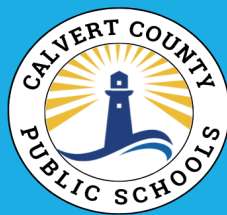


# Family Support Newsletter



December 2023

## All About Me

*Kristina Tchoumak*

Hello! My name is Kristina Tchoumak, I am the new Family Support Coordinator with Family Support Services, previously named Parent Connections, for families who have children with disabilities. This position is staffed by parents of children with disabilities. I have two young children, both of whom attend PAC. They have a variety of disabilities that include Autism, ADHD, epilepsy, developmental delays, as well as complex medical histories.

Being a parent of two children with disabilities is tough, complicated, and draining but this experience has changed my life. It gives me a perspective that I did not have before and it has allowed me to meet incredible families, that I may not have met if we were not on a similar journey.

In my spare time I have gained two bachelor's degrees, one in Biology and another in Psychology. I am currently working towards a dual master's in clinical mental health counseling and school counseling, thanks to the inspiration of my children. As you can see, I like to stay busy! While I like to stay busy, it is equally important for me to intentionally provide myself with self-care. My current mode of self-care is indulging in reading books that have nothing to do with my education or special needs. Recently, this has been my escape when I am feeling overwhelmed. It is important to focus on our own self-care to minimize negative feelings, our kids need us at our best, and our best can only happen if we take care of ourselves!

I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday season! Check out my tips and tricks below for surviving the holidays with our kiddos!



## Upcoming Events

2023-2024

### Winter Reading Festival:

Calvert County Public Library,  
Prince Frederick  
January 25, 2024

5:30 pm-7:30 pm

\*Snow Date Only:

February 1, 2024

5:30 pm-7:30 pm

### School Success Begins with the Basics: Behavior/Maximize Love, Manage Stress, Ages 0-5

January 30, 2024

6:00pm-7:30pm

### School Success Begins with the Basics: Count, Group, & Compare, Ages 0-3:

February 28, 2024

5:30 pm-6:30pm

### Potty Training Workshop:

March 7, 2024

5:30 pm-6:30 pm

March 14, 2024

5:30 pm-6:30 pm

**“There is ability in every disability.”**

-unknown

# Tips for Preparing for the Winter Break and Holidays

This time of year is filled with excitement and many fun activities. It's a time of celebration, but it also comes with a change in routine, which can feel very overwhelming. Not only can the change in routine be overwhelming but so can the family events, often causing a sensory overload for some of our kiddos. What can we do to make the holiday time enjoyable for the whole family while keeping everyone's needs in check? Read my tips and tricks below!


- \* Create a countdown to winter break and once winter break starts, create a countdown to when school starts back up again. This allows your child to know in advance when a change in routine is about to happen.
- \* Communicate with your child's teachers if a change in routine can be problematic, this way they are prepared to help your child with the transition.
- \* Create a visual schedule of the day during winter break so that your child knows what to expect.
- \* Try to keep to the school routine as much as possible. I.e.. Keeping their bedtime/waking routine and having meals at the same time.

## Family Events Tips & Tricks

- \* If you are going to someone's house, ask if they can set aside a "quiet room" where you can take your child if they start feeling overwhelmed.
- \* Bring a plate of food from home if trying new foods is a challenge for your child. You are not being rude; you are listening to your child's needs. It is great to introduce new foods, but an overstimulating family event is not the place you want to put up that fight.
- \* Create a social story before the event, this helps your child to understand what is going to occur, making the transition less stressful. If you have trouble creating a social story, check out our books, **Writing Social Stories** and **My Social Stories Book** by Carol Gray, in our lending library, located at the Family Support Services office in the Infants & Toddlers/Child Find building at Calvert Country School. I have also provided some examples on the following page.
- \* Do not be afraid to leave an event early if things become too overwhelming. You want everyone to have a good time and sometimes having a good time means knowing when it is time to leave.


# Social Stories

## Winter Break


It is winter break. There is  for 2 weeks.

During winter break, I  get on the bus.

During winter break, I will stay at home, where I get to play.

During winter break, I will relax, be with , and go to events.


I may visit family I have not seen in a while.

On Christmas day, I will open .

When break is over, I go back to school, and see my friends and teachers!


## Family Events

Once upon a holiday, Alex went to a family's house. 


It was loud from people laughing and talking. 

The kitchen was filled with yummy smells  of cookies and dinner cooking.

Alex met family members—some he has seen a lot, some not so much.

They played games  and told stories, making lots of noise.

The house was filled with delicious smells and laughter.

Alex discovered that holidays are not just about decorations and gifts, 

But about being with family and making new friends, creating special memories together.

**\*Note: These are examples of social stories but anything in these stories can be changed based on your family activities or celebratory preferences. If you would like anything changed in these social stories do not hesitate to contact me and we can create one together that fits your families needs!**

## Contact Information

Kristina Tchoumak  
410-550-8375  
[tchoumakk@calvertnet.k12.md.us](mailto:tchoumakk@calvertnet.k12.md.us)  
Located at the Infants & Toddlers/  
Child Find Office  
1350 Dares Beach Road  
Prince Frederick, MD

