



**Child Mind Institute**  
**4 Ways to Make Holidays Better for Kids**  
**Tips for keeping kids happy and able to enjoy the fun**  
**Rachel Ehmke**



It's easy for children to be smitten with the magic of the holidays. Fun presents. Extra sweets. A vacation from school—there's a lot to like. But with the freedom and excess of the season, sometimes kids can get a little carried away. For most families, there will be a point when the kids get overtired and cranky, or greedy about presents, or would rather play a video game than talk to Grandma. Here are some tips to keep kids happy and ready to enjoy whatever the season brings.

1. **Gifts, gifts, gifts:** Getting presents is a high point of the holidays for any kid, but they shouldn't be the only focus. As adults we know that giving presents can be just as rewarding as getting them, and we shouldn't wait to teach that lesson to our children. Even when kids are too young to buy a present, they can still make one, or help you pick out something. Some of my best holiday memories are of helping my father look for the perfect gift for Mom, or combing the mall to look for presents with my siblings as we got older. Volunteering, participating in a local toy drive, or giving each of your kids a little money to give to a charity of their choice are all great ideas for getting children in a more generous mood. Also, remember that the best gifts that you give your children probably won't be the material ones. Taking time for the whole family to get together to play a game, watch a movie, or decorate sugar cookies—these are the things that kids remember as they get older.
2. **Let them help out:** There's a lot of extra work to do around the holidays — putting up decorations, cooking big dinners, throwing parties. The Martha Stewart in all of us can take over, but it's important to take a step back and make sure our kids are included, too. Children can help set the table, decorate the house, and wrap presents. If they're too young to wrap, they can help by holding down the paper or getting the tape ready — there's always something kids can do. And at holiday time, the preparations are often as fun and as meaningful as the end product. Plus, this way kids won't feel left out — or be glued to the iPad for hours.
3. **Keep routines:** We love the holidays because they give us a break from the everyday, but that can also make them stressful, especially for kids who find routine comforting. Try to keep some things constant. Kids still need snack time, they still need special attention from you, and they still need a chance to unwind before bedtime. At family gatherings when they notice the kids are “getting antsy,” psychologist Rachel Busman says she and her sister give them their baths, get them into pajamas, and turn on a movie. “We know when they need to wind down, and no one judges us for excusing ourselves from the table to do these things,” she says. “In fact, my sister and I enjoy some great conversations during this time.”
4. **Remember they're kids:** Some holiday traditions depend on kids being on their best behavior: lengthy services, parties with lots of strangers, elaborate meals that may not appeal to picky eaters. Try to keep those to a minimum and customize festivities for your kids' frustration level. Don't schedule more than one demanding event in a day, and make sure to include physical activity and plenty of downtime.

Your kids will be grateful — and so will you.