



TERM 02 TOPIC

Parents Newsletter

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TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S ROUTINE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

December...

The month of long nights, presents, decorations, nativity plays, shopping, parties, visits, Christmas songs, hot chocolate, advent calendars... In one word - excitement, lots of excitement. Although many welcome this month with open arms enjoying every bit of change in routine, some of us tend to struggle a bit.

All this merriment can create a lot of stress and put pressure on our nervous systems. Children are the ones who seem to struggle with it the most, especially when the school is out and their routines are interrupted. We, as parents, arrange things for our families with the best intentions to have a good time, but this change in schedule can impact our behaviour and mood. Hence December, for some families, also tends to be the month of intense emotions, tears, meltdowns and arguments.

One way to manage this is by reflecting on how you can maintain your child's routine even during the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Routines help children navigate the world of excitement; they also help parents to assist emotional regulation during the festivities. **Below** are some ideas on how to achieve this.

Protect sleeping and eating patterns

Letting our hair down, turning the alarm clock off and just generally being more relaxed about eating and sleeping are things that some of us look forward to during the holiday season. However, it is important that we prioritise our children's sleeping and eating patterns. Make sure that on most days, your children go to bed at their usual time and get the right amount of sleep. The same applies to eating patterns: sticking to your usual eating schedule during the holidays will not only help your children manage change and excitement better but will also maintain their energy and blood sugar levels. In turn, this will make it less likely for your children to have meltdowns. So, as much as you can, stick to your children's usual sleeping and eating patterns. If your planned activities clash with these patterns, bring along snacks and make sure you don't book anything ambitious for the following day.



Have a game plan for screen time

Limiting screen time usage in general is important. Doing so is even more important during the holiday season. To help you with this, remember the basic premises:

- How much screen time will depend on how old your child is and whether screen time affects their behaviour, mood, sleep and cognitive abilities.
- Not all screen time is the same: using screens to help your children learn skills, do something creative, educational and analytical is better than just numbly scrolling on social media.



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Watching a Christmas film together, while talking about it, improves your child's comprehension and the feeling of belonging within the family.

- Refrain from using screens as “baby sitters” (or at least not as often). Think of other activities your child could be doing during the holiday season – playing with all the new toys, maybe?
- Use the screen time to encourage children to move and engage in physical activities – anything that gets them to get up and move their bodies is beneficial especially during the festive season when we all tend to eat more and move less.
- Limit the use of screens in bedrooms, especially at night and around bedtime to help with maintaining those sleeping patterns discussed above.
- Model positive screen usage and behaviour for your children. Be mindful of how much time you spend on screens during the holiday season. Again, there is a difference between scrolling on social media and talking to your family/friends via a screen.

Plan for at least 60 active minutes a day

We, as species, are made to move. When we don't move enough, our bodies and minds start to suffer. In children, this often comes out as fidgety, aggressive, annoying behaviour, issues with sleeping and eating. Unfortunately, according to research, children's physical activity decreases during holidays and especially winter ones so chances are if we, as parents, don't do anything about it, our children will struggle mentally and emotionally. The way forward is to make physical activity a part of your daily routine during the holiday season. This doesn't have to be anything big or expensive: walks, bike/scooter rides, playing in the park or back garden, bouncing on the trampoline, dancing, playing catch...



Take part of home on the road

If you are planning to go away with your family during the festive season, remember that that might be potentially problematic for your children. In order to make it the least disruptive, ground your children in sight, sound, smell and structure wherever you go. Practically, this means bringing something from home with you that will look like home (a photo from your children's bedroom?), sound like home (some white noise or a toy that makes a noise), smell like home (your child's pillow or used pillowcase) and provide similar structure to home. It is possible that you might have to forewarn your friends and relatives about this – just be honest and explain why this is beneficial for your child.



Finally, remember that holidays or not, children still have the same emotional and physical needs. Ignoring them or trying to override them usually doesn't end well. So, if you can, slow down, be present, don't be too ambitious, don't over plan and stick to the routines.



Merry Christmas from Marijana and the whole of Move More team!

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