



Breaking with tradition
without breaking your family

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'I'm That Kind of Ski Mom'
Hitting the slopes with the family

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When sickness comes
for the holidays

BY LARA KRUPICKA

It starts out with your child being tired and looking a little under the weather. But it's the holiday season so you chalk it up to the extra activity and some richer foods than normal. Soon though, you realize what's really happening. What's happening is your child is sick and tomorrow is the big day.

While we'd prefer not have to deal with it, the reality is most families face illness during a major holiday at some point in time. Given the right attitude and a good "Plan B," you can still make holiday memories. Here are a few tips on celebrating through (and in spite of) varying degrees of illness:

SHORT-TERM ILLNESS

Sarah Williams' family enjoyed Christmas celebrations with relatives, but they still had a special event on the calendar when two of her children came down with the stomach flu.

"Two days after Christmas we had tickets to a play that my aunt had given them. They were going to be gone the whole day," she explains.

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What teachers really want for Christmas

BY SARAH NEWCOMB

Teachers are a special part of your child's school life and certainly deserve to be acknowledged at Christmas time. However, finding a gift to show your appreciation can be incredibly time-consuming and costly.

If you're not sure what to get your child's teacher this Christmas, look no

further! We've compiled some of the best (and inexpensive) gifts that are sure to make the teacher on your list feel appreciated:

DO IT YOURSELF
ASSEMBLE A COOKIE MIX

Have your child decorate a clear Mason jar using glitter glue, stickers

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WHEN SICKNESS COMES: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Instead they stayed home to allow the sick children to recuperate. But rather than mope around the house, Williams planned a special activity: game day. Her three children each picked a favorite game and together they played all three.

"It was fun. It actually forced us to do something we would not have done on a normal day," Williams says.

While not every family may be able to have a game day with their sick children, the holiday doesn't have to be a complete bust. Follow your regular traditions, albeit in a more subdued form out of respect for the person who is ill. Include them as much as possible, while giving them space to simply be sick.

Your Plan B could include a second celebration once the child (or parent) has recovered. Because it's not the actual holiday, it won't be exactly the same. So don't try to make it that way. Find opportunities to make it uniquely special - like the Williams' game day.

HOSPITAL STAYS AND MORE SERIOUS ILLNESS

No one wants to consider a hospital stay during a holiday. But sometimes it can't be avoided, whether due to an accidental injury or chronic illness. The best resource for coping with a special date on the calendar while in the hospital is the hospital staff. Find out from your child's doctor or the hospital social worker what activities the hospital plans for the holiday. And discuss the expectations your family might have.

There's no getting around the fact that your child or other sick family member won't be at home for the holiday. Don't try to ignore it. Instead address hopes kids may have for the holiday.

Rose Seelenbinder, a child life specialist at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, urges parents to be appropriately honest with their children. "We recognize it's hard to be away from home and these are hard conversations for parents to have."

Encourage your child that just because this Christmas might be different, it doesn't have to be bad. In fact, with some planning on your part, it can be exceptionally memorable.

"Think about 'how can we translate what we do at home,' in a different environment," Seelenbinder says.

It's also important not to go overboard to compensate. It may seem like a good idea, but often ends up backfiring during the transition back home.

Remember to give yourself space. Holidays can be crazy without a sickness. Add on the challenges of caring for home while making frequent hospital visits and you'll be primed for a meltdown.

"What we really encourage parents to do is take a moment for themselves and look at their whole family and how they can support everyone," says Seelenbinder.

This may mean leaving the holiday preparation to someone else. Your Plan B could include engaging in the activities available through the hospital and keeping the bedside celebration simple. Focusing on the meaning behind the celebration and not the calendar date can also free your family up to observe the holiday in a more traditional sense once the hospital stay ends.

TERMINAL ILLNESS

Millions of people use hospice services each year. So it's not uncommon for a person to be approaching death before or

during a holiday. This doesn't make it any easier, but there are approaches parents can take to help. The first is to acknowledge the situation and how that impacts the holiday.

"Don't expect it to be the same as every other year," says Dr. Don Schumacher, president and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. "You have to acknowledge that some change is coming. With every death, a new family is born. You have to figure out how to go forward."

Schumacher suggests starting a new tradition right away. You don't need to scrap your old traditions, but it is important to begin the transition. Talk with your children about how life will be changing and ask their input on what new tradition they would like to start. And if possible, include the ill person in creating the plan.

"Incorporate them in the discussion without saying they'll be gone," says Schumacher. "It shows them that you're taking on the burden."

Make sure to include visits with the sick family member in your holiday observances. Schumacher points out how this can particularly aid children as they work through issues of separation. Holiday traditions provide a great avenue for sharing memories. Talking about those memories and the role the family member has played can be powerful for enabling the child to walk toward closure as death nears.

When it comes to holiday preparations, accepting that there might come a time for "Plan B" can be a helpful process. Then when you encounter a sickness in your family, you won't have to waste energy on shifting gears. You'll be ready to find your own Plan B for adapting your celebration.

Holiday to Go

Create a holiday basket that takes your tradition to the sick room, whether in your house or at a hospital. Include these elements to make the day special:

- a traditional symbol of your family's holiday (a cornucopia, miniature Christmas tree, or Menorah)
- a holiday story book, particularly if it's one you've enjoyed together before
- a gift that can be enjoyed in bed, such as a new CD/music download
- if the patient can eat, include one or two of their favourite holiday foods that are easy to transport, like a plate of cookies.

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