



# Navigator's Nook

## December 2021

### **The Holidays can be a stressful time for kids, too** **By Sarah Joseph**

The holidays are a fun and joyous time but even during the best of times they can cause stress and anxiety for kids. During the holidays, there are lots of fun activities and events going on, both at home and at school. And while that can be a good thing, the reality is that all that hustle and bustle means schedules are often out of whack, bedtimes get pushed back, and routines are disrupted. As a result, it's inevitable that kids may feel out of sorts.

As we head into another year of winter holidays amid the pandemic, I wanted to highlight the fragile state of kids' mental health. The pandemic along with recent natural disasters, are taking a serious toll on the mental health of our children and us adults. Our capacity for handling changes and extra stressors is certainly diminished at this time. Let's be mindful that while we want to make this year's holiday feel more "normal" than last, "normal" might not be what we need. The hustle and bustle, the over-scheduling and trying to fit everything in might not have the same fun and joyous feel of years past. It might actually cause more stress, anxiety and behaviour challenges than we are capable of dealing with at this point.

This holiday break is a good time to slow down and listen to what kids are trying to say. Often kids express themselves through behaviour. If you've been experiencing more emotional reactions, crying, disruptive behaviours, clinginess, or demands from your children, this is their way of telling you that they are struggling. It is normal at this time (during the pandemic, with a lower capacity for stress) that we would be seeing an increase in these behaviours. It's important that we understand that we all have a lowered capacity for stress right now. But just because we can expect this doesn't mean we should push through. Understanding can be helpful in allowing us to respond to each other with more compassion, respond more thoughtfully and plan ways to rebuild our capacity. We can slow down and build some capacity back up by filling our buckets with rest, connection and play.

With this in mind, here are some Tips for Reducing Holiday Stress:

- Stick to routines as much as possible.
- Emphasize exercising, eating healthy foods and getting plenty of sleep.
- Limit how much time you and your kids spend on screens.
- Make time for peace and quiet.
- Avoid over-scheduling.
- Get outside.
- Play.

The most important way parents and teachers can help ease stress and anxiety in children during the holidays is by taking care of ourselves as much as possible. As with so many situations, the way adults handle an issue can set the tone for how kids will behave. If you let holiday stress get to you, your kids will definitely pick up on it, and behaviour is more likely to be a problem in your classroom or house.