

Dealing with the Post-Holiday Letdown

“The pleasure of expecting enjoyment is often greater than that of obtaining it, and the completion of almost every wish is found a disappointment.”—Samuel Johnson, English poet

The holidays are over. A lot of time, energy, and money went into the holidays, and now it's time to get back to the routine of everyday life. For some people, that's a welcome relief. Yet, for many parents and their kids, the days after the holidays are over can stir some disappointing feelings. Here's how to deal with the letdown.

Try it...

For all parents

- Debrief the holidays as a family. Talk about how to make them better for next year. Discuss questions such as these: Which traditions do you wish to keep? Why? Which are boring? What else would you enjoy doing?
- Talk about what you each enjoyed most during the holidays. Discuss how having the holidays come to an end can feel disappointing or sad.
- Figure out ways to include the best parts of the holidays into your everyday life. For example, if your family enjoys entertaining, find an event to invite people over for dinner, such as a Super Bowl party or a Martin Luther King Jr. birthday party where everyone talks about their dreams for themselves, their families, and their country.
- Take the time to thank the individuals who gave you gifts during the holidays—or who brightened your holidays in some way. Teach your children to write thank-you notes and to show their appreciation.
- Use the holidays as a chance to do a family service project together. Often, we feel more let down when we make ourselves the focus of the holidays, rather than others.

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- Young children may have a hard time getting back into their daily routine, particularly if the holidays were exciting to them. Be consistent in getting kids back into a daily routine, but be creative to entice kids to follow their routines, such as helping you [buy groceries in a fun way](#).
- Hire a sitter or ask a friend to play with your child if you have a lot of post-holiday activities, such as taking down holiday decorations, going through holiday cards and letters, or putting away holiday dishes.
- If your child gets upset about you packing up something from the holidays (such as a holiday picture book or a stuffed animal), consider keeping it out and asking your

child to take good care of it until the next holiday arrives.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Children can have a hard time letting the holidays go if they want to spend more time at home doing fun things. Make going back to school special by placing a note or drawing in your child's lunchbox—or sewing a red felt heart inside the flap of his jacket to remind him that you're thinking of him.
- Play games with your kids. For new game ideas, check out [Great Group Games](#).
- Create a “favorite things” collage with your child. Have her include photos of people she loves and activities she loves to do. See if there's a favorite holiday activity that she also wishes to include.

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- Kids can get disillusioned from the holidays, particularly if they start counting how many days until their birthday—or the next holiday in order to receive more gifts. Encourage them to enjoy the gifts they did receive and not to think so much about what they don't have.
- Be patient and calm when kids at this age poke fun at holiday traditions and activities—or talk about how happy they are that the holidays are over. Allow kids to have their own opinions, but watch out for any button pushing they may be doing to try to upset you.
- Monitor kids closely if one of their favorite relatives died during the year, and this was the first holiday without that person. Kids can form deep bonds with extended family members, and they may be grieving.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Ask your teenager about his opinions about the holidays. You might be surprised by what he was touched by—and what bothered him. Teens often make insightful comments about the ways family members act around the holidays, noting who gets stressed, who goes overboard, and who is stingy.
- If your teenager dreads going back to school after the holidays, this may say more about the schoolwork than the holidays. For many teenagers, the semester ends in mid- to late January, so going back to school often means a lot of tests and papers. Be sensitive to their stresses.
- Even though the holidays are over, look for inexpensive, fun ways to connect as a family, such as renting a funny movie and eating popcorn together, going out for hot chocolate, or going for a snowy walk under a full moon.