

Planning for the holidays in Head Start

Dr. Deborah Bergeron: Happy November! Can you believe it's already November? Time is just flying. Time for this month's vlog and this month's topic is "What Do the Holidays Mean for Head Start." We'll get to that in just a minute.

But first, got to send out my love note. This month's love note goes to Doug Jacobsen of TCC Action Partnership in Minnesota. Doug emailed me a couple of months ago, after he saw me at one of the big events, here in D.C. and we kind of exchanged some ideas on asking the question "Why?", when we're doing our work and how important that is in leadership. And then he shared with me his newsletter to his staff, where he outlined the issue they were having with under-enrollment. I so appreciated, first of all, that Doug tackled this problem--it was an issue for their Head Start--head on. Totally transparent. Calling out what they were having issues with and then just really deliberately tackled the problem. And he used the theory of asking why we do what we do, in order to do that and in the 17, 18-year Head Start: 100 percent enrollment. Early Head Start: almost there--just a little shy. So they certainly made the progress they needed to make. And I want to commend him and his team for that work. If you're having issues with under-enrollment, you might Google TCC Action in Minnesota. Call Doug--see if he give you some pointers. He's a very creative leader. So shout out to Doug and his team for that great work.

Now, let's get on this month's topic. We thought it would be a good idea to talk a little bit about the holidays--they are upon us--and those of us who work with children know that they can both be an exciting time and sometimes not so exciting. And there are issues that go with the holidays when working with children. So I'm going to give you my perspective and what I think the Office of Head Start can do to support you. And here are--let's see this month I have five pointers.

Let's start with Number 1: Routines, Structure: A Must. It is so tempting at a time when things feel like they should be fun and energizing, to kind of get off of routines, to break the mold and do kind of outside-the-box things--which sound exciting and can even look exciting, but for kids, just sends them off the deep end. They like routine. They like structure. And they like to know things are predictable. So keep it that way and I think you'll find that as you go through the holiday season, you have far fewer issues with behavior.

I don't how common this is in Head Start, but I know from the K-12 world, I had to make the announcement: No movies. Movies are a mistake. Breaks the routine and the kids get nutty. So don't do that.

Number 2: I'm going to give you a really cool pointer that I'm bringing straight from my most recent experience as a high school principal: Find your local high school. Reach out to that high school and learn about what ever clubs they have that participate in community service. I'll give you a few: Beta Club, National Honor Society and Key Club are service-oriented clubs.

There are many others. So they may have other names. Tap into those resources for all kinds of things that can help your Head Start program during this season. If your families are struggling with food, they will do a food drive for you. Holiday gifts, babysitting for a night out for your parents. All kinds of creative things--these high school kids are looking for ways to support their community. I know in my situation, a lot of times, they had trouble finding volunteer opportunities. So be their solution, that also

provides you with a solution. And it's just this win-win situation. So I highly encourage you to call your local high school. If you have two or three in your neighborhood or in your vicinity, call all three of them. And see who would like to come out and support your Head Start. And, of course, that could be a relationship that goes well beyond the holidays.

As I said, holidays are a happy time--this is Number 3--but not always. So make sure you're paying attention to how your children are responding. You know, you know your families, so you know what struggles they're going to have. And just be aware that children are going to display their anxieties, at this time, in different ways. You might see acting out. You might see kids becoming more withdrawn. And just be aware that that can have an impact on children in a variety of different ways. And be responsive. And I'm going to provide you with some resources through the Office of Head Start on our ECLKC at the end of this video.

And then, Number 4: Don't forget about the staff. Mindfulness for staff during this time is also extremely important. You know, a lot of our staff are pinching pennies too and during the holidays sometimes it can feel kind of like you're like an outsider if you're not in the spending game. We tend to be very obsessed with spending during this time, and it can make people feel very inadequate. So I think just knowing that your staff might be going through some hard times--emotional-- certainly if they've lost a loved one or had an issue in their family and you come around the holidays, it tends to exacerbate that. So be aware of your staff's needs too. Take some time to breathe and spend time together and remember the beauty that exists in your staff culture. I think that can be a real benefit at this time of year.

And Number 5: Don't forget: The holidays do end. And children come back. So transitions back into the classroom during this time are extremely important to think about. And this is not just the big winter holiday--one or two weeks off. We're talking about two or three days over a weekend, tacked onto a weekend, can make a big difference for a four-year-old kiddo. That is a lot of time to them. So coming back in: Remind teachers: We have to review routines when we come back. We can't expect children to remember them. Treat it like the first day of school. Spoon-feed that back to them, so that they know what the expectations are and they can be successful in your classroom environment. And taking the time to do that will give you big payoffs in the long run.

So the holidays are full of lots of exciting things and, you know, it can be a great time. But we are aware that it can also be challenging. At the end of this video, you're going to see a lot of links. We've got a lot of resources for you. You know, I suggest, maybe putting together a holiday packet maybe for your parents, that would have some of that information. Maybe even some things to do at home that can fill some of that time with something other than television. Those kinds of things--anything you can do to enrich this time for your families is going to be a good thing.

So I hope those suggestions help you. And my--if you didn't know it already-- this time is actually going to be ECLKC, which I'm sure you really do already know. But I want you to be aware of these resources that I'm going to provide you here. Because, there are many of them. A lot of them are printable. There're things you could provide your families. There're things you could provide your staff. There're

activities that you can do with children and enrich the classroom, during this time. So please take advantage of all of these resources that are available to you. And, of course, enjoy the holidays!

I hope you have a great--let's see: Thanksgiving is what you're going to be embarking on, after you watch this video. So I hope your Thanksgiving is wonderful. I always think that the most important thing is the time that we have to spend with the people we love. So I hope you get to do that. And just remember, Head Start is access to the American Dream. Go make dreams happen!