

A SPECIAL EDITION FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

# BULLDOG WELLNESS

Supporting the Academic, Social, and Emotional Health  
of Grant Elementary Students, Teachers, and Families



## UPCOMING DATES

- November 20: Early School Dismissal
- November 25-27: **No School** Thanksgiving Holiday
- **Angel Tree Gifts**
  - Donations Due December 11
  - Gift Pick Up December 16-18 (Arrange Time with Mrs. Marsh prior to pick up)
- December 21-January 1: **No School** Winter Break

Dear Grant Family,

On November 2, I (Mrs. Marsh) found myself in a conversation with Principal Ball that inspired this *special edition* of the Bulldog Wellness newsletter. Much like everything in 2020, the holiday season this year looks REALLY different than what we're used to. I find myself wondering, alongside much of my family and friends, what celebrating this season will be like. If you are wondering the same thing... you are not alone!

In this special edition I've tried to include as many ideas, tips, and suggestions for making this holiday season special and meaningful - despite any changes we have to make. I will be putting many of these into practice myself, and I hope that you find them helpful as well.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to support you as we wrap up 2020, and head into 2021!  
Remember, we are Stronger Together!

Warmest Regards, Mrs. Marsh



## KEYS TO THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

I have gathered these tips and suggestions for you from a variety of resources, my own conversations with family and friends, as well as from other mental health professionals. Take what works for you ~ and don't worry about the rest!

- **Have Hard Conversations:** Prepare your children for what might be different this year about the holiday season. That may include changes in routine and holiday gatherings/visits, expectations around gifts, travel plans, etc. For me, my holidays typically involve a lot of traveling to various family gatherings - 3 locations on Christmas Eve and another 2-3 on Christmas Day. That certainly won't be happening this year, so my family and I are discussing what our connection is going to look like instead.
- **Connection:** For many families, the holiday season is all about connection with others (like in my example above). If you aren't going to be traveling in person to see loved ones, think about what connections can look like. Drive-by hellos and gift drop offs, picnics in the snow, or virtual gatherings (maybe with activities planned!) can all support connection this holiday season. Get creative! Ask your kids for help planning. They really do have some phenomenal ideas!
- **Rethink Gifts:** In one of my recently-received emails I came across the word "shipageddon", which was used to describe the mass amount of mail and shipments going through the system this year. While our access to online resources, both from local small retailers and large stores, is incredible, make sure that you order earlier than normal if you want it in time for the holidays. Perhaps think about home-made gifts, ordering curbside, supporting small local businesses, or other alternatives!
- **Create New Traditions:** This year is unlike any other. While that comes with disappointment, it also comes with opportunity. Is there something you have always wanted to incorporate into your holiday plans, but have been too busy to do? This is the year! Spend time together to think about what new holiday traditions you want to begin!
- **Acceptance of What Is:** Comparison to year's past is an easy thing to slip into around the holiday season. Disappointment and other emotions are to be expected and are completely normal. However, rather than dwelling too much on what you would like to be able to do this year but can't, find ways to connect and celebrate this year as it is. Gratitude is also an important component of finding this contentment. See additional pages for more on gratitude and ideas for celebrations!
- And most importantly, **Stay Safe!:** Follow CDC and Local Health Authority guidelines for gathering, travel, etc. Visit the [CDC website](#) for recommendations.

# CELEBRATING VIRTUAL THANKSGIVING

If you're planning on virtual holiday gatherings, here are a few ideas inspired from Connecticut Children's to help support the holiday fun! These ideas are specifically for Thanksgiving, but think about ways you can adapt them for other winter holidays - including Christmas and New Year's Eve!

**BEFORE:** Plan a shared experience around the 5 senses (same music, sharing the same meal, same scent of candle, etc). If you plan to have the same meal, meet virtually to create the shopping list and ensure everyone has the ingredients they will need. When you're ready to begin cooking, have whoever typically does the cooking (or holds the secret family recipes) guide everyone else step by step. You could also send holiday care packages! Get your kids' ideas about what to include, and maybe make some of the items (baked goods, decorations, etc).

**DURING:** Have a "Holiday Host" to lead some opening and closing ceremonies (dance, song, quote or special message, etc) of your virtual gathering. Have everyone share something they are grateful for, and make sure that everyone gets a chance to share. Set up your computer / screen where people can see everyone in your physical location and you can see them! This may mean connecting the computer to a TV screen or sitting somewhere untraditional. Create a holiday playlist for everyone to listen to. While the annual family football game may not be an option, there are virtual games available. Check out [this link](#) for some ideas!

**AFTER:** Instead of the Black Friday shopping spree, spend the weekend thinking about small, meaningful ways to show your love to others. Maybe participate in the REI-inspired "Opt-Outside" movement, or spend time making small tokens to share with loved ones.



## THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

If one thing is consistent about this November, it is that gratitude is a central theme. Gratitude has been shown in countless studies to help increase resilience, impact sustainable wellbeing and happiness, and increase physical health outcomes. Everything we need right now! So, spend some time expressing your gratitude this season in tried

and true ways, or do something new! Start a gratitude journal, write cards to others expressing your gratitude, make a gratitude chain (links of paper connected together ~ we're making a gratitude tree here at Grant!), make "thank" calls to express your appreciation for those in your life, send care packages, find ways to give back to the community, or come up with your own ideas!

How are you planning on celebrating your holidays? We would love to hear your ideas and share them with the community!

Email your ideas to [smarsh@murrayschools.org](mailto:smarsh@murrayschools.org)!



[Click here for more ideas from Big Life Journal!](#)

# MANAGING HOLIDAY DISAPPOINTMENT

*Amy Adolfo Signore, PhD, MPH and Emily Wakefield, PsyD  
Pediatric Psychologists, Connecticut Children's*

**0-3 Years Old:** Focus on spending quality time together, as children this young won't recall detailed memories of previous holidays. Connecting together in quiet-down time will allow children to feel love and attention from their caregivers, which is also incredibly beneficial to their development!

**4-6 Years Old:** Create new traditions! Ideas could include; home-made decorations and gifts, cooking a special meal together, video interactions, writing letters, making cards, etc. Acknowledge that their disappointment is real. It is okay to feel any emotions they feel! Model and teach positive reappraisal and self talk. Example: "Since we don't have to travel, we get extra time to relax and play at home!"

**6-12 Years Old:** Focus on validating emotions and building *resilience* (if your kids are at Grant they'll know that word!). Kids this age may have particular expectations about the holidays, and may feel particularly disappointed. Talk about how it's normal to feel angry, frustrated, or sad. This age group may also be particularly interested in coming up with ideas on how to make the holiday special!

**13-18 Years Old:** Validate their emotions and allow them to talk to you. Rather than jumping to "fix" the problems, spend some time just listening. Offer some perspective if they are open to it. Give them some sense of control; they could plan a safe outing for the family, celebrate with a close friend, or choose a family game or activity. This age group in particular benefits from positive social opportunities, like volunteering in a safe and socially distanced way (maybe make a new tradition out of it!).



**Adults and Caregivers:** We'll feel the emotions too! We need to manage our own disappointment just as much as our kids' disappointment. Allow yourself to feel whatever feelings YOU are feeling about the holidays this year, and take the time to nurture and care for yourself. Adjust your expectations about what this year looks like, and look at the big picture.

Remember, children take cues from the adults around them. Model positive reappraisal and gratitude!

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo.  
"So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

*J.R.R. Tolkien The Fellowship of the Ring*