

Holiday Tips

Supporting autistic students during the holidays



1. Some children/youth with autism may be anxious when their surroundings at home change. When decorating, be mindful of blinking lights, different sounds, and clutter in their environment. Consider adding a new decoration or change one day at a time, having your child/youth participate in where it goes in the home.
2. Reduce the stimuli as much as possible if your child/youth is more sensitive to lights, sounds, and smells.
3. Plan ahead for travel and celebrations by marking individual events on a [calendar](#) and striking each day off as you approach the event.
4. Provide a visual of what the event may look like, who will be there, and even how you will go there.
5. Use previous family photos of the people you will be spending time with so your child/youth can predict who will be there. Consider a video call beforehand to familiarize them with family and friends again.
6. Communicate your plan with others. You are not alone in supporting your child/youth during the holidays, so make sure to communicate your child's food preferences, have a quiet space available where you'll be visiting in case your child/youth needs a break, and some quiet time to self-regulate.
7. Pack additional preferred items that support self-regulation and calming activities that can be done at someone else's home.
8. If gift giving and receiving is difficult for your child/youth to participate in, consider practicing ahead of time and writing out the rules of how to wait and take a turn. To make the experience more successful and pleasant, it may help to minimize expectations so that the child/youth opens one gift in the large group and then the rest on their own.
9. You know your child/youth best. Share your tried and true strategies with those around your child/youth during the holidays. Consider a [mini tip sheet](#) of preferred items, activities and sayings when your child/youth is starting to get anxious or overwhelmed.
10. Enjoy yourself! The holiday season can be a wonderful time to be with family, friends, and most of all your child/youth. Take the time to rest, communicate, and be together both inside and outdoors.

