

## Help Me Digest the Season!

Last autumn tasks may be completed, but the season does not seem to want to wind down and bring a pre-winter's rest to any of us! As adults, we talk about the busyness, we think about it, we check our calendars, make our lists...

But what helps our children in this time of the year when the days grow so short, the sun struggles to rise above the horizon and then leaves so quickly. The urge to hibernate grows as strong for them as for little bear cubs. They hear on all sides the outer world anticipating holiday events and expectations. We hear their questions as soon as they can put words together! "Who are all those creatures popping up on everyone's lawns, in every store?"

Perhaps our largest question is this: how to help our children, and ourselves, navigate the season? Here are a few thoughts and tips that will help the children manage.

- Hold onto your family rhythms for dear life! And if there aren't enough of them, create some new ones. Perhaps they will be permanent, good ideas worthy of carrying forward throughout the year, or perhaps they are reflective of the season itself.
- Eat as well as possible. Resist the temptation for quick snacks and their empty calories. Tuck something seasonal in the oven, use every modern advantage of crock pots, rice cookers, delayed cooking timers that you can find.
- Slow down at every moment you can with the children – it is said that slowing down solves more problems than any other strategy. Give it a test! Bedtime, morning time, dressing for the day...
- Sleep, sleep, sleep – remember those little hibernating bear cubs. Children cannot be successfully social when they are overtired (neither can I!).
- Reduce media and screen time of every kind to the absolute minimum. Media – the sounds, the visual rush of images are intense and hard for young children to process and digest.
- Keep weekends as simple and home-based as possible. Let one person make the outings into the world while someone else remains at home with the children. You'll be amazed at how much this helps.

The basic principle: it is not just food that young children need to digest. Equal for them is the sensory world of each day – the sounds, sights, things they touch. Moving (walking, climbing) is their major way of digesting the sensory experiences of each day, second only to sleep. We all know these things instinctively! Withdrawing for a quick nap always improves things, an early to bed night helps us all. When the sensory stimulation unavoidable increases (for instance, shopping, visits to family, special events, general family busyness), the most effective tool you have in your parents' tool kit is predictability, rhythm, boundaries, and the usual routines.

Once you have children, you have a wonderful invitation to imagine and create your own family traditions for this newly created family of your own. Spend a few minutes creating a vision of what you want for your family. This will give you a roadmap for making decisions about what to say "yes" and "no" to in the coming weeks. When an idea or invitation comes up, you can then say – yes, this fits in with my vision, or on the other side, no, this doesn't support what I want for my children.

They will thank you a thousand times over without even knowing it, when you give them the gift of clarity.

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Sophia's Hearth Family Center

December 2010