



Baking cookies and decorating them is another great activity to have your child engage in with you. Courtesy photo

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Holiday tips for parents with children who have mental illness

by Cynthia Sedillo-Artiaga in Commentary



People Post is a space for opinion pieces, letters to the editor and guest submissions from members of the Long Beach community. The following is an op-ed submitted by Cynthia Sedillo-Artiaga, a Clinical Therapist at The Guidance Center's Compton Clinic, where she helps guide children and families struggling with mental health conditions or abuse toward positive and productive futures. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the Long Beach Post.

The holidays can be a difficult time of year for those struggling with a mental illness. It is very likely that you may know someone who may be facing an emotional or behavioral-health issue such as depression, anxiety or a trauma-related disorder. They might want to avoid the upcoming family dinner or skip out on social engagements.

It's important for you to remember that some mental illnesses can cause individuals to want to isolate themselves. There are many things happening around the holidays that can act as triggers, but you can be that safe place for them and help them enjoy the season.

If that person is your child, take this opportunity to begin new traditions with them. Here are some fun holiday activities that you can try to engage your child who is struggling with a mental illness.

Tip No. 1 – Holiday Light Magic

If transportation permits, getting out of the house is key. An activity that I love to do is going to see the gorgeous holiday light displays. My favorite neighborhoods to visit during this season are Candy Cane Lane in El Segundo, Sleepy Hollow in Torrance and Naples waterfront homes in Long Beach. The best part is that for all these locations you can either drive through the light-decorated neighborhoods or you can park your vehicle and walk through them.

Tip No. 2 – Movie Time

Movie nights at home are a great family bonding activity where you can have your child pick a holiday movie, or one of their year-round favorites, then everybody can put on their pajamas and watch the movie together. This helps reduce isolation during the holidays.

Tip No. 3 – Holiday Arts and Crafts

The 99 Cents or Dollar Stores have beautiful, very low cost arts and crafts supplies that you and your child can use to get creative together. They have everything you need to create ornaments to hang in the home, paint picture frames or simply paint a picture. The purpose here is to engage your child in the positive activity and to avoid your child in ruminating on negative thoughts that the holidays may trigger.

Tip No. 4 – Festive Slime

Slime is a big hit right now with our children. To add a little holiday twist, try using holiday-colored food coloring, like red, gold or green, and make slime with your child. Slime can be a great relaxation activity for our children and can be utilized as a coping skill during the holidays. Click [here](#) for an easy slime recipe.

Tip No. 5 – Cookies and Quality Time

Baking cookies and decorating them is another great activity to have your child engage in with you. Try making this an activity for just you and your child solely to do together instead of including the whole family. This will help your relationship with your child, and they will value the quality time together. They might not be able to verbally express it, but you will be able to see it in their body language and facial expressions. Sometimes our children want that one-on-one attention, but they don't know how to ask.

Tip No. 6 – Game Play

Game night is also a great activity to get your child involved in during the holidays. From Jenga, to Lotería, Mancala, Monopoly and Battleship or even a simple card game, the purpose is to engage your child and help them reduce isolation. By engaging your child in the game activity, your child is now no longer by themselves playing on their phone and isolating themselves. Playing games together as a family will decrease isolation symptoms at home.

Remember that the holidays rarely turn out as planned. Focus on making them a special time for you and your child, no matter what the circumstances. Celebrate the season of hope and expectation.