Q: Our family is going stir crazy this winter! Can you offer some suggestions for fun, healthy family activities?
A: Finding activities to keep a family active and connected can be a challenge during the cold winter months. Exploring ideas for fun, healthy family activities can be turned into an adventure. Be sure to take into account your family’s unique needs and interests.

Ideas for both customary and unusual outdoor winter fun are extensive. Some of the more common include snowmobiling, building a snowman or fort, a snowball fight, ice fishing, sledding, or skating on an outdoor rink. Take on the challenge of snowshoeing or cross-country skiing.

Get creative! Blow bubbles on a cold day and watch them turn to ice before your eyes. Make snow paint by adding food coloring to water, putting it in a spray bottle, and painting your yard. Plan a scavenger hunt; it can be as simple as hiding an object in the snow and giving out simple instructions to follow. Throw snowballs at a bullseye target and keep score.

A family nature walk is a great way to appreciate the beauty of winter. Bring a camera to capture pictures of the winter landscape. For those who prefer a less active lifestyle, sitting on your porch swing with a blanket and a cup of something hot can be a relaxing change of pace.

If you’d like to get out of the house without braving the outdoors for longer than it takes to pile in the car, bowling, exploring a local tourist attraction, ice skating, or a trip to the movies are all great options. Do things a child or spouse wants to do also sends a strong message of love. It’s a good idea to identify the things family members want to do together.

How much time should families spend together? That varies from family to family. Families with young children usually spend the most time together because young children need a great deal of physical care and guidance. Families with teenagers may spend less time together because teens naturally want to be alone.

A strong family finds that opportunities for quality time emerge from quantity time: The more time you spend together, the better chance you have of sharing quality experiences. Eating meals together, talking about the events of the day, sharing joys and defeats, doing household chores together, and spending some evenings popping corn and watching movies are examples of shared activities. Some families even schedule one evening every week for special family activities.
movies may fit the bill. A drive with the family to check out the holiday lights and decorations is a simple way to get into the holiday spirit.

The internet is full of creative ideas for baking recipes, craft projects, and fun games. Make bird feeders out of pine cones or oranges, peanut butter, and birdseed. Cut out paper snowflakes to decorate your home. Go camping indoors, or simply have a family fun night of playing board games, cards, or putting together an unusual puzzle.

No matter if you enjoyed the great outdoors all days or hunkered down, the perfect end to any winter day is still curling up in front of the fire (or TV), enjoying a cup of hot chocolate, and just being together as a family.

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The holidays are an exciting time of year for kids. To help ensure they have a safe and happy season, here are some safety and mental health tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

- **Try to keep household routines the same.** Stick to your child’s usual sleep and mealtimes when you can, which may reduce stress and help your family enjoy the holidays.

- **Take care of yourself both mentally and physically.** Children and adolescents are affected by the emotional well-being of their parents or caregivers. Coping with stress successfully can help children learn how to handle stress better, too.

- **Give to others** by making it an annual holiday tradition to share your time and talents with people who have less than you do. For example, if your child is old enough, encourage him or her to join you in volunteering to serve a holiday meal at your local food bank or shelter or sing at a local nursing home. Help your child write a letter to members of the armed forces stationed abroad who can’t be home with their own family during the holidays.

- **Remember** that many children and adults experience a sense of loss, sadness or isolation during the holidays. It is important to be sensitive to these feelings and ask for help for you, your children, family members or friends if needed.

- **Kids still need** to brush their teeth twice a day!

- **Make a plan to focus on one thing at a time.** Try a few ideas to balance the hustle and bustle of things like shopping, cooking, and family get-togethers during the holidays. Stop and pay attention to what is happening at the moment, focus your attention on one thing about it, and notice how you are feeling at the time. Withhold immediate judgment, and instead be curious about the experience.

- **Don’t feel pressured** to “over-spend on gifts.” Consider making one or two gifts. Help your child make a gift for his or her other parent, grandparents, or other important adults and friends. Chances are, those gifts will be the most treasured ones and will teach your child many important lessons.

- **Most important of all,** enjoy the holidays for what they are – time to enjoy with your family. So, be a family, do things together like sledding or playing board games, and spend time visiting with relatives, neighbors, and friends.

**Source:** www.aap.org