

How to reduce holiday stress, for you and your kids

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DURHAM – If you have anxiety about the coming holidays, your children likely do as well. Dialing back all the lists of things hustle and bustle can reduce holiday stress, according to advice shared this week at an Early Childhood Faith Initiative lunch and learn session on “How Congregations Can Reduce Holiday Stress for Families with Young Children.”

The Rev. Chris Tuttle of Westminster Presbyterian Church said that any anxiety he and his wife are feeling, their kids feel directly.

“This is hard, but don’t try to do everything. Be strategic,” Tuttle suggested. He also said that kids don’t need a big pile of Christmas presents, and it is important to involve them in giving to others.

“All of our families crave this time to be together. Tone back presents for kids,” he said.

Nancy Rozak, director of Christian education at Westminster, said that children as young as 3 or 4 can go pick out a gift or make something to give. She remembers the first gift she ever bought for someone else – a tree topper from Woolworth’s. It’s the thought that goes into giving a gift, she said.

Rozak said that for those in early childhood, it’s important to keep their schedules consistent during the holiday season. “Don’t eliminate naps for shopping or social schedules,” she said. And kids don’t need big events. “The wonderment, for a child, of lights, is enough to stimulate them,” she said.

“Churches are moving, moving with events, but we could all benefit from slowing down, whether during Hanukkah or Advent,” Rozak said.

Winnie Morgan, coordinator of the Early Childhood Faith Initiative, said that extreme stress impacts young children’s brain development, but even other stress can impact their social-emotional development.

“It’s really pretty important we manage our stress,” she said. “And routines are probably most important with birth to 5. The most important thing children want is your time. Children love time and attention.”

Katushka Olave of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church said that for Latino immigrant families, participating in events and worship services are how they celebrate Christmas, rather than spending money.

“Some might just go to Mass,” she said. Rather than spending time with extended family, this time of year, for immigrants, is one of missing their family members living elsewhere. “A big wave of depression comes into the home,” Olave said, both in terms of missing family and not having money for presents.

“What I learned from my parents is that the love that they give us is a present,” she said. Going to Christmas services and related events is a way to forget worries for a minute, she said.

Morgan said commercialism is what children will remember about holidays unless we teach them otherwise.