



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #44



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DID SOMEONE MENTION HOLIDAY?

(A few coping suggestions to help you and your autism affected loved one through this time of year....)

While the holidays are designed to be joyful and fun, we all know they can and often do bring on their own set of stressors. Families and individuals who already face a unique set of challenges associated with ASD can be particularly affected this time of year.

Knowing the limits of your loved one with ASD is a good start to avoiding unnecessary unhappiness. How much noise or other sensory input is tolerable? If you have family members coming to visit, prepare them ahead of time to the possible problems that are specific to your family member with ASD. If your family is planning to travel, prepare your ASD family member to the possible challenges that go with traveling and unfamiliar environments.

In other words: Plan ahead, plan ahead, plan ahead!

Just like we sometimes slowly ease into a swimming pool or warm/hot bath – ease yourself and your ASD loved one into the holiday season.

- You might begin by showing pictures from previous years or putting together a visual support that depicts various stages of decorating.
- You might even begin with a social story or social narrative that includes your family's holiday traditions and how changes can be fun and that feeling some stress is okay.....but be sure to include some strategies of how to cope with it, e.g., it's okay to remove yourself to a quiet place and regroup, take some deep breaths, perhaps watch a favorite video, or play a video game, etc.
- Predictability seems to be the key in keeping everyone's stress level at a manageable level. The individual with ASD wants to know the answers to questions such as these... (along with the rest of us)!

The following list was adapted from Division TEACH and a Powerpoint slide designed by Dr. Ruth Aspy, Dr. Barry Grossman, and Dr. Brenda Smith Myles:

- ✓ What is the Schedule (Plan)?
- ✓ What am I expected to do?
- ✓ How much am I expected to do?
- ✓ What will other people be doing?
- ✓ How will I know I'm finished?
- ✓ What will I do next?
- ✓ What should I do if I don't know what to do?
- ✓ Am I aware when I become overwhelmed, anxious or upset?
- ✓ What should I do if I become or feel myself becoming overwhelmed, anxious or upset?

Answers to these questions will go a long way in making the holiday transition calmer and increase your loved one's ability to join in the fun.

- When possible, provide a place for your loved one to get away from the sensory overload and excitement. Have some favorite activities available to assist him/her in calming down.
- Be direct: if an individual with autism begins to obsess about a particular gift, item or person – perhaps setting a timer for five minutes and letting the person with ASD talk about the desired object and when the time is up, conversation over. If you know the desired object is not going to be an option, it's best to simply state that directly and specifically.
- If there are holiday activities your loved one is not interested in – don't force the participation.
- Have desired food and snacks on hand – again, this is not a time to “make” your loved one with ASD participate in a meal that has nothing appealing to him/her.
- Be flexible, choose your battles and remember everyone is doing the best that they know how in any given moment.

You are only responsible for YOUR behavior and how you choose to respond to others is where your growth and lessons are derived.

Some additional resources that you might find useful include:

- [*101 Activities for Kids in Tight Spaces: At the Doctor's Office, on Car, Train, and Plane Trips, Home Sick in Bed...*](#) by Carol Stock Kranowitz
- [*The New Social Story Book*](#) by Carol Gray
- [Social Skills fact sheets](#) by Project ACCESS staff

Here's to a pleasant and kind holiday season!

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