

Planning Ahead for the Holidays: Don't Be a Scrooge, how to Make the Holidays Fun for Your Family in 2020



With COVID-19 cases surging during the holiday season, the way we celebrate this year is going to be different for most of us. Following the recommendations of the CDC means limiting gatherings to only those people in our households. Traveling to see grandparents and having extended family over to celebrate are being discouraged in an effort to slow the spread of the virus. Is that disappointing? Sure, it is. Does it mess with long-standing family traditions? Absolutely.

We can choose to focus on the sadness and disappointment of not being able to carry on as usual. But when we do that and when we talk about everything that won't happen this year – the shared meals, game playing, lighting of candles, congregating in places of worship – we stay stuck in that sadness and disappointment. And the little ones in our lives – yes, even the teenagers – hear what we say. And they get stuck in the sadness and disappointment, too.

Stay Positive for Your Children (and Yourself) Most of us have heard the expression: Watch what you say and do because little eyes are watching you. Children often get their clues on how to feel about something from the adults in their lives. It's important to pay attention to the things you're saying and doing – especially those things that you don't want your children to pick up on. This is true at any time but even more so during this time when we could all use holiday cheer.

So how can you make the holidays special for your children (and yourself)? Set a better tone. Present a better outlook. Acknowledge that celebrations will be different and traditions will be missed, but then turn the focus to what you're able to do for the holiday and how you can still celebrate.

Some decisions will need to be made regarding your normal traditions and whether those are adaptable during the pandemic. There may be some traditions you can't include in this year's festivities. Those decisions can be made as a family – try to include your kids in decision-making whenever possible. Ask them what they most look forward to during the holidays and then brainstorm how to make those activities happen or how you can alter them to make them safe.

Take family games, for example. If you plan, you can still play games virtually with that big extended family of yours:

- Certain games are easily adaptable to video chatting – Scattergories, Boggle, Pictionary, Password and Family Feud, to name a few.
- Play BINGO. Send printable BINGO cards to family or deliver in advance. Plan for prizes to be given in each household.
- Have older children and adults playing? Create a Trivial Pursuit-style game with questions about family history or what's been happening more recently with everyone.
- Play a question card game (like Hygge) to spark silly or meaningful discussions.

Focus on What You Can Control The holidays are a time to connect with others, and you can still do that even though you can't physically be in the same space. But you do need to be intentional about how you go about it. Maybe this year is also an opportunity to focus on your immediate family more and experience some real quality time with them. Savor those traditions of yours that won't be changing – baking cookies, decorating gingerbread houses, crafting decorations, watching your favorite movies and finishing puzzles together.

Is there something you've always wanted to incorporate into your holiday but never could because there was always so much else going on? Well, now is the time to do that! Take your time going on a drive to look at Christmas lights. Watch home movies together. Make s'mores on the grill. Get creative, and create new traditions.

You have the choice to make the best of the holiday season. Put your focus on what you can control – what you know you'll be able to do. Ask friends and family for ideas, and keep them involved in the planning process to help build anticipation. Yes, the holidays will be different this year. *And* they can still be enjoyable. Remember, support is always just a phone call away. If you are finding it difficult stay in the holiday spirit this season give Best Care EAP a call at 402-354-8000 or 800-801-4182 or email eap@bestcareeap.org.

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