ACE's TALK
ACEs Education
Newsletter
November 2025
Volume #10

5 WAYS TO COPE WITH TRAUMA DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays are often described as "the most wonderful time of the year." But for grandparents raising grandchildren—especially those impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—this season can also bring stress, grief, and emotional triggers. The good news is that there are practical, trauma-informed strategies that can help both you and the children in your care find peace, connection, and resilience.

1. Protect Sleep Routines

Sleep is one of the most powerful tools for healing and stability. Trauma can disrupt sleep, and holiday schedules often make it worse.

- For You: Keep a consistent bedtime when possible. If you're traveling, bring familiar items like a pillow, blanket, or diffuser to create a sense of safety. A short relaxation routine—like deep breathing or gentle stretching—can signal to your body that it's time to rest.

- For Kids: Children thrive on predictability. Stick to bedtime rituals—reading a story, saying a prayer, or listening to calming music. Even if bedtime is later than usual, keeping the routine the same helps them feel secure.

2. Be Mindful with Alcohol & Caffeine

Both alcohol and caffeine can heighten anxiety, disrupt sleep, and make it harder to regulate emotions.

- For You: Decide ahead of time how you'll approach holiday gatherings. If you choose to drink, set a limit that feels safe. If you skip alcohol, bring your own festive drink so you don't feel pressured.
- For Teens: Model healthy choices by offering fun alternatives like hot cocoa, sparkling juice, or cider. This not only reduces stress but also shows kids that celebrations don't have to revolve around substances.




3. Manage Your Energy Levels

The holidays can feel like a marathon—shopping, cooking, traveling, hosting, and keeping up with children's needs. For grandparents raising grandchildren, the demands can be even greater. Trauma adds another layer: when routines are disrupted, both caregivers and children may feel drained more quickly.

- For You:
    - Prioritize, don't overcommit. Choose the events and traditions that matter most. It's okay to say no.
    - Schedule downtime. Build in quiet moments between events—whether it's a nap, a walk, or simply sitting with a cup of tea.
    - Listen to your body. Notice signs of fatigue, irritability, or tension. These are cues to slow down before exhaustion sets in.
    - Simplify tasks. Instead of cooking a full holiday spread, consider potlucks or ordering part of the meal. Delegate chores to older children or family members.

- For Kids:
    - Keep routines steady. Even if bedtime is later, keep the same sequence (bath, story, lights out).
    - Offer breaks. Create a "quiet corner" with books, coloring, or headphones so children can recharge.
    - Balance stimulation. Alternate high-energy activities (like parties or outings) with calm ones (like crafts, puzzles, or movie nights).

4. Set Boundaries with Family

Family gatherings can be joyful, but they can also stir up old wounds, conflicts, or grief. For grandparents raising grandchildren, there may be added stress if relatives question your caregiving role or if children feel the absence of their parents more strongly.

- For You:
    - Set boundaries ahead of time. Think about which topics are off-limits (e.g., custody issues, finances) and prepare gentle but firm responses like: "I'd rather not discuss that today."

• Protect your peace. If a conversation becomes heated, step away. You don't have to stay in situations that feel unsafe or draining.
• Choose supportive company. Spend time with relatives and friends who uplift you and your grandchildren.
• Model calm responses. Children watch how you handle conflict. By staying calm and respectful, you show them healthier ways to manage stress.

• For Kids:

• Prepare them in advance. Talk about who will be at gatherings and what to expect.
• Give them an "exit plan." Agree on a signal they can use if they need a break.
• Create safe activities. Bring games, crafts, or movies that keep kids engaged and provide positive distractions.
• Validate their feelings. If children express sadness, anger, or confusion after family interactions, listen without judgment and reassure them that their feelings are normal.

5. Honor Grief

Grief often surfaces during the holidays. It may be grief for loved ones who are gone, for traditions that have changed, or even for the "ideal family" you hoped for.

• For You: Grief is normal, temporary, and safe. Allow yourself to feel sadness without judgment. Journaling, writing letters, or lighting a candle in memory of someone can help.
• For Kids: Children may grieve absent parents or feel sadness when comparing their family to others. Encourage them to express feelings through drawing, storytelling, or creating memory boxes. Remind them it's okay to miss someone, even if that person also caused pain.
• Together: Create new traditions that honor both loss and resilience—like cooking a favorite meal, sharing stories, or volunteering as a family.

🌍 Building Resilience Together
By protecting routines, setting boundaries, and allowing space for grief, you model healthy coping for your grandchildren. These small steps help children feel safe, valued, and resilient—while also giving you the strength to enjoy the season.

📣 Closing Message
The holidays don't have to be perfect to be meaningful. By focusing on rest, boundaries, and compassion, you and your grandchildren can create moments of peace and connection that last well beyond the season.

Grandparents As Parents ...filling the Gap

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Upcoming Trainings

November 4, 2025 @ 11:00 AM (PDT): Resilience Film Screening - Learn More
November 5, 2025 @ 8:00 AM (PDT): Self Care & Wellness -` Learn More
November 6, 2025 @ 10:00 AM (PDT): Introduction to Trauma & Trauma Informed Care - Learn More
November 10, 2025 @ 10:00 AM (PDT): Trauma Informed De-Escalation - Learn More
November 11, 2025 @ 9:00 AM (PDT): The Developing Adolescent Brain - Learn More
November 17, 2025 @ 9:00 AM (PDT): Progress Muscle Relaxation - Learn More

A Message from the GAP Program Director

As the holiday season approaches, we want to take a moment to express our deep gratitude for all that you do as kinship caregivers. Your love, patience, and resilience make an incredible difference in the lives of the children you support—especially those who have experienced trauma. While this time of year can bring both joy and added stress, please remember to care for yourself, too. Taking even a few quiet moments for rest, reflection, or something that brings you peace helps renew the strength and compassion you so freely give every day. Thank you for the heart and stability you bring to your families and our community.

Jennifer Odum, Director

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