

Holiday Tips

The holidays come with many unique activities and experiences. There are many different sounds, textures, temperatures, and changes in routines during the season. These changes can lead to stressful times for children with autism and their families.

Tips to enhance holiday enjoyment for everyone:



Planning Ahead. Make a new routine during school breaks to allow for some predictability. Put dates of family gatherings on a calendar where your child can see and talk about them. Pictures of family and friends on the calendar can also be a fun way to prepare your child.



Giving Gifts. Gift giving can help your child to practice important skills like identifying people, giving named items, and saying, “you’re welcome” when someone says, “thank you”. Provide lots of praise when you see these skills!



Explain Traditions. Social stories can be a great way to show your child the traditions in a way they understand. Ask your BCBA to help create a social story!



Finding Their Gifts. Teaching your child to find their name on a gift tag can help prevent them from opening gifts that belong to others. You can also designate a certain wrapping paper for them, or using a color, shape, or symbol on their gift tag.



Sensory-Friendly Decor. Shatterproof decorations and ornaments are safe alternatives to traditional, fragile decorations. If your child is sensitive to sound, consider wrapping presents in fabric to reduce the sound when opening gifts!



Find Quiet Spaces. Whether you’re at a family member’s house, or community gathering, it’s helpful to know where the quiet spaces are if your child gets overstimulated and needs to take a break.



Pack Fun Activities. Gatherings can include lots of conversation and events that may be uninteresting to your child. Pack activities that your child enjoys and will keep them busy and content during these times!



Bring Your Child’s Identification Information. If your child has a hard time staying with you in new places, make sure your child is wearing their ID bracelet, carrying an ID card, or wearing an AirTag.



A Note For Caregivers

Don't forget to take care of yourself. Holidays are stressful for everyone, but even more so for families that have children with autism. Find times to relax and enjoy the time of year!

Reach out to your BCBA to help you set up routines and strategies for this holiday season. You don't need to do this alone!

Get outside! Try going for a short walk each day. If your child enjoys walks and follows your directions outside, bring them with you. This is a great time to remove distractions and connect with the environment.

Accept imperfection. Acknowledge that things may not go as planned and that's ok.

Set boundaries for you and your child. You can decide where you and your child will go, what you will do, how long you will stay, and how much you will participate. Be honest about what you can handle, and when you need support. Focus on quality, not quantity.

Celebrate small victories. Small achievements are cause for big celebrations. Whether it's for you or your child, make sure to reflect and take pride in any accomplishments, especially during a busy season!