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NAVIGATING HOLIDAY GATHERINGS: TIPS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILIES

Creating Memorable Moments with Care

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NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS
INTRODUCTION

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TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL HOLIDAY GATHERING



SPECIAL NEEDS
EMPOWERMENT COACH

Holidays are a special time for families to come together, but for those with special needs, they can feel overwhelmed.

With thoughtful preparation and the right tools, you can make these gatherings enjoyable and memorable for everyone.

Here's how to plan ahead and create a supportive environment for your child and family.

INITIAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE STARTING:

How are you feeling about the approaching holiday season in terms of parenting?

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced in the past during this time of year?

CONNECT WITH FAMILY AND HOSTS AHEAD OF TIME

Communicate Needs:

If your child requires specific accommodations, such as a quiet space or special dietary options, share these with the host in advance. For example, if your child only eats certain textures, bring their preferred foods and let the host know not to be offended.

List Specific Needs:

Check the Plan:

Ask about the schedule of activities. For instance, if there's a long sit-down dinner, you might bring quiet activities like coloring books or a tablet to keep your child entertained during the meal.

Notes About Event:

BRING A “COMFORT KIT”

Familiar Items:

Pack a bag with your child’s favorite snacks, headphones, or a beloved stuffed animal. For example, if your child loves a specific sensory toy like a squishy ball, make sure it’s included.

List Comfort Items:

Prepare Sensory Tools:

If your child is sensitive to noise, bring noise-canceling headphones. Weighted lap pads or small blankets can help them stay calm in an unfamiliar environment.

List Sensory Toys/Activities:

PREP YOUR CHILD FOR THE GATHERING

Use Visuals:

Show your child photos of family members, the host's home, or any pets they might meet. For example, you might say, "This is Grandma's house, and we'll be there for dinner. See her big Christmas tree?"

List Places To Familiarize:

Practice Social Skills:

Role-play scenarios like saying "hello" or waving goodbye. For example, practice a high-five or fist bump for greeting relatives if hugs are uncomfortable for your child.

What is your child comfortable with for interaction?

CREATE A “QUIET ZONE”

Find a Retreat Spot:

Coordinate with the host to identify a quiet space. This could be a guest bedroom or even a small corner with a comfy chair and pillows. Bring items like books, a tablet, or noise-canceling headphones to set it up.

Quiet Zone Checklist:

Stick to Calming Activities:

If your child becomes overwhelmed, guide them to the quiet spot. For example, you could do a mindfulness activity together, like taking deep breaths or counting backward from 10.

List 3 Calming Activities to Practice:

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Know Your Child's Limits:

If your child can only handle an hour or two, plan for a shorter visit. For example, let family members know in advance: "We'll join for lunch but may need to head home before dessert."

Practice Sharing Your Plan:

Be Ready to Adjust Plans:

Flexibility is key. If your child becomes overstimulated, be prepared to leave early or take a walk outside to reset. Remember, the goal is to make the experience enjoyable for your family.

Choose a Word or Phrase that Helps You Remember to be Flexible:

THANK YOU!

Holidays can be a joyful time to connect, even with the unique challenges of special needs parenting. By planning ahead and staying flexible, you can create a positive experience for your child and family. Remember, it's okay to step away, modify traditions, or leave early—what matters most is the happiness and well-being of your loved ones.



Need help navigating?

Available Services

- 1:1 Parent Empowerment Coaching
- Group Speaking Engagements
- Special Needs Parenting Facebook Group
- Weekly Newsletter
- Workshops and Trainings Virtual/In-Person
- Supportive Community

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