

# School Holidays : A brief survival guide

# SURVIVE

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# S

Stress arises when there is change and inconsistency. Change is frequently described as being stressful. Humans function better, psychologically, in consistent environments, where we know what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, how it is going to happen, and why. Inconsistency and uncertainty are irritants to our nervous system, resulting in higher-than-usual arousal levels, intense emotions, and unsettled behaviours.

# U

Under stress, the brains of children are hard-wired to set off behaviours associated with the fight-flight-freeze response:

- Fight: Controlling, aggressive, destructive and demanding behaviour, hyperactivity
- Flight: Running off, hiding, hyperactivity
- Freeze: Reduced responsiveness to the environment (e.g. not listening, daydreaming).

# R

Routines provide structure and order to people's lives, which relieves stress and helps to maintain lower arousal levels. The absence of routines is stressful.

# V

Variety is the spice of life. But too much variety and too many choices can be overwhelming for children. Limit the number of choices of activity a child is given at any one time.

# I

If your child is consistently misbehaving day after day, it is probably because they are used to following routines and being occupied throughout the day, as occurs during school term. Planning activities for your children across each day and the week ahead and making these plans known and visible to the child via a calendar or other visual assists with structuring their day and week and will help with avoiding boredom and unsettled behaviour.

# V

Vigorous physical activity is a useful way to reduce stress and alleviate boredom. Incorporate at-least 30 minutes of physical activity into your child's daily routine (e.g. visiting a playground; riding a bike; walking the dog; trampoline time)

# E

Endeavour to maintain routines, just as occurs during school times (e.g. bedtime, wake-time, mealtimes, activity time).

## A Final Word

Parents also need consistency. Maintain some routines of your own.

