

“Preparing Your Child & Yourself for a Successful Holiday Season”

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The goal of this talk/discussion is for parents to walk away with actionable strategies and language to use during the holidays in three categories:

(1) Specific Hacks; (2) How to Talk to Family/Friends; (3) Self-Care.

(1) Specific Hacks: what to do when:

- Preparing to Travel, e.g., try on clothes before packing; pack bag with familiar things, including clothes; create/use social stories
- Traveling (car/train/airplanes)
- Routines are disrupted
- Meltdowns/tantrums
- Sensory overload, e.g., fireworks; noise in general; lawn mowers /leaf blowers.
- Tactile defensiveness/sensory avoidance (don't like to be hugged/kissed)
- Unmet expectations/disappointment, e.g., not getting the one toy kid wants; not getting anything s/he wanted; not being able to open all the presents s/he got
- Explaining situations to your kid: you need scripted language
- Screen-time: e.g., maybe your kid uses screen-time as a way to relieve stress/ reset, so allow extra screen-time; how to explain that to others

(2) Family Members; In-laws & Friends:

- You might not know who the players will be in advance / who's going to be there and where they're coming from— i.e., what they know/think about kids with disabilities; if their kids are perfectly behaved; if disabilities make them uncomfortable in general
- if you know who will be there, review them with your kid (use photos; make family trees; make social stories; role play)

- If you do know who will be there, prep them about: important things, e.g., your kid is sensory avoidant (“Please don’t hug/kiss him unless...”); your kid is sensory seeking (“Please give him a big hug”); your kid is not flexible/needs to stick to routines (“Please don’t change plans spontaneously”); your kid needs extra screen-time (“Please let him keep his phone at the table”)
- Be aware that some people just won’t get it, no matter what
- Everyone has his/her own baggage
- Don’t let other people’s responses/reactions ruin it for you
- Have ready (thoughtful, calm) responses: you need scripted contemplative language to respond to comments that are: mean; well-meaning but hurtful /just plain wrong / thoughtless, e.g., “those children”

(3) Self-Care

- Holidays are hard: give yourself a break
- Give yourself permission to say, “No”
- Make a mantra that works for you and use it
- Give yourself a Time Out
- Calibrate expectations— remember the expression: “don’t let perfection be the enemy of good enough”
- Be kind/gentle with yourselves; guard your serenity
- Don’t let the stress ruin the holidays for *you*
- Conserve your energy/resources: pick your battles
- Make traditions that will work for you and your family
- Don’t lose yourself in details
- Don’t take everything/anything personally: “It’s not me, it’s them”