

# Proactive Planning: One Parent's Approach

By Jana Morgan Herman

The holiday season is upon us. This very busy time of year affects children, who depend on us for consistency, in so many ways. Although the increased activity of the holidays is fun, it can also be stressful, for adults and children alike. Here are some tips that may help to make this holiday season calmer.

**1. Plan.** Make a plan for your family that details guidelines for visiting others or hosting company. Changes in schedule are unavoidable; however, you can prepare your child with statements like, “Grandma and Grandpa are going to be spending the weekend with us. Some things will be different, but these ground rules will be the same.”

Practicing grace and courtesy throughout the year will prove helpful during holidays. Not interrupting when others are engaged in conversation, saying “please” and “thank you”—these manners act as social lubricants that help reduce stress and friction. But remember: Teach through modeling and *loving redirection*, not humiliation. Redirect children in private so they can focus on what you’re saying instead of focusing on their embarrassment at being scolded in public. As Montessori says, “Of all things, Love is the most potent” (1995, p. 295).

**2. Respect your child.** It is unreasonable to believe children can “shop until you drop.” If children must go shopping or socializing with you, make the outings short. If your child demonstrates that he or she is tired (i.e., throwing him-/herself on the floor, rubbing eyes, crying—you know the signs), calmly end your trip and go home. Children

do not have an adult’s endurance. Speaking loudly to children—especially in public—embarrasses them and makes the situation much worse. Instead, say something like, “It’s been a long day, hasn’t it? It’s hard to sit in the cart while I do this. Let’s get these last two items and go home for a bath (or nap or walk) and a book.” An even better option is having a friend or relative take the children to a park, or go on a walk, while you run a few errands.

If you are visiting someone, first go over expectations with your child before you visit and on the way there. “We are going to be at Aimee’s for 1 hour. We can take your rug and the blocks or Legos to play with while we talk, or you can play in the yard.” Then, only stay an hour—no longer! An even better idea is inviting Aimee to your house.

**3. *Semper paratus*** (always prepared). Not everyone is used to having children around. Remind your child that some things may be for “eyes only.” Books, coloring books, and a small set of Lincoln Logs, along with a rug (a portable, defined workspace) will help your child remain occupied while you converse. Never underestimate the attraction of other people’s possessions, so have realistic expectations for how long a child can restrain him-/herself. Going for a walk or to a park while you visit adults allows children to move and enjoy themselves.

**4. Wash, rinse, repeat.** One time through is not enough. If situations arise while you are out shopping or visiting, quietly (as not to elevate the situation) have a private conversation with your child about what the ground rules are. For example, if Jess is too loud,

have a short private conversation:

“Jess, remember the rules. If you need to, stay with me awhile, then you may try again in a few minutes. We will be leaving/eating/going to bed soon. Thank you. I know it’s not easy for you when things are so different.”

Hugs are recommended to help kids (and adults) settle.

**5. Sleep on it.** Maintaining a consistent bedtime routine will do wonders for your family, no matter what state you are in (literally and figuratively). Bring your bedtime books and favorite pillow and blanket. Following the same timeline (dinner, bath, books in bed, good-night kiss) every evening will lessen the stress your child will feel over going to sleep in a different environment.

Finally, remember to be patient with yourself and your child. This too shall pass. The stress is short-lived, and if you manage everything carefully, you won’t need a vacation from your vacation.

## Reference

Montessori, M. (1995). *The absorbent mind*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

JANA MORGAN HERMAN, MEd, is an *Early Childhood guide and a teacher educator for Montessori Teacher Education Center—San Francisco Bay Area*. She is AMS-credentialed (*Early Childhood*). Her two daughters, now in college, attended Montessori schools. Contact her at [jana.morganherman@gmail.com](mailto:jana.morganherman@gmail.com).

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