



Illness + The Holidays

While our society prefers to acknowledge happiness and joy during the holidays, at Tu Nidito we know that families experiencing a child's serious diagnosis feel a variety of emotions during this time of year. We don't want to overwhelm you with information, but we do want to offer some insight on important topics that you may find helpful this holiday season.

"Shoulds"

The day-to-day is usually full of "shoulds" - things others (and we ourselves) think are necessary. The holidays seem to be a time of year with even more "shoulds" than the day-to-day. Here are some common examples:

- **"You should go all out for the holidays!" or "You should keep things quiet this year."** While others are well intentioned and make suggestions like these from a loving place, it may be frustrating to hear their opinions. Consider what you can mentally, physically and emotionally handle before making commitments. Ask your children about their hopes for the holidays and be honest with them if there are things that aren't likely to happen. They will appreciate your honesty so they can adjust their expectations. A new holiday tradition may even arise from your discussions.
- **"You should let me help this year."** Offers of assistance are wonderful. They tend to be most appreciated when they come from those you trust, with whom you can be completely honest. If someone offers to help on their terms rather than yours, their help can quickly become a burden. Clearly communicate your needs, wants and expectations. This will ensure their offer is what they intend it to be - helpful!
- **"You should be happy, it's the holidays after all!"** It can feel hard to spread holiday cheer when your child is experiencing the impacts of a serious diagnosis. Sometimes exhaustion, concern and stress outweigh happiness, and forcing happiness usually results in the opposite of a good time. Emotional expression is normal and important for you and your children. It's okay that your family is not okay all the time.
- **"You should do what is best for you and your children."** Yes, you should.



Self-Care

Self-care can be almost anything, so long as it is physically, mentally and emotionally safe for you and those around you. Here are some ideas to consider:

- **Identify and Acknowledge your Emotions:** “I feel sad” may seem like a simple statement, but at a time of year when we “should” be happy, it may feel challenging. Grant yourself permission to feel and express both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. This shows your children that emotions are normal and expressing them is important.
- **Consider Your Needs:** Your needs may feel non-existent because your mental and physical energy is being directed towards your ill child. But, your needs are still very important! Taking them into consideration allows you to care for yourself and those around you. Plan for breaks (big or small) and take each day moment by moment. If plans suddenly change, remind yourself that it’s okay that things are hard.

Siblings

If your diagnosed child has siblings, you may be wondering how to make the holidays special for them while still considering the needs of your diagnosed child. Here are a few suggestions that may be useful:

- **Make Room for Meltdowns:** While emotional meltdowns from your healthy children are unpleasant, they are processing their world being turned upside-down by the diagnosis. They need and deserve their meltdowns, just like you do.
- **Re-Directing Generosity:** Your community may want to shower your diagnosed child with gifts and love this holiday season— with good reason! Reminding friends about the needs of your healthy children may inspire re-direction of all that extra special care and attention.
- **1-1 Time:** When possible, spend individual time with each of your healthy children, focusing on what they'd to do or talk about. When one-on-one time is not possible, have a close family member or friend spend quality time with your healthy children. This is no replacement for time with you, but it shows your children that they are cared for.
- **Clear Communication:** Talk openly with your healthy children about holiday ideas, reminding them that plans can change since illness can be unpredictable. Some families decide to hold the holidays later in the year when things may feel more stable. There’s nothing wrong with Thanksgiving or Christmas in June!