



Children and the Holidays

Holidays come so quickly and are gone just as swiftly. It seems Jack-o'-lanterns and goblins soon give way to pilgrims and turkeys and are almost immediately replaced by the red and green symbols of the winter holidays.

If you're attempting to fit the joys of parenting in with shopping, decorating and your usually hectic schedule, it's a good idea to remind yourself about what behavior is normal and predictable from your young children.

Most children act their age. While pictures in magazines show beautifully attired, clean, calm children sitting patiently for hours on end and behaving themselves, you must keep in mind those are just pictures. Real children go through stages. Let the stages of your young ones help determine activities at holiday time.

Take time to enjoy the phase your child is in – remembering that how a child acts is tied to his or her age and stage of development.

- Although children less than a year old may love the excitement, holidays are really just another day to a child this age. It's easy for them to feel overwhelmed by too many toys, relatives or kinds of food. While it might be an important year to establish traditions, give your baby enough rest and time alone with you.
- Toddlers will be lovable, cute and curious, but probably demanding and exasperating at the same time. The big word of warning is to child-proof your home. Don't try to make too much of the holiday. They will enjoy it more next year.
- Two year olds will be so excited about everything that sparkles, glitters and blinks. They like to be a part of everything, but can't anticipate, so they can't wait to open gifts, eat the goodies, and go places. They are beginning to love pretty boxes, but probably don't care what is inside. Remember, they don't share well yet and will often hit other children and grab toys. They are stubborn and might throw a few tantrums. Don't take them shopping if you can avoid it.
- Three year olds might offer the first year where you have a little one without diapers and with a sunny disposition. They are beginning to have expectations, so you might want to decorate

early and work together on simple projects. They love gifts – both the packaging and what’s inside. They can now play with other children. This will be better when the relatives get together, except, of course, they may fight. Their excitement level is high; therefore, they may be hard to handle in the mall or shopping center. They love to ride around and look at the light displays.

- Four year olds are enthusiastic, silly, eager and fun. They love the holidays. They can remember well and can anticipate activities. Stretch out the holidays for them. Take them to events, but not too many or for too long. They may have highs and lows and may sometimes be rude, but they generally are under control. Most four year olds are dramatic and imaginative, so this is a perfect time for them. **One reminder: You need a lot of energy.**
- Five year olds are composed and “together”. They are much improved in behavior over previous years because they are beginning to set their own limits. At this age, they may actually keep Grandma’s surprise gift a secret long enough to let her open the package. Since they like to help and do things alone, this would be a good year for projects. This is the first year it may be a good idea to take them shopping. Expect a long list of gifts, but remember they are better off with just a few.
- Six year olds want to be the hub of it all. This is not the easiest Christmas for them, however. They might brag, think no one else can compare to them and forget their manners. They like making things and can stretch a project over several days, so try more involved projects. Most are really getting out of the preschool years and need to be treated as such, or you are in for trouble.

Whatever you do, take time to enjoy your children and the holidays. It is a once-in-a-lifetime role.

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