



DECEMBER 2008



Family Time Work Time

A BALANCING ACT

Building Strong Families

Celebrations

Many families celebrate a special holiday this time of year. It's easy to get caught up in all the "hype" found in the media and lose track of the important reasons we are celebrating. It's a busy time of year for many people. Here are some ways to make this time of year more meaningful for you and your family:



- Be sure your child understands what you are celebrating. Spend time together talking about it. Look at old photos of past celebrations.
- Simplify your "to do" list. Keep only the most important things on your list.
- Make sure your kids have regular play times and quiet times away from the television and computer.
- Spend some time each day talking with your child. Read stories together. If you decorate or make special foods for a holiday, have your child help.
- Have regular mealtimes whenever possible. Serve nutritious meals and snacks.
- To help keep holiday stress to a minimum be sure your child gets enough sleep. Do the same for yourself.
- Teach your child to care about others. There are many ways to reach out to others during holiday times and all year long.

Donations

It's good to teach your child about doing things for others. There are many ways you and your child can reach out. Here are some ideas:

- Your child could do something special for a neighbor or relative. It could be something as simple as visiting them. Other ideas are raking leaves or running an errand.
- Make or buy some small gifts for those in nursing homes or hospitals.
- Your child could make cards and write a short note to those in nursing homes or hospitals.
- There are programs to send drawings and notes to those folks serving in our armed forces who are away from their families. Look for information about those programs in your local papers.
- There are local toy collection drives for needy families.
- Many churches have special giving projects for those in need.



Ask your child, "What's the best thing you've done for someone else? How did it feel?" You teach your child something really special when you teach about helping others!

A recommended children's book about giving and sharing is *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein.

Healthy Celebrations

Sharing a meal or snack together is often a big part of special family celebrations. These days when many are focusing on healthy eating, it is good to think about serving healthy foods for those special times with your family. Some ideas for healthy celebrations:

- A yogurt sundae bar can be fun. Everyone can build their own creations with toppings such as fresh fruit, dried fruit, granola, chopped nuts, or whatever your family likes to put on some yogurt.
- Find and prepare healthy recipes from different cultures.
- Ask your child for ideas of healthy foods. You may be surprised at the good healthy food ideas your child has.
- Vegetable and fruit platters are colorful and tasty.
- Your family may enjoy making fruit kabobs by placing bite-sized pieces of fruits or vegetables onto skewers.
- Vegetable dips or spreads can be made from salsa, hummus (a bean spread), or cottage cheese whipped in a blender with some Italian dressing mix.
- Plan some activities to do other than eating. These can be games, making decorations, or playing music to sing-a-long or dance to.



Safe Food

Do you always remember to check dates on the foods in your refrigerator and cupboard? It's important to do this. Here is a list that explains the terms that may be used on the food products you buy:



- "Sell by" date – This indicates how long a store should display the product. Purchase foods before this date has passed. The food may still be good to consume at home. An example is milk, which would still be good for at least a week beyond the date if it is properly refrigerated.
- "Best if used by" – This indicates when the quality and freshness is best. Foods are safe to purchase and consume after this date.
- "Use by" date – The manufacturer recommends consuming the food by this date for best quality. It is not a food safety date, but it is best to use the food by this date.
- "Expiration date" – Throw it out if you have not used a product by this date.
- "Coded dates" – These packing numbers are used by stores to allow them to rotate stock and respond to recalls.

Products that are past their expiration day may still be safe to eat. Brand-name manufacturers often have a toll-free number on the package for you to call if you have questions about how long a food is safe to eat. You do need to remember that foods can go bad if they are not stored properly and protected from contamination. Economy sizes need to be used up while their quality is still good. They are not a bargain if you have to throw some out.

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