

5 Ways You Can Support Children with Behavioral Challenges

DURING THE HOLIDAY BREAK

For families of students with emotional and behavioral challenges, extended school breaks—and the disruption in routine that they bring—often increase stress and anxiety in the home. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the holiday break.

- 1 Maintain structure with schedules/calendar.** This can help with the transition to being at home.
 - Create a daily calendar for the break, with any activities clearly indicated on the calendar.
 - Make a consistent daily schedule, especially for weekdays.
- 2 Review expectations daily.** Review the expectations for upcoming activities daily.
 - For a child who struggles to communicate and express emotions appropriately:
 - » Practice greetings and how to show excitement in a socially acceptable way.
 - » Write down three topics and role-play what those conversations could sound like.
 - » Practice saying goodbye and what to do if your child feels sad after a goodbye.
 - For a child who frequently argues with siblings and other family members:
 - » Practice sitting quietly and getting attention appropriately.
 - » Practice coping skills, like squeezing a stress ball or deep breathing.
 - » Identify and schedule an activity that your child would like to do with siblings.
 - For a child who can be aggressive when asked to do non-preferred tasks:
 - » Provide a choice of tasks.
 - » Practice how to respond to requests and praise your child for responding positively.
 - » Identify and schedule a task your child wants to do after completing the tasks.
- 3 Follow through with incentives and praise for positive behaviors.** Be sure to make good on any predetermined incentives after children meet established expectations.
 - Use behavior-specific praise to acknowledge positive behaviors.
 - When doing so, state the exact behavior observed: “Great job petting the dog gently.”
- 4 Promote active engagement.** While adding incentives can promote engagement, there are other strategies that may be helpful, too.
 - Promote conversation and mindfulness about how your child is spending their time.
 - Create simple games related to projects around your home, then provide praise and a choice of activity when the game is finished.
- 5 Be realistic about expectations.** Knowing your child’s abilities and limitations is important. If your child seems frustrated or upset, stay calm and suggest a change of scenery or a quick task that helps your child feel successful.

Other Tips

1. State your expected behaviors in positive terms. Remind children what they should be doing rather than what they shouldn’t be doing.
2. Look for opportunities to remind children about expected behavior while they’re behaving well.
3. Offer choices that are limited and reasonable.
4. Stay calm. If there’s an issue, take a moment and a deep breath before responding.

We hope these tips are helpful, and wish you and your family all the best this holiday season!