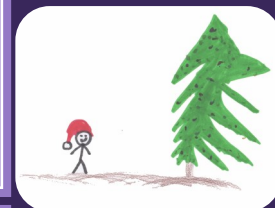# Holiday Tips

Happy Holidays from the UWAC!

For individuals with autism, enjoying the holidays and participating can be extra challenging with all of the extra lights, noises, events and schedule changes. To help you and your family have the best holiday possible, we compiled some tips for the season from our clinical staff. Warm wishes for the holidays and happy new year! —*Aspen White, MBA*

From the Director

Whether your ideal holiday pace is slow or fast, packed with activities, or reading in front of the fire, we hope you find some special moments that are just right for you! —*Annette Estes, Ph.D.*

Thinking Ahead

Take time to think ahead about what might help YOUR child prepare for the holiday break. Would your child benefit from a written or picture schedule of what they can expect each day? Would your child benefit from having a quiet place to decompress on a regular basis amidst the extra stimulation of the holidays? Would your child benefit from a special job or role during the holidays such as taking photographs to put together later as a holiday memory book or for thank you cards? —*Kelly Johnson, Ph.D.*

Sensory Considerations

It can be important to consider how the individual with ASD may be impacted by decorations, lights, and sounds at home; the sensory aspects of the holidays. If your family member is sensitive to this, introduce holiday decorations slowly throughout the season or limit how many items are on display so the home environment is still comfortable for you family member with ASD.
—*Patricia Matestic, Ph.D.*

New Activities & Schedule Changes

Tip 1: Many individuals with ASD can become anxious when there is change or a new or unfamiliar activity. It can be helpful to prepare the family member ahead of time for the event by talking about what will happen and setting up clear expectations, looking at pictures or visiting the place in advance to become more familiar with the setting, and then slowly introduce activities in a step-wise fashion. Also, remember sometimes shorter activities or visits are better and easier to manage. —*Patricia Matestic, Ph.D.*

Tip 2: Social stories about specific events, such as meals with extended family, visiting Santa, thanking people for gifts, etc., can be a great way to prepare kids so they know what to expect. —*Ella Vanderbilt-Adriance, Ph.D.*

Tip 3: Go over your schedule every day and talk about changes like school breaks, trips, and appointments in advance. Use pictures and visual schedules to help children picture when things are happening.
—*Amy Rodda, Ph.D., CCC-SLP*

Tip 4: Time with extended family can be wonderful, but it also can be stressful. For those with family members who simply don't understand autism or are critical of your choices, take a minute to think through how you want to approach or respond to them before you let a comment hurt you. Sometimes it helps to have a brief and rehearsed pat response ready.
—*Jessica Greenson, Ph.D.*

Traveling

Tip 1: Call the airlines ahead of time and share your child's diagnosis with them. They may have suggestions for you in terms of documentation to bring in order to bypass lines or other accommodations.
—*Ashley Penney, Ph.D., BCBA-D*

Tip 2: If traveling in the car or to family or friends houses, bring supplies including preferred toys, fidget toys, noise cancelling headphones, sensory friendly items like a weighted blanket or lap pillow, and favorite snacks.
—*Tanya St. John, Ph.D.*

Tip 3: Rent digital books from the library on an iPad or other tablet in order to reduce the number of items you need to bring with you in your carry on. —*Ashley Penney, Ph.D., BCBA-D*

Tip 4: A surprise bag filled with new, inexpensive items can be a great way to keep your child entertained on a longer trip or at a time when their patience begins to wane. —*Tanya St. John, Ph.D.*

Tip 5: Use tinfoil to wrap and re-wrap dollar store items and snacks on the plane or in the car. Give your child a new "present" at spaced out intervals throughout the trip to keep things fun and new.
—*Ashley Penney, Ph.D., BCBA-D*

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