



Children in the striders room at the Tenas Illahee Childcare Center explore the inside of a pumpkin.

Courtesy photos by Tenas Illahee Childcare Center staff

December Notes from the Healthy Family Healthy Child Project

After what amounts to about 60 days of severe writer's block, we thought it best to try and catch you up with what has happened with the project since the October article.

White Bison has contributed as much to our Tribe and community as it can. As you might remember, Don Coyhis paid his final scheduled visit to the Tribe on Aug. 19. During this visit, with the much-needed and valuable input of Tribal Elders, Tribal Council members and many community members, ideas were put on paper that soon will present themselves to the Tribe in the form of what Don Coyhis calls a "Vision Book."

This is a book that embraces the vision of what a sober Tribe and community would look like, as seen by those who attended and contributed at the event in August. The book is still being put together by the White Bison staff and should be ready within a month or so. It's a book that will be made available to all who want to have it.

But we digress. The purpose of this article is to address the upcoming holidays by revisiting an article that was written last year. The theme is still pertinent, perhaps to some even more so than last year. To those, we would say be of strong heart. Things are slowly getting better.

With that said, we submit the following words, printed in this paper last year:

Like it or not, the holiday season is almost upon us. For some of us, the holidays bring a couple of unwelcome guests – stress and depression. And it's no wonder.

In an effort to pull off a perfect holiday, one might find oneself facing a dizzying array of demands, such as work, parties, lack of money, shopping, baking, cleaning, caring for elderly parents or relatives, caring for the kids on school break and a score of other chores and problems. So much for peace and joy, right?

Healthy Family Healthy Child Project would like to offer some practical tips that might help minimize the stress

and depression that often accompany the holidays. With luck, you might even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you might.

Holiday stress and depression are often the result of three main triggers. Understanding these trigger points can help you plan ahead on how to deal with them. They are:

Relationships. Relationships can cause turmoil, conflict or stress at any time. Tensions are often heightened during the holidays. Family misunderstandings and conflicts can intensify, especially if you are all thrust together for several hours or days. Conflicts are bound to arise with so many different personalities, needs and interests. On the other hand, if you are facing the holidays without loved ones, you might find yourself especially lonely, sad or depressed.

Finances. Like your relationships, your financial situation can cause stress at any time of the year. But overspending during the holidays on gifts, travel, food and entertainment can increase stress as you try to make ends meet while ensuring that everyone on your gift list is happy. You may find yourself in a financial spiral that leaves you with classic symptoms of depression, such as hopelessness, sadness and helplessness.

Physical demands. The strain of shopping, attending social gatherings, travel and the preparing of holiday meals can wipe you out. Feeling exhausted increases your stress, creating a vicious cycle. Exercise and sleep, good antidotes for stress and fatigue, may take a back seat to chores and errands. High demands, stress, lack of exercise and overindulgence in food and/or drink are all ingredients for holiday blues.

When stress is at its peak, it's very hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially when you know that the holidays have taken an emotional toll in previous years. The following are some

thoughts about heading off holiday stress and depression.

Acknowledge your feelings. If a loved one has recently passed or you are not able to be with your loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness or grief. It's OK now and then to take time just to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.

Seek support. If you are feeling isolated or down, seek out family members, friends, community or possibly social services or religious services. They can offer support and companionship. Consider volunteering at a community or religious function. Getting involved and helping others can lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. Also, enlist support for organizing your holiday gathering as well as meal preparation and cleanup. You don't have to go it alone.

Be realistic. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Hold on to those you can, but also accept that you may have to let go of others.

Set differences aside. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Practice forgiveness and set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. With stress and activity levels high, the holidays might not be conducive to making quality time for relationships. Be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes wrong.

Stick to a budget. Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then be sure to stick to your budget. If you don't, you could feel anxious and tense for months afterward as you struggle to pay those bills. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make one big food-shopping trip. That will

help you prevent a last-minute scramble to buy forgotten ingredients. Expect travel delays, especially if you plan to fly.

Learn to say no. Believe it or not, people will understand if you can't do certain projects or activities. If you say yes only to what you really want to do, you will avoid feeling resentful, bitter and overwhelmed.

Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a dietary free-for-all. Some indulgence is OK, but overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Retreat to a quiet place, even if it's to the bathroom for a few moments of solitude. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to your favorite music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring your inner calm.

Forget about perfection. Holiday TV specials are filled with happy endings. But in real life, people don't usually resolve problems within an hour or two. Something always comes up. Your sister may dredge up an old argument, your partner may burn the cookies or your mother may criticize how you raise your kids – all in the same day. Accept those imperfections in yourself and in others.

Remember, one key to minimizing holiday stress and depression is knowing that the holidays can and do trigger stress and depression. Accept that things aren't always going to go as planned. Then take active steps to manage stress and depression during the holidays.

Take time to breathe. Take time to laugh. Remember also that alcohol is a depressant and can make bad situations worse. Be safe. Be healthy. Be kind to yourself and accepting of others and, if possible, have a great holiday.