



Supporting Students During Holiday Stressors

Dr. Allison Blackburn (she /her/ hers, Licensed Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Cincinnati Children's)

With the buzz of winter holidays just around the corner, it can be easy to focus on the festivities, celebrations, and merriment. As an educator, you may be counting down the days until your well-deserved break begins, and incorporating holiday cheer into your lesson plans. However, it is important to be mindful that not every student experiences the holidays as joyfully as we hope. For many students, this time of year can cause feelings of stress and sadness. The two week break from school may also be a break from food security, predictable routines, and a sense of safety. Some students will be placed in uncomfortable situations such as visiting distant parents they do not wish to see, or spending an abundance of time in their home with conflict, discord, or substance abuse. Families will struggle to provide adequate supervision for their child during the break, given that many caregivers will be required to continue working during their child's time off. This holiday season, there will be students missing family members at their tables due to death, divorce, military deployment, or incarceration.



Here are a few simple ways to support students before the break begins:

- 1) Avoid assignments that emphasize the "happiness" and "joy" of holidays. Do not ask students to write about their best holiday memory or the coolest gift they received.
- 2) Talk to your students one-to-one as they see you as a trusted adult willing to listen. Help them identify emotions and validate them (e.g. "It sounds like you are really nervous about seeing your dad again. I think that makes sense because it has been so long").
- 3) Keep routines as much as possible until the break begins. Students thrive on consistency and predictability.
- 4) Teach stress reduction techniques. Equip your students with tools that can help them cope with holiday stressors. Teach and model coping skills including deep breathing, mindfulness, journaling, yoga, and exercise/movement.
- 5) Consider passing out information about food resources to all students so no one feels singled out and no one is skipped over who may need it. Know whether your district's family resource center has food to send home or identify local food banks.

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