

Handling the Holiday Stress

Holidays are often filled with stress. There always seems to be a lot of pressure to make the holidays perfect and fun. This is a tall order in any situation, but when you add to that the stress of having a child with special needs whom you also want to have a perfect holiday, it can become overwhelming.

Holiday time is exciting for children, and children with special needs are no different. As opposed to wishing and pushing for a child to be normal, acceptance of where he or she is encourages further development. More than new toys, it is their parents' time and attention that is so exciting and wonderful for children.

As families we have comprised a few helpful tips to help and think about during this festive season of giving.

- ♥First buy an inexpensive notebook for holiday planning. We all need a schedule.
- ♥Strategize your holiday plans with the entire family. Discuss what makes you and your family happy as well as your child with special needs.
- ♥Think about shopping online instead of overcrowded malls and stores. Do your shopping early.
- ♥Schedule some activities to nourish your spirit, such as musical performances and plays.
- ♥Do not over schedule your children and self. Cut back on tasks that are overwhelming, such as avoiding long trips to the mall. Think about the activity level, what might be overwhelming for one child may not for another.
- ♥Prepare home-based activities. Spend time with children making decorations and cards.

♥Physical activity. Physical activity is one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce stress.

♥Relaxation skills for entire family. Make an activity of stretching and deep breathing.

♥Make "quiet time" a part of your families' schedule. Read or tell stories, sing and listen to holiday music, or even just give each other massages.

♥Maintain bedtime routines during the holiday break. While some routines will be thrown off during this time , try to keep bedtime on track, allowing for plenty of rest.

♥Provide opportunities for you and your children to help others. Help bake and deliver food, donate clothing, toys or books. Read and tell stories to emphasize giving.

♥Teach and instill appreciation and gratitude. It does not need to be a major event, maybe a hug, words of love or catching snowflake on your tongue. Use their special qualities to enhance the season.

Let us connect with mind and heart to our families and friends and all those whose lives we touch. Trying to create the perfect holiday for your child with special needs will certainly stress you and your child. Spending quality time together is what is important.

" The only true gift is a portion of thyself"
Ralph Waldo Emerson.



Adapted with permission from Vicki Peterson and families of children with Autism

