

Holiday Resource Guide For Families:

Strategies for Holidays and Special Events

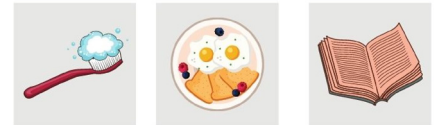
DNEA Resource Guide
for Families

While holidays are a time of joy and celebration, they can also be difficult for youth with autism spectrum disorder. During the holiday season, thoughtful planning can assist in reducing holiday-related stress and challenging behaviors related to the uniqueness of different holiday events and activities. The purpose of this guide is to provide strategies to help de-stress during the busy holiday season.

Stick to the Schedule

- Changes in routines can be difficult for individuals with autism. Maintain as many familiar routines as possible during the school break.
- Talk to your child's school and find out when they have snack, quiet time, or lunch.
- If your child uses a visual schedule, make and teach pieces for novel activities.

Morning Schedule



Have a Decorating Game Plan



- Decorations are a change that can be overwhelming or distracting. Consider decorating your home in stages.
- Involve your child in the process as much as possible. Develop a visual schedule or calendar that shows what you hope to accomplish each day.
- Decorations can be confused as toys. Discuss rules regarding the use of certain decorations. Model how to interact with decor and use visual boundaries, like a gate or painters' tape, to show clear boundaries.

Remember to Reinforce Positive Behaviors

- Remember to continue to reinforce positive behaviors.
- Encourage and reinforce positive behaviors during new holiday activities that may be difficult for your child.
- Make your praise specific: "I like the way that you are waiting while your sister opens her gift!"



Additional resource guides and a full list of references can be found at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org>.

Suggested citation : Fletcher, A., Mallory, S., & CDS DNEA Team. (2021). *Holiday resource guide for families: Strategies for holidays and special events*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism.

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Give the Gift of Predictability

- Use visual schedules, timers, and visual cues to help establish clear expectations for the timing of gift giving.
- Consider role playing gift etiquette such as taking turns, waiting, and saying “thank you.” Model and discuss scenarios to prepare your child for receiving a gift they don’t want in order to avoid uncomfortable situations.
- Don’t forget to bring your child’s communication device and permanent supports with you (e.g., visual supports, de-escalation tools, social narratives).



Make Time for Yourself



- Notice and celebrate small victories. Take a moment to focus on something that went really well.
- Practice meditation or deep breathing; ongoing practice can have positive health effects.
- Volunteer your time; it can boost your sense of happiness and well-being.
- Get outside; take at least a 10 minute walk daily.
- Laughter creates positive physical changes in your body; spend a half hour watching anything that makes you laugh.

Celebrate with Confidence

- Invite your child to assist in planning for guests you may be hosting. Provide them with context by involving them in setting the table or changing bed linens.
- Use role playing and social narratives to practice being a gracious host before guests arrive.
- Be aware of holiday sensory triggers. Sights, sounds, smells, and large crowds can be overwhelming. Determine in advance where to take your child if they become overwhelmed during an event.



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