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For Caregivers & Parent Peer Support Partners *Tips on Family Gatherings & Holiday Seasons*

For families who are parenting children, youth, and adolescents with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs, a hectic and busy holiday season can increase levels of stress. Normal routines can become disrupted with seemingly endless gatherings and activities to attend. As the season progresses fatigue can set in, leading to increased meltdowns and escalating behaviors. **Efforts to nurture emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wellness** can be improved through creating and maintaining balance between activities and downtime.

For some youth and families, the holidays can bring a sense of deep grief and sadness as they may be separated from loved ones or may have lost loved ones. Those facing grief may struggle to find comfort, peace, and joy during this season and may find it difficult to give and receive love during this time.

Parent Peer Support Partners may find themselves facing additional stress as they juggle the needs of families they are supporting with the needs of their own families.

Here are some **tips and strategies to support Parent Peer Support Partners and caregivers** to help alleviate stress during this holiday season:

- Create and maintain a **healthy balance** of work and home
- Be sure to get a good night's sleep
- Review potential holiday activities/events with your family, find out what is important to them, what they don't like or what might trigger a meltdown. **Carefully choose together** what events/activities you will accept and which you will decline.
- Stick with the same **bedtime routines** as much as possible. If you know you will be out late, bring pajamas, toothbrushes with you and have your children change before the drive home.

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- Come up with a **code word/or signal** as a family that you can use in larger gatherings when youth are tired and want to go home or when parents are signaling to youth that it's time go home
- Be mindful of **healthy snacking options and eating in moderation** during the holidays to combat potential weight gain in a short period of time.
- Be willing to **say no** to an event/activity/gathering when you find yourself fatigued physically and emotionally without guilt or fear of judgment.
- Keep things **low key** and have a quiet family feast/gathering with a few cherished family members/friends.
- Spend time together learning how other cultures celebrate the holidays. **Incorporate some of these traditions** within your own family.
- Remember, no matter which holiday you celebrate, they are over within a very short period of time. Don't be afraid to schedule events, activities, and gatherings out to other months to **limit stress**.

