

Tips for Enjoying the Holidays with your Child

The holidays can bring all kinds of different sensory experiences. For children with sensory processing differences, interpretation of and their responses to all the sights, sounds, tastes, and perception of movement and unpredictability of schedules can be uncomfortable. Slightly changing activities and/or the environment can help you and your child enjoy the special events and activities of the holiday season. Here are some tips to help you manage through the holidays.

<p>Help your child know what to expect.</p>	<p>Prepare your child for the holiday by;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discussing some of the associated traditions and activities. 2. Read a book, create a story, look at pictures from previous years, and role play through known trigger situations. 3. Role-play different situations that may occur to help give either polite responses/questions or polite ways to “say the same thing.” (“I don’t want to play a game right now.” Rather than “I don’t want to play with you.”)
<p>Think about your child’s reaction to clothing. Holiday outfits can have stiff lace or feel uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Instead of going for the formal wear;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage wearing of the holiday colors in clothing that the child prefers to wear such as red or green sweatshirts. Holiday socks and ribbons can add a festive flair without being uncomfortable. 2. Sometimes wearing something familiar underneath will help (sweatshirt with a holiday vest over it.) Better for your child to be comfortable than look fashionable and not be able to control their behavior.
<p>Family Get-Togethers offer challenges. Too many people. Too much noise. Too much food.</p>	<p>Pace your family’s involvement and try to stick to your child’s routine as closely as possible.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call ahead and explain that your child may need some time to get away from the crowd. Ask that a quiet space/room be available for your child to go to take a break. 2. Have your child pack a backpack of toys that are organizing and calming to them, or if at your house have your child put some special toys away that are off limits to guests. Have a quiet place arranged in your home too. 3. Make an escape plan and be ready to leave at a moment’s notice if you see your child has had all he/she can handle. 4. Check in with your child at regular intervals throughout the gathering. Offer encouraging words and feedback. 5. Give your child a job –taking drink orders -collect coats – open the door –assist with the younger cousins and friends.
<p>Help your child avoid a meltdown.</p>	<p>Give your child self advocacy skills by practicing phrases like; “please don’t touch me” or “I need a break” or “no thank you” if a relative pushes a certain food that your child does not like or insists on too-tight-hugs. Think ahead about strategies they could use like covering their ears if the singing is too loud.</p>
<p>Worship services.</p>	<p>You don’t have to make it all the way through a service for it to be meaningful.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you know your child loses it after 15 minutes, go ahead and leave after 15 minutes. Shoot for 20 the next time. 2. Give your child a responsibility; make your child in charge of finding the hymns in the hymnal. 3. Take quiet fidget toys, drawing, chewies, hard candy to suck on and gum (if your child chews with his mouth closed) 4. If you have to take just your child with sensory differences out while the rest of the family stays, do not make it a play time. Go to the car and sit quietly or pray while you wait.
<p>Holiday meals.</p>	<p>Many times our holiday meals are more formal. Review expected table manners you have all year long but also talk about special manners they may need as well.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The difference between Grandma’s china and the plates at home. 2. “No thank you,” rather than “Eww! That looks/smells gross!” 3. The rules of using a cloth napkin, etc.
<p>Take care of yourself and try to make realistic expectations. Holidays are rarely picture perfect.</p>	<p>Determine which activities and traditions are most important to you.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage in those that have true meaning and perpetuate happiness. Forgo those that are stress-inducing for you. 2. Consider starting new traditions to replace old stressful ones. 3. Ask family and friends for help and support and understanding. 4. Take care of yourself. Eat right, exercise and get enough sleep. You will be better prepared to recognize and meet the needs of your child.