



Winter Break!

Winter break intertwined with the holidays and family traditions can produce feelings of excitement as well as worry for us all, especially kids.

Just before the break, elementary school age students often get caught up in all the wonder, excitement swirling around the holidays and the extended time off. Additional poise and patience is often needed to help students remain on task.

Middle and high school students likewise look forward to the extended break and the holidays, however, they also tend to experience more anxiety during this time. For many of them, they are tasked with completing old and new end-of-semester assignments, studying and taking end of semester exams, as well as participating in family/holiday traditions even before winter break has begun.

Additionally, peer relations often dominate middle and high school students' lives and an extended break during the holidays often means less time with friends. This alone can cause worry and uneasiness about the extended time apart from their friends.

Moreover, winter break, coupled with the holiday season, can significantly alter a kid's schedule, including activities, sleep, meals and social time. For many kids, they are going from their set and consistent daily school schedules to a schedule that can feel a bit chaotic and unpredictable due to the holiday season celebrations and all the time and demands of the festivities.

Below are some suggestions for parents and/or caregivers on what they can do to make the break and celebrations less chaotic for kids.

- **Structured Routines:** Have and keep set mealtimes and bedtimes as much as possible. This may sound simple enough but as we all know, the holiday season is full of hustle and bustle and celebrations with lots of family and friends. It's easy to put aside daily routines for kids. Making a conscious effort in following a routine will provide some structure and consistency that can help alleviate unnecessary confusion and frustration for kids. Furthermore, routines will help transitioning from break back to school go much smoother for parents/caregivers and kids alike.
- **Activities & Schedule:** Give kids, especially middle and high school aged kids, some control over their schedule and activities during the break. Allow time for them to socialize and celebrate with friends. As mentioned before, extended time away from friends can be quite stressful and cause a lot of anxiety amongst middle and high school kids. You can discuss and negotiate what festivities they can choose to attend and which ones they are expected to attend.

Parents may find by doing so, their child is more involved in the family festivities they do take part in.

- **Include Kids:** Allow kids to be more involved in holiday preparations, such as planning some of the family centered activities, shopping, decorating inside and outside as well as baking and/or cooking. This not only allows kids to feel more connected to what is going on around them, but it also takes some of the holiday pressure and stress off parents/adults during this time of year.
- **Social Media/Screen Time.** Like most things, too much of anything can be unhealthy. Time spent on social media or playing video games is certainly no exception. As we already know, extended video gaming can lead to irritability, lack of sleep and can cause sensory overload. Social media may inadvertently set kids up to compare their holiday celebrations and winter break experiences to their peers. This can lead to dissatisfaction and disappointment for some when comparing their experiences to what they see on social media.
- **Down time & Relaxation.** We all need time to just decompress, relax and refuel, kids and adults alike. Building in time where nothing is planned will help allow everyone the opportunity to relax, unwind and refuel.
- **Be Observant.** It is easy to get caught up in all of the hustle and bustle during the holidays, so it is important for us to pay attention to the moods of those around us. The holidays are a mix of joy and sadness for most of us. And while it's a time to celebrate, remember kids, just like adults, often reflect and think about those that are no longer in their lives because of a move, changing of friends or death. Check in with your kids to make sure they are doing okay and enjoying their break. If you become concerned that your child might be struggling emotionally, don't be afraid to reach out for some additional support and/or services. You can go online to find out more about what kind of support and behavioral health services there are in your community and/or click on the links below for some additional information and resources regarding grief, depression and suicide prevention/crisis.
 - **Grief**
 - <https://www.mourninghope.org/>
 - <https://thecollectiveforhope.org/>
 - www.scipnebraska.com
 - **Depression**
 - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/teen-depression>
 - <https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/depression/parents-guide-to-teen-depression>
 - www.scipnebraska.com
 - **Suicide Prevention and Crisis**
 - <https://988lifeline.org/promote-national-suicide-prevention-month/>
 - <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/get-involved/digital-shareables/shareable-resources-on-suicide-prevention>
 - www.scipnebraska.com