



Tis the season to be.... relaxed.

Making the transition to school holidays easier for parents and kids.

With the school holidays fast approaching, many parents are experiencing both relief and trepidation. Relief at the thought of a break from packed lunches, extracurricular activities and last minute homework. Trepidation at the prospect of long days to fill and potentially too much time spent *together*. Keep in mind that all members of the family will take time to adjust, transitioning slowly into the new, more relaxed routine of the summer holidays. So whilst we may assume that our children are prepared for the long break from school and its associated structure, the reality is that significant changes to daily routines may be unsettling for them too.

In the first week of the holidays kids may be argumentative, irritable or not sure what to do with themselves. In an effort to avoid too much ‘screen time’ caregivers may become pre-occupied with cramming activities, playdates and excursions into the calendar, forgetting that kids need down time too. Children often just like hanging out at home and most importantly, spending time with you. A common concern is that they will spend too much time ‘doing nothing’, usually in the company of a device. Remember however that during the school term, our kids are holding it together for at least 5-6 hours a day, 5 days a week for up to 10 weeks straight. Not to mention the extra-curricular activities and social events adding more stimulation and contact hours to their weekly routine.

Having a well-earned rest over Christmas makes good sense, with time to process the previous term and prepare for the new year. School can be mentally, physically and emotionally exhausting. Encouraging your kids from a young age to relax, take time out and just “be” will help set them on a path of good self-care. If you are working, try to get a few days off yourself and just relax at home, reconnect and rebalance. Enjoyable activities may include looking through old photo albums together, going for a walk, doing puzzles and playing board games or watching TV. Give your family permission to be lazy and simply enjoy this special time together. Children may respond better to visual clues so to make the transition to holiday mode easier for all, mark the days off on a calendar. Show which days you will be off work, the days that will be a “home day” or when the kids will be with grandparents for example. Young children may like

to draw a picture on the days when you do have something planned, for instance a bag of popcorn for a trip to the movies or a bucket and spade for the day you will go to the beach. These visual clues will help them adjust and see that there will be some days with nothing to do (so they can mentally prepare) and other days with structure and stimulation.

Whilst longer holiday periods do bring with them the potential for family arguments, preparation here is the key. Have a family discussion before the holidays begin, exploring the different scenarios when arguments are most likely to occur and ways to express our feelings without lashing out. For example, ask all family members to think of at least 2 situations that might annoy them in the holidays and may lead to an argument, write them down and then come up with ways to address these. For younger children, it might be concern over a sibling playing with their toys. The child might be able to identify a couple of toys they would be happy to share with the sibling, whilst all agreeing that there are other toys that are off limits for now. Encourage negotiation and clear expectations with older kids too. This might be negotiating alternate days for access to Netflix or the X-box. Most importantly, don't be afraid to let your kids be bored and do nothing. Given the chance to rest, most will eventually find their own best means of coping with the long break from structure and routine... and it won't do them any harm either.

Narelle Gillies

Psychotherapist/Counsellor

Ph.: 0431 594 141

www.perspectivetherapies.com