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Children’s Hospital Association of Texas Provides Tips to

Prevent Child Abuse Increase During the Holidays

AUSTIN, Texas — The holidays are upon us, which is good news for excited kids and family members anxious to reconnect. But many Texas parents struggle to find childcare while school is out and worry how they can afford the added expenses of holiday gifts and travel. The frustration and stress that many families experience this time of year often lead to more cases of child abuse or neglect.

More than 66,000 Texas children are abused or neglected each year. Economic and personal stresses are contributors to child abuse. For many parents, the holidays increase these stress levels because of the extra demands on their time, money and energy.

“Many children and adults have unrealistic expectations for a perfect holiday season,” Stacy Wilson, president of the Children’s Hospital Association of Texas (CHAT), said. “Additionally, economic downtimes, arguments with family members, and possible dependence on food and alcohol—among other factors—can become catalysts for parents losing their temper.”

To minimize the risk of abuse, it’s best to reduce unnecessary stress by planning ahead. CHAT recommends the following tips that parents can use to avoid having a holiday meltdown.

* Establish a family budget for holiday spending, and be realistic about what you can afford.
* Hold a family meeting to discuss holiday plans, and include the children in planning activities.
* Post a calendar of family activities in a place where all family members will see it. Ask each person to remind you of school events, church activities, holiday parties, etc.
* Limit travel. On top of everything else, long trips may be more than your family can handle. Suggest visiting relatives later in the year when things are calmer and you can enjoy the trip more.
* Have your children make a list of elderly or shut-in neighbors in your area. Plan to share a meal, some of your time, or run errands for these neighbors. Explain to children that helping and sharing are important elements of special holidays.
* Set family priorities for the season. One of the biggest causes of holiday stress is having too much to do in a short period of time. This year, sit down as a family and make decisions that are important to all of you.
* Learn to say “no.” Fewer activities mean more time to relax and enjoy being with family.

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If you do find that it is difficult to avoid being verbally or physically harsh with your children, stop and try the following:

* Take a deep breath and count to 20.
* Phone a friend.
* Take a walk outside.
* Ask for help.
* Place your child in time out or a safe area, such as a crib, and leave the room.
* Take a time out and leave your child with a responsible adult.
* Catch up on sleep.

For more information about CHAT and its member hospitals, visit [www.chatexas.com](http://www.childhealthtx.org).

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About the Children’s Hospital Association of Texas

The mission of the Children’s Hospital Association of Texas (CHAT) is to advance children’s health and well-being by advocating for policies and funding that promote children’s access to high-quality, comprehensive health care. Since 1989, CHAT has worked to advance its goals and public policy objectives in cooperation with other trade associations, advocacy groups, state agencies and the Texas Legislature.

[www.chatexas.com](http://www.chatexas.com)