

Conquer children's post-holiday "blues"

Do you look forward to the week after Christmas when the last gift is unwrapped, the final Christmas cookie baked and the last turkey casserole is securely in the freezer. Or is it a time of unhappiness, with moments of friction due to your home-from-school children?

If the week after Christmas finds you on edge with children who appear ungrateful for the abundance of new things they received, you may be interested in knowing you're not alone.

Lancaster County Extension Home Economist Michelle Rodgers says that "post holiday blues" can easily creep into any home, and that it is natural for children to have feelings of being letdown after having been entertained by the family.

Michelle says, "If the post holiday blues do hit your household don't deny them. This is a normal feeling of unwinding. All the excitement and activities associated with preparing for Christmas can make getting back to a normal schedule a little disappointing."

She suggests planning some activities for after Christmas to wind down the children gently. Family outings could be saved to take place the week after Christmas or a gift could be held back. She adds, "An unexpected present can raise anyone's spirits."

Michelle states that holidays may be happier if preparations are made more sensibly and if a family celebrates with simple and significant rituals. She notes that

traditions associated with the holidays are important because they add to the security of the child and give them lifelong memories.

If you are reading this just prior to the arrival of Santa Claus, and you're dreading Christmas morning and the chaos that sometimes accompanies gift-giving, Michelle makes a suggestion to make things move more smoothly. In her family gifts are opened one at a time, beginning with the youngest and proceeding to the eldest. (The eldest may be miffed at waiting, but usually is willing to wait his turn patiently.)

It is sometimes difficult for children to watch their parents going to parties when they are left behind. Michelle suggests that parents plan something specific for children to do while they're out. Also, she advises telling children in advance, so it is not a surprise for them. While parents need activities just for themselves, Michelle says they should also plan activities which include the children.

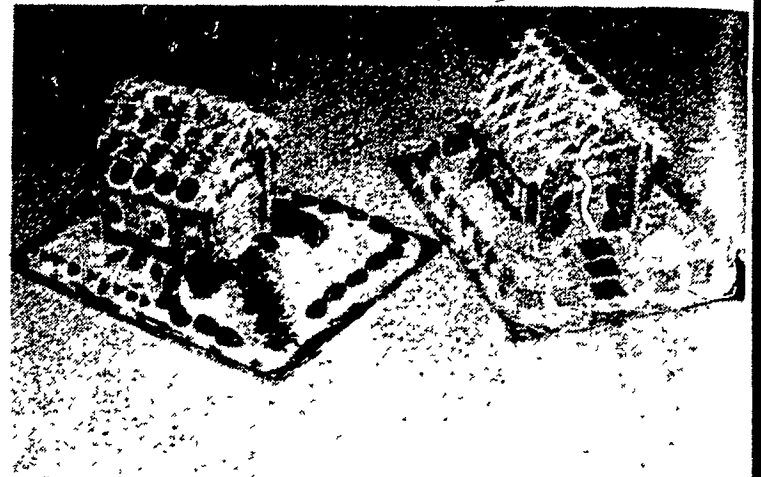
As an answer to the time when children come to you and say, "I don't have anything to do" (even with all those shiny new things under the tree), Michelle suggests a "surprise jar." In the jar give ideas for things to do. Children can choose a piece of paper with a suggestion, and this can also be used to assign jobs to be done. It will be especially interesting if fun things are included along with more responsible items.

Since children will not be seeing their school friends, it may be a good time to plan a tea party for the children and their friends. This is a great way to eat up leftover Christmas cookies, and there are some special "festive frosty flurries" listed at the conclusion of this article which children could make themselves.

Another fun activity for children when they need a lift is preparing cheese fondue. They can watch the cheese melt and then cook their own food.

Drawing from her own experience, Michelle recalls that there were some important traditions in her family. When it snowed, her family always made doughnuts and invited their closest neighbor to share in the eating.

"When we had to stay home because of snow we made doughnuts and it gave us all a big boost. It took all day, and



These graham cracker houses can bring your child hours of happy entertainment as they plan their decorations. Easy to assemble, children of all ages will find this activity a neat one to chase the post holiday blues.

Homestead Notes



This simple bird feeder can be made by cutting openings in the sides of a gallon milk container. Commercial or homemade bird feed is placed in the bottom as a sure treat for winter friends.

everybody loved it," she remembers.

Michelle is a firm believer in sharing kitchen time with children, observing that the kitchen offers a multitude of learning opportunities. While the fancy Christmas baking may be over, a fresh cookie is always appreciated and time may be less hectic in the week following Christmas. "Cooking is a life skill and children can learn a lot of basic knowledge in the kitchen," Michelle states.

While admitting that a little patience is required, Michelle stresses the importance of letting children try things by themselves, and when they make suggestions allow them to experiment. She says children should be included in the clean-up so they learn to take that responsibility.

An important aid in getting children through the post holiday blues is spending time with them. Michelle says, "Plan to spend more time with your children and enjoy beauty and the specialties of the season that nature brings to us." With school children home it is a perfect time for togetherness on projects which can be educational as well as fun.

A temperature study can be fun and informative. Michelle says a large and accurate thermometer which measures indoor and outdoor temperatures will offer children the opportunity to keep a record of temperatures over a period of time.

A small carton of juice could be placed outside to freeze and children could be allowed to taste it after re-melting it.

A bird feeder is not only a good family project but also helpful to our feathered friends. Children can get joy from stringing cereals and cranberries on shoelaces and placing them at a spot where they can be observed from a window. The popcorn on the Christmas tree can also be used to feed the birds.

A simple bird feeder can be constructed from a gallon milk jug and attached to a tree branch.

Children can mix bird seed with peanut butter and put it in margarine tubs or spread it on pine cones. One caution however - never feed birds just peanut butter or their beaks will stick together.

Snow brings its own pleasures, of course, but remember that children can make snowmen and angels in the snow when the fun of sledding fades.

An easily-made treat is to create snowcones by packing clean crushed ice in paper cups with an ice cream scoop and pouring fruit

flavored gelatin, powder or syrup over the ice.

And what child doesn't enjoy homemade ice cream? Invite in some friends and use your favorite recipe or the one at the end of this article which does not require a freezer. It will be soft ice cream; for firmer texture freeze mixture. This is guaranteed to cheer anyone's spirits!

Another fun activity for children of all ages is making small graham cracker houses. This is something they can decorate entirely on their own, spending many hours on it. It's perfect for anyone who feels they could not undertake a gingerbread house.

It takes four complete graham crackers to make one house, but remember that there is bound to be some breakage. Two are broken in half for the sides, and two are used for the roof, cutting off one quarter of the roof cracker. The quarter piece is then cut with a serrated knife to form a triangle and this is the peak of the house.

A cardboard base covered with foil will allow a nice yard on which additional decorations can be placed.

Assemble the house using royal icing. Begin with the four walls, then add the peaks at either end and put the roof pieces on last. Spread icing on exposed side edges and triangles to hold the crackers together. There will be a slight overhang on the roof. It's best to wait a short time before adding the candy decorations.

Remember that a large investment in candy is not necessary. Look around your kitchen and use cereals, nuts, baking chips, mints and other edibles you already have.

Children will become totally absorbed in decorating their house, and will be thrilled when it is completed.

The royal icing is used to assemble the house and to add the decorations. It may be made from scratch or from purchased meringue powder.

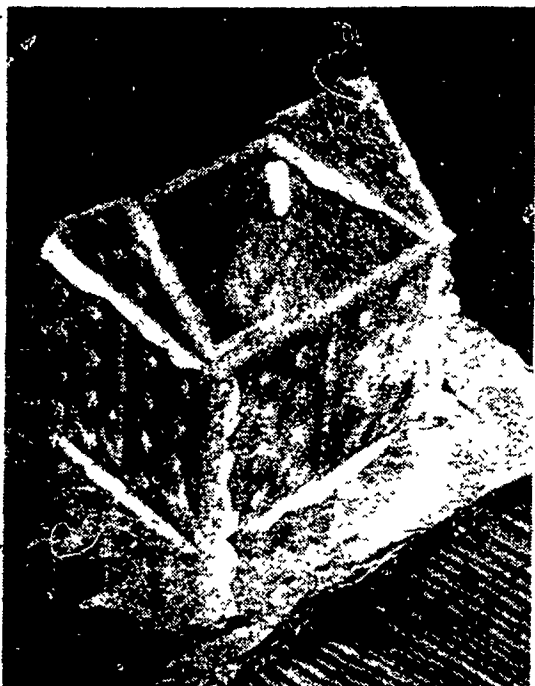
The recipe follows:

2 egg whites
1/8 teaspoon cream of tartar
2 teaspoons water

2 1/2-3 cups sifted powdered sugar

Beat eggs white, cream of tartar and water until frothy; gradually add powdered sugar. Beat until mixture holds soft peaks. Plain white icing is used to put together the house, and some may be tinted for added trim. This is also used to "glue" on the decorative candies.

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The roof piece is made from three quarters of a graham cracker, with the fourth quarter being used to make the peak in the house. A



serrated knife is necessary to cut the cracker into a triangle for that purpose.