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### Managing Mental Health Throughout the Holidays for Parents and Caregivers

The holiday season is upon us and while this time is meant to be full of joy and celebrations, it can cause stress and bring about feelings of frustration, sadness, or anxiety for some. For children and adolescents who are already struggling with emotions and behavioral issues, the holidays can be a time of even greater stress. Prioritizing commitments to holiday celebrations and not trying to “make up for lost time” is one example of a proactive step in managing one’s own mental health and setting an example for our children throughout the holiday season. Keeping in mind that everyone does not process the experiences of the holidays the same way, can help us support one another’s emotional response throughout the days ahead.

### A few reminders for parents and caregivers to manage mental health...

**Don’t Overbook** – Prioritize holiday plans and only commit to the most important celebrations.

**Stick to the Regular Schedule** – Children typically thrive when following established routines.

**Stay Active** – Don’t forget to incorporate fresh air and exercise throughout the hustle and bustle of the holidays, limit screen time for the entire family.

**Rest and Relaxation** – Be sure to utilize the holiday break from other obligations for some time to rejuvenate, this is healthy for your mind and body.

**Be Aware of Your Own Stress** – Setting a positive example for our young ones can have a lifelong impact!

### Insight offered through common questions for the mental health experts...

#### How can I tell if my child is experiencing holiday stress?

Be on the lookout for even minor changes in your child’s typical behavior. Becoming easily

angry or tearful for seemingly minor reasons can be a sign of feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Nervous behaviors such as pacing, nail biting and fidgeting may be signs of anxiety and overstimulation. Withdrawal from friends and family or refusing to attend school or social gatherings with friends, can be symptoms of depression.

#### How can I minimize holiday stress for my child?

Stick to the regular routine as much as possible, including typical bedtime and wake up times. Try not to overschedule and be sure to include time for rest/relaxation. Balance family time with independent activities for children, so that they can rejuvenate after socialization.

#### Why does my child seem depressed around the holidays?

The holidays are an exciting time and often come with expectations of joyous occasions and positive memories. Although for some children and adolescents, the holiday season reminds them of difficult times or memories of past holiday seasons that were not so bright. Particularly those who have experienced some level of trauma, such as exposure to domestic violence or substance abuse, separation or divorce of parents, or even financial stress for the family. Taking advantage of the holiday season to spend more quality time with children can assure them that there are more optimistic times ahead and/or remind them that you are listening and paying attention to how they feel. Teenagers typically respond positively to this approach, even when it may not seem like it at the time!

#### How do I learn more?

More information is available at their upcoming Parent and Caregiver Support series. All parents and caregivers are welcome! Register in advance at [FLRSVP@devereux.org](mailto:FLRSVP@devereux.org), at no cost to participant and without commitment to participating in ongoing services. Limited sessions available upon request for private groups. (To make a referral for counseling or ongoing therapeutic services, contact [FLCounseling@devereux.org](mailto:FLCounseling@devereux.org) or 407-745-0499.)

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