

Holiday TIPS for Families Living with Autism

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Winter

2007

The holiday period can be both an enjoyable time as well as a very stressful time for those touched by autism. Over Christmas, daily routines are changed, new people present themselves, there are sensory overloads from the bright lights, new smells from all of the cooking and baking and there are the sounds of music seemingly everywhere.

If we anticipate the holidays and what they entail before they arrive, and make adjustments as situations unfold, the person with autism (and their families) can be made more comfortable and at ease—allowing Christmas to be an enjoyable time for all.



Tips for Decorating your home:

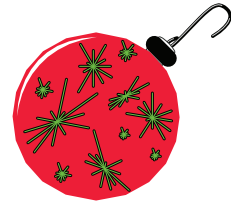
Begin early – as soon as Halloween has passed, create a large calendar on a white board outlining when certain things will be undertaken. Include such things as when you will set up the Christmas tree.

Where will the tree be set up (do you have to move furniture, it's a good idea to move furniture one day and to set the tree up several days (or more) afterwards).

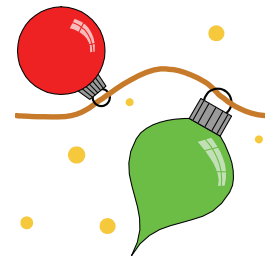
Say and show where "moved things" will be stored until after the holidays (confirming that they are not lost or thrown away).



Will there be shiny bulbs on the tree or in various rooms of your home? If so, can a few of them be put in small jars for a couple of weeks before your home and tree are decorated so that one has a chance to see, touch and get used to some of them before they are on the tree.



Will there be lights on the tree? If so, can they be brought out early and set up somewhere so that one can get used to the varying colors? Put on the calendar when lights will be put on the tree, and when lights will be put up both inside of your home and outside of your home.



Are there favorite ornaments, perhaps those with pictures or names of family members on them? Bring them out early so that they can be looked at and examined beforehand.

On the White Board Calendar, also list:

- When you will visit family and friends – **BE EXPLICIT** and include times of arriving and departing (and keep to your schedule for:)



- School Plays
- "Must see" Television specials
- "Must watched" video's and DVD movies
- Visits to Santa Claus

Food

Talk about the different types of food that might be present and if possible, practice making some of the new or less frequently prepared food early



(Vienna sausages may look like little hot dogs but will likely be a big taste surprise for someone expecting it to taste like a hot dog).



Visiting Family and Friends Homes

If possible, pre-schedule the visit (and place the date on the White Board

Calendar) and if the visit is to a familiar home, identify a safe or quiet place that the person touched by autism is able to go to if things become too stimulating for them (and make sure there is a favorite activity, video, book, etc in that room or place when you make that visit).

Meals

If possible, bring along a food the person will always eat – bringing along some chicken nuggets or French fries and re-heating them at a friend's home can certainly save a disaster.

Dress

If possible, don't worry about how the person touched by autism is dressed, special Christmas outfits can make wonderful photographs, but if the clothes don't fit just right (possibly due in part to the stress of being someplace new or with unfamiliar people) tantrums don't make for Kodak moments.

Practicing

If possible, before leaving "practice" by looking at photographs, and the names of The people you will be visiting. Also "practice" scripts, how to respond to "how old are you now," "what grade are you in," and "how is school" with prepared scripted responses.

Presents-

Presents are wonderful, but can be Overwhelming

Sometimes it might be useful to stagger opening presents. Although this can be difficult to siblings, it helps the child with autism to pace some of the stimulation. a good method to use a white sheet to cover some presents beforehand and uncover presents periodically throughout the day.

When a child stops playing with one toy to begin attending to another, it might be useful to move that toy out of the area, perhaps to another room so that you don't have competing interests between toys to contend with.



Particularly with video games, preview them when possible first, come games have so much stimulation between noise, action, and colors that one touched by autism can't help but to become overly stimulated right away. Often these types of games are better left for other times (sorry Dads).

