

Thriving During the Teenage Years - Holiday Time is Family Time

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Boulder Valley School District December 2007

As we enter the holiday season, we have a wonderful opportunity to spend time with family and nurture those important relationships. Too often what starts out as a wonderful time together ends in conflict and disappointment. This year you can increase the chances that this special time with family will be positive and enriching for everyone. In addition to planning the holiday dinners, family vacations and gifts, consider putting some planning into the relationship building potential that this time together offers.

One reason that families stumble a bit during the holidays is that in our busy, hectic lives we're simply not used to the luxury of having uninterrupted time together. Thus a little planning can go along way. Consider the following suggestions to maximize your success:

1. **Set the tone by openly discussing the family's goals for the holidays.** At a positive moment initiate a discussion with family members regarding the upcoming holidays and try to reach some agreement on a unified effort to have a positive time together.
2. **Focus on FUN.** It is unfortunate that during the year simply having fun together is often such a low priority. Don't underestimate the therapeutic value both emotionally and physically that is derived from engaging in fun activities.
3. **Make sure that EVERYONE'S voice is included.** Regardless of age and status in the family, everyone needs to have a voice in the holiday plans in order to achieve success. This empowers every member of the family and significantly increases their ownership of the plan and resulting effort to increase the likelihood for success.
4. **Troubleshoot by discussing potential conflicts.** It can be useful to discuss past holiday/family conflicts, particularly those that occur frequently. Without placing blame, encourage all family members to identify potential strategies to effectively address these issues should they occur.
5. **Brainstorm potential activities.** Whether you'll be home or away for the holidays, encourage the family to generate a list of potential activities during the holidays and list them all. Once everyone has run out of ideas, go back to the list and refine it to the activities that are realistic and endorsed by most members. Having everyone rate potential activities can be a useful measure of their interest.
6. **Focus on the positive.** As parents it is natural for us to focus on our children's' negative behavior and provide little attention and feedback when our children are behaving. Put extra effort into choosing your battles during this precious time and focus on what makes you proud.
7. **Express your positive feelings.** Our feeling of love for our children far outweighs the frequency that we share those feelings with them. The holidays are a wonderful time to make up for that by making a point of letting them know through our words and actions.
8. **Minimize negative interaction.** When negative behavior occurs, provide immediate feedback and if appropriate whatever consequence is necessary and move forward. Remind everyone of the family's goals for the holidays and get back on track.

Putting a little effort into the holiday season will help to create special time that your family will long remember and treasure. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!