



**PARENT SENSE** VICKI CURRAN, EDS, LPC

## ‘Wonderful’ time of the year

The time of year between Thanksgiving and Christmas really is “wonderful.” Ordinary places are transformed into a glistening fairylands as a magical journey of hope and nostalgia begins for young and old alike.

But November and December can also be particularly hectic. There is so much to be done and it can seem as though as soon as one “to do” list is finished, another “to do” list begins. What’s supposed to be “the most wonderful time of the year” can easily become “the most stressful time of the year.”

To get through some of the stress, we need to slow down, breathe deeply and relax.

Believe it or not, our children need to learn the same skills. Of course, for them, this time of year is exciting and magical, but they still have things that stress them out and make them anxious.

Whether it’s imagining a monster under the bed, worrying about end of term exams, or feeling uneasy about performing in their winter concert, if we try to convince a fearful child that they shouldn’t be afraid by saying things like, “Don’t worry. There’s nothing to be afraid

of,” we may unintentionally create more worry for them.

Instead of trying to talk kids out of their fears, try these tips the next time your child reveals a worry:

- Ask them, “Where in your body do you feel afraid?” Shifting their attention from their head — where overwhelming thoughts often escalate worries — to their body actually changes the way their brain is translating the situation. Getting out of their thoughts and into their feelings can actually help them to become more

grounded and help the worry to seem more manageable.

- Help them learn calm breathing by teaching them “cookie breathing.”

Calm, gentle breathing settles an agitated nervous system more quickly than anything we can say. “Cookie breathing” helps them to breathe slowly and deeply through their nose and out their mouth. Tell them to imagine you just baked a delicious batch of chocolate chip cookies. They want to breathe in deeply through their nose to smell the won-

derful aroma but the cookies are hot so they must gently breathe out of their mouth to cool them off. Do this five times to help a nervous child relax.

- Use actual scent to ease stress and anxiety. As Jackie Stephanides mentioned in the last article, “Certain aromas are able to affect mood by eliciting a muscle relaxing effect ... specific scents have the ability to reduce stress in individuals.” Invite your child to prepare a small kit of comforting oils or room sprays that they especially like. When they are facing a fear, help them to utilize the soothing fragrance that they have chosen.

- Normalize their feelings by saying, “Thank you for telling me. I sometimes get anxious, too. Even though it passes, I know it’s not fun.” It

is important to empower our children to deal with the inevitable fears that come with living in a complicated world. Acknowledge that fear and worry are emotions that come and go for you, too’ — like waves on the beach. Encourage your kids to practice the tips mentioned above so they can learn to “ride the waves” of scary feelings without being swept away.

We all experience stress, worries and fears. Hopefully, these tips will help our children to become empowered to face those feelings with confidence knowing that they can manage their own emotions.

---

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.