

Trevor's Best Of Help Tips to Have the Happiest of Holidays

The holidays can be the most joyful time for many children but for others it can be the most stressful, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Proper planning and organizing ahead of time can help lessen the stresses the holiday season brings. Trevor shares his "Best of Help" (BOH) tips to help relieve some of those anxieties and make it truly the most wonderful time of the year for you and your little one.

Read It Again and Again: Create a visual social story to help your child prepare for what the holiday season would be like. If possible, write the story together making him/her the "star" of the show. Describe and demonstrate the activities he/she will be participating in and how much fun they will be having. Try to use real-life pictures to make the story as realistic as possible; but most importantly make it FUN! Tailor the story to your child's abilities and attention span. Read it and re-read it multiple times before the festivities begin.

Calendars and Schedules: Maintaining structure and routines are difficult during the holiday season. Calendars and schedules are great ways to show children exactly what is going to occur and when. Grab a calendar, or better yet, make one with your child. Identify all the important dates. Use pictures representing the people, places, and activities you'll be experiencing together. On days where routine will be different, prepare a visual schedule of events. Visual schedules will reinforce structure and make transitioning from one activity to the next less difficult. The schedule should include pictures of each event and the times they will be taking place, as well as activities you know your child will enjoy. Reviewing calendars and schedules beforehand will let your child know what to expect and when to expect it.

Break Time: It is much easier to "prevent" meltdowns than it is to manage them once they have erupted. Kids on the spectrum can become overwhelmed with all the holiday activity, out of sorts with the change in routines, and overloaded with all the sensory stimulation. Before they feel lost and unanchored schedule time for them to decompress and ground themselves. You know your child's limits and triggers best; so plan accordingly. Building break times into your daily schedule may avert a major break-down.

Ornamentation: Decorating your home may get you into the holiday spirit but may cause some discomfort for your special child. Many children on the spectrum have a sensitivity to lights and noises. So those festive surroundings may bring a whole new level of stress and anxiety. In addition, the transformation of your home's appearance may be a little overwhelming. Avoid the added anxiety by engaging your child as much as possible in the decorating process. Show him/her pictures of holiday decorations in advance. If possible, take your child shopping with you or to places already decorated. Select items you know he/she can tolerate. Finally, have your child help you **gradually** decorate the house. Add the wanted festive flare to your home without the unwanted flare-up.

Use Your Words: The holidays are rich with tradition as well as language. Garland, tinsel, gelt, and mistletoe are all words seasonally spoken and not commonly heard in everyday conversation throughout the year. Help your special kid get into the holiday spirit a bit easier by **READING** holiday books, **PLAYING** seasonal games, **LABELING** holiday objects, and **TALKING** with him/her about the joys of the season. Also, creating cards, singing carols, and watching movies are effective ways for your child to become more familiar with the seasonal lingo.

Festive Foods: Determine in advance what holiday foods your child does or does not like. Many delicious dishes and yummy treats are prepared and brought to holiday gatherings. Even though you have no control over what your guests are going to bring you do have control over what you have on hand. Be sure to have plenty of your child's favorites. A little forward food planning and preparation may encourage your little one to dine at the same time as everyone else.

Travel Checklist: Put together a checklist of all the essentials that will help your child get through journeying beyond their own communities. Essentials can include: electronic devices; DVD players; music, toys; books; snacks; and more. Think of your child's daily routine and bring along the necessities that help him/her get through a typical day. Keep that checklist close at hand to ensure everything your child requires travels with you everywhere you go.

Gift Practice: Practice opening gifts with your child. Together gift-wrap some fun objects and then open them. Be sure to rehearse taking turns and waiting for others. Practicing these skills in advance can help avoid embarrassing moments and unnecessary outbursts.

Picture This: Take plenty of pictures of you and your child as you experience all the joyous activities over the holiday. Once the season is over, printout those photos. Together select your favorites and glue them onto paper. Write a short sentence underneath each picture and staple the pages together. Viola! You've created a holiday picture book. The picture book can serve as a visual cue to help your child talk about his/her holiday experience. Furthermore, it can help your child remember the season, retain new language, and reinforce appropriate social behaviors. Plus, it will make for a beautiful keepsake. The perfect gift to top-off a wonderful holiday season.



Wishing Everyone a HAPPY and SAFE Holiday Season!!!

www.kookabuk.com