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Parent Newsletter December 2026

Mugs, Mittens, and Making Spirits Bright



The holiday season is officially here, bringing a whirlwind of excitement, lights, consuming a lot, and big emotions for our little ones. To help you enjoy the magic without the meltdown, we've put together our best tips for navigating disrupted routines, tricky family moments, and holiday travel. Grab a warm drink, take a deep breath. Let's dive into the holidays!

Maintaining the "Anchor" Routines and Managing Energy

- **Protect anchor routines.** Keep morning wake-ups and bedtime rituals (bath, books, songs) consistent, even if nap or party times shift.
- **Follow the "one big thing" rule.** Limit plans to one major outing per day to prevent fatigue and meltdowns.
- **Build in buffer days or hours.** Staying home for holidays? Keep at least one weekend day completely unscheduled for pjs and decompression. Traveling with a packed schedule? Communicate with family/hosts and pre-schedule a few hours of each day for downtime outside of nap.
- **Pack their Creature Comforts.** Bring noise-canceling headphones, familiar snacks, and a comfort item to loud or unfamiliar gatherings.
- **Map out Meltdown "Safe Spaces" Ahead of Time.** Big feelings happen, and planning for them can help adults stay calm and responsive. Whether it's the car, stepping outside, or a guest bedroom, noting these spaces ahead of time can save a lot of sanity!

Something for the Littles: A Seek-and-Find!

One of Santa's elves has hidden some holiday treasures in this newsletter! Can you and your parent find:

- **1 string of lights**
- **2 snowmen**
- **3 candles**
- **4 gingerbread people**
- **Green stars**
- **A pile of snowballs**
- **A reindeer**
- **A wreath**





Tips for Travel, Parties, and Transitions

A little planning and communication can go a long way!

- **Set expectations early.** Text relatives beforehand about hard exit times, important routines, safety requests (stowing breakables or cords), or food allergies.
- **Feed them before parties.** Give kids a protein-rich snack before leaving home so hunger doesn't collide with holiday meals or not-so-kid-friendly food options.
- **Allow more time for transitions.** Allowing extra buffer time for incidentals (lost glove, multiple clothing layers, tough goodbyes, etc.) can bring a bit more ease to all parties involved.
- **"First...then..."** When there are many steps involved in getting to a destination or a desired outcome, using the "First...then..." phrase can simplify steps for the child to follow. Ex.: "First we'll use the bathroom, then we'll go find our seats."
- **Practice at home.** Set the scene and play pretend! Practice boarding an airplane, waiting in a line at an exciting event, and saying "thank you" or "no thank you" at a family gathering.

A Note on Consent:

- **Let children choose their greetings.** A hug, high-five, fist bump, or a wave are all okay!
- **Prep relatives ahead of time.** A quick heads-up prevents awkwardness in the moment.
- **Respect a "no" or body language**. If a child pulls back or says "no," back them up so they know their boundaries matter.
- **Skip forced affection for gifts.** A sincere "thank you" or a smile is always enough.
- **Give them an easy exit.** Let children know they can step away for a break if a room feels too crowded or loud.



DIY Holiday-Themed Busy Bag

An activity bag provides children with a screen-free alternative to stay calm and occupied during long waits or overwhelming gatherings. These tangible activities still allow the child to passively engage with their surroundings while keeping little hands busy and providing some gentle sensory input. Here are a few tips for putting one together:

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...DIY Busy Bags*continued from previous page*

- **Stay practical.** Only add items that are low-stakes, easy to clean, have minimal parts, and quiet.
- **Add activities that are the right level.** Make sure activities can mostly be done independently, but offer a fun challenge to hold their interest.
- **Connect an activity to a holiday tradition!** Maybe Elf on the Shelf needs help stacking pompom snowballs? Or mom needs help making ornaments for the Christmas tree?
- **Turn it into a craft opportunity.** You can also have fun making a busy activity together beforehand like this **Holiday-Themed "I Spy" bottle** (glue the cap!).
- **Keep it simple.** A bag of 3-4 activities is plenty for a little one, and they love repetition! You can always swap out activities, or replace a frustrating activity with something more fun.



Looking for holiday parades, light festivals, Santa visits, and other family activities?

Pollywog's Community Events Calendar has you covered! Finding affordable, family-friendly events is now easier than ever! Search by city, county, or date to find fun near you, then subscribe so you never miss an event. Find holiday events near you at https://pollywogfamily.org/communityevents/



Coming in January:

New year, new opportunities to unplug after the holidays and get outside. Many families look forward to restoring a sense of balance after a busy holiday season. We'll be offering ways to give screen time a break and stay healthy during the dark winter months!



Don't forget to check out our Holiday Resource Guide!

Looking for holiday support or community resources in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties? The 2026 Holiday & Community Resource Guide from Pollywog is here to help your family thrive this season! Whether you are looking for local programs, family support, or holiday assistance, this guide covers local services available across our community.

Wishing families everywhere a safe, warm, and joyful holiday season!



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