



Happy Kids for Christmas

It's typical for children to become over stimulated and stressed with all the activities surrounding the holiday season. Children with social and behavioral challenges may have the most difficulty adapting to schedule changes, visits to unfamiliar places, and introductions to new people and foods. The following tips give parents and caregivers some ways to maintain the joy of the season.

- ★ Prepare your child well in advance of all events.
- ★ Tell children what will happen and what you expect them to do. Be specific, such as: *The guests will arrive between 5 and 6. Most of the children will be in the family room. If you need me, come to the kitchen.*
- ★ Preview guests or people you will visit with photos; rehearse names and relationships.
- ★ Role-play scenarios for greeting guests, receiving gifts, etc.
- ★ Identify “safe places” at home and away where your child can get away from crowds, noise, and confusion.
- ★ Take a favorite food or toy along when leaving home and changes in routine cannot be controlled.
- ★ Prepare relatives and friends for the potential of unusual behavior or if your child's actions may be misinterpreted. *Bill doesn't understand jokes; he takes things very literally. Sue may interrupt conversation because she doesn't know when it's her turn to talk. Mary doesn't like to be hugged.*
- ★ At gatherings, ask trusted adults to alert you for signs of a potential “melt down” before it happens.
- ★ Help your child fit into social situations by coaching them while engaged in conversation and group activities.
- ★ Give your child a role in which they can be successful.
- ★ Help your child select or make gifts with their special talents.
- ★ Ask your child to join the family in a service project that contributes to the larger community to devalue the materialism of Christmas.
- ★ Try to attend a Christmas Mass that isn't too crowded.
- ★ Stagger the opening of presents throughout the day or longer.
- ★ Prepare your child when furniture is moved and items are put away temporarily so they know familiar things will return after the holidays.

Sources:

Brown, Dale S. “How to Help your Child Have a Happy Holiday.” Website: *LDOonline.com*. 2008.

Sutton, Larry. “Christmas with Autism.” *NAfIM Messenger*. December 2007.

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