

## Helping Kids Cope with the Holidays During the Pandemic

David Fassler, M.D.

This has definitely been a strange and stressful year for kids and families. The upcoming holidays are likely to be particularly challenging. Here are a few thoughts and suggestions:

1. Make your plans in advance, if possible, and tell your kids what's happening, when and why. Kids can adjust to lots of changes, but uncertainty and indecision increases stress and anxiety.
2. Try and retain as many traditions as possible, even if in a modified form. Make an extra effort to connect by phone, Zoom or FaceTime with friends and relatives you'd normally see.
3. Consider cooking familiar dishes from past celebrations.
4. Make sure kids understand why this year is different and why people aren't traveling as much as usual. Gear your explanations to their age and developmental level using words and concepts they can understand.
5. If kids get moody or frustrated, acknowledge their feelings in an open, honest and consistent manner. Let them know that lots of people are working hard to bring the pandemic to an end as quickly as possible and that they will be able to travel for the holidays and visit relatives at some time in the future.

Most kids will understand, accept and adjust to the changes. However, preparation, information and ongoing discussion can help make the holidays fun and less stressful for the whole family.

*David Fassler, MD, is a member of the Consumer Issues Committee at AACAP. Dr. Fassler is a child and adolescent psychiatrist practicing in Burlington, Vermont. He is also a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine.*