

HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS

Tips for make the holiday season easier for your kiddo on the Autism Spectrum

Decorating:

- Decorate in stages, rather than changing everything at once. While holiday decorations are fun and festive, to a kiddo with autism the changes to a household can be sensory overload.
- Allow your child to interact with the decorations and help put them in place. Flashing lights or musical decorations can disturb some children. To see how your child will respond, experience these items in a store or someone else's home first

Shopping:

- Last minute holiday shopping can be stressful for children who rely on routines.
- If you do take your child shopping, allow enough time to gradually adapt to the intense holiday stimuli that stores exhibit this time of year.
- Keep your receipts and make sure 'surprise' items are returnable.

Family Routines:

- Meet as a family to discuss how to minimize disruptions to established routines and how to support positive behavior when disruptions are inevitable.
- Continue using behavior support strategies during the holidays. Try social stories to help your child cope with changes in routine, and visual supports to help prepare for more complicated days.
- Make sure to take two cars to family events, so that if your child is too uncomfortable you can leave early.
- If you want to go to a grown up party, schedule help or babysitters in advance and familiarize your kiddos with them.
- If you are travelling for the holidays, make sure to have their favorite food, books or toys available. Use social stories to explain what will happen if travel involves boarding an airplane or overnight stays in new places.

Gifts:

- If you put gifts under the Christmas tree, prepare well ahead of time by teaching that gifts are not to be opened without the family there. Give your child a wrapped box and a reward for keeping it intact.
- Wait until just before the holiday to set out gifts, especially large tempting ones.
- When opening gifts as a family, try passing around an ornament to signal whose turn it is to open the next gift. This helps alleviate disorganization and the frustration of waiting. Also, if you have no intention of getting a specific item, be direct and specific about what they will and won't receive. This will diffuse future meltdowns.

Play Time

- Prepare siblings and young relatives to share their new gifts with others.
- If necessary, consider giving your child a quiet space to play with his/her own gifts, away from the temptation of grabbing at other children's toys.

And Remember!

- Brace yourself for melt-downs. Handle them as calmly as possible. Know your loved one with autism and exactly how much noise and new activity they can tolerate.
- If necessary, consider giving your child a quiet space to play with his/her own gifts, away from the temptation of grabbing at other children's toys.

