

# Pointers For Parents

## Making The Holidays Meaningful To Your Child

(NAPSA)—This time of year, we're bombarded with holiday messages. Every year they start earlier and earlier. Many retailers begin holiday advertising right after Halloween, promoting extravagant gifts, elaborate decorations, new clothing, lavish parties and special food. No matter what your personal beliefs, children are likely to hear a lot about Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Ramadan.

In the midst of the retail hype, how can parents make the holidays meaningful to their children?

Barbara Anderson, Ed.D., vice president of education for Kinder-Care Learning Centers, which operates more than 1,250 early childhood education and care centers nationwide, has some suggestions.

Anderson encourages parents to focus on what is best for their children and families. "During the holiday season, it is easy to lose that focus, to get carried away with celebrations that are far from the everyday routines children need to make sense of their world and to feel secure and comfortable," she said.

Many children find holiday preparations and traditions stressful, overwhelming and sometimes even frightening. For children, familiar schedules and everyday activities offer a welcome respite from parties, strange food, visitors, anticipation and disrupted routines.

Holiday activities often are geared to adult satisfaction and have nothing to do with what children want, need or can handle developmentally. Anderson recommends activities that emphasize the importance of caring, sharing, giving and celebrating with family



and friends.

She suggests that families take time to talk with children about their family traditions, their significance and what makes them special. This can be a wonderful opportunity to share family history and memories through storytelling. Where possible, children should participate in specific family-related activities so they can gain a better understanding of certain rituals or customs.

It's important for children to understand that different families celebrate different holidays. Not everybody is preparing for Christmas or celebrating Hanukkah. And some people have fun with their families but they don't celebrate any holidays. Parents and teachers can help children understand diverse traditions by talking about their own and other holiday traditions and by explaining that it's okay, too, not to celebrate any particular holiday. Many children have first-hand experience with classmates who are different from them.

Anderson recommends maintaining familiar routines for children throughout the holiday season, limiting disruptions and keeping the emphasis on what's really important—time with friends and families.