Tell them in the morning if you have a special activity planned. Use language they understand such as, "after playtime" or "after lunch." Ten to fifteen minutes before the activity tell them again. Some of them may not like the change, but you've given them time to make any adjustments they need to cope.

The Holiday Rush

Over-stimulation or the constant exposure to planned activities also stress young children. This can be true at home or child care. Make sure your child care schedule is peaceful and moves at a child's pace, rather than using prescribed curriculum stuffed with holiday activities that the children have to keep up with. Even though it's a festive month, you need to keep the celebration under control. Children are perfectly happy if you keep your simple routine and just inject a little holiday spirit into their activities. For instance, don't upset their normal routine with a blowout day of crafts and cookie baking. Use their normal art time to do holiday crafts and make sure they get their full free play time. Children need this. While all the activities seem fun in themselves, children don't have the vocabulary to tell you when they've had enough. Unfortunately, you won't know until the 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 as toddlers are playing, especially during this exciting time. Any extra stress they brought to child care can exhibit itself through their 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 preschool. They need to be taught. As a family child care provider you are in a unique position to help toddlers due to the small group and the close relationships. Each child need only learn about the personalities of five other children. The stability they experience being in your small setting with a few close friends, instead of setting where there is a constant turnover of teachers and students is much less stressful for them.

Difficulties Communicating

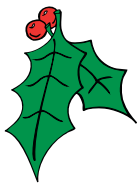
We're all aware of the terrible twos or sometimes terrible threes. Much of that stress comes from the frustration children feel because they can't communicate with their friends or caregivers. Help them decrease their holiday stress by allowing them the necessary time to show you what they need and always say the words out loud when you discover what they want. Learning to communicate effectively won't happen overnight, but they are 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 them and translate their wishes to their friends when they are having difficulty getting their point across. Soon they will pick up the words they need, which will ease their own stress.

Celebrate the Important Things

The most important thing you can do for the children in your care 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. Parents will appreciate that you're keeping their children relaxed and happy, especially if their schedule seems to be spinning out of control. Take care of yourself. When the children aren't there, stay in your pajamas all day. Enjoy a cookie and some hot cocoa while watching a 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
Child Care Provider
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 illustration 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

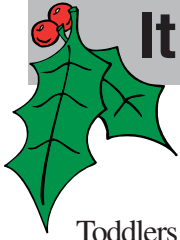
Peel the potatoes and coarsely grate by hand, transferring to a large bowl of cold water as grated. Soak the potatoes 1 to 2 minutes after last batch is added to water, then drain them well in a colander.

Spread the grated potatoes and onion on a kitchen towel and roll them up jelly roll style. Twist 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 CHILDREN 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 tablespoons of potato mixture per latke into skillet, spreading into 3-inch rounds with a fork. Reduce heat to moderate and cook until browned, about 5 minutes. Turn latkes over and cook about 5 minutes more. 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



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, 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 the children how to keep their bells soft and quiet. When it's time for the chorus, have them ring and sing with everything they've got. They love the contrast.

Wrist Bell Activities

Take out a number of wrist bells and see how creative the children can be about where they place them and how they can make a noise. They can put them on their head, hang them on ears and noses, place them on wrist and ankles and dance up their jingles. They 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 the children because they 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 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups shredded coconut
- 3 cups of chopped almonds
- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ 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 the children take handfuls of graham cracker crumbs and spread them all over the bottom of the pan. When they are done, use your hand to press them firmly into the butter.
3. Have the children layer 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 the children do this using small measuring cups.
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 a toddler's face as they present their homemade gifts to their parents. 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 also purchase unfinished wood picture frames. Make sure you have plenty of Elmer's Glue. Give the children the glue and the collage box and let them decorate. After they are done, if they'd like, add some glitter for sparkle, but you must maintain control over the container. Toddlers don't have the motor control to keep glitter contained and you'll find it around the house until 2010.

When they are done, trim the inside edges so their decorations are not covering the picture opening. Take this a step further by using your camera to take pictures of all the children to be placed in their frames.

Storage Box

You can use the same process as above to make decorated storage boxes out of shoeboxes. You'll have to take some time the night before to cover all the shoeboxes 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. The children can then 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. Children go through them quickly.

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

www.orientaltrading.com

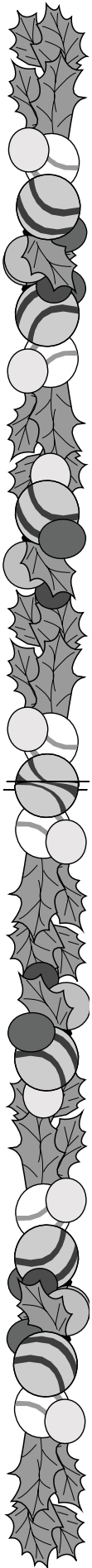
www.stickersgalore.com

Children's Stories

In issue 119 we talked about children sharing their stories with you. If you have been writing these down over the course of the year, you have the most precious gift of all. Parents will appreciate hearing what their children have to say while they are at child care. 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 the children write a story. Every day take some time with each one of them and ask them what they want to say in their book. It can be very simple things, "Hello Mom." or it can be an elaborate story from their imagination. The most important thing is that it's their words. If you do these year after year, parents have their child's development documented in a very special way.





Dear Family Childcare Providers,

This will be the last edition of Childcare Matters that I write. It was an honor and a pleasure to be invited into your homes to read to your children. 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. You were a constant inspiration. Your tireless efforts are so important to so many people. 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 kindly. If all you teach comes from that place, you've made a huge step toward becoming an outstanding child care provider.

*With Great Respect,
Elizabeth Allen*

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