

Tips and Tricks for Holiday Success



Preparation is the key to success



- ▶ The key to a successful holiday with a child with special needs is preparation. Preparation will mean different things to each child depending on their areas of need.
- ▶ Involve your child in any choices or decisions you can. Ask them for help in the planning of the holiday. It may be as simple as their costume, a tablecloth or it may be choosing an airline seat for an older child. Be flexible and encourage your child to be as well. Changes always happen.
- ▶ Social stories can help prepare children of all ages. The social story will tell them what to expect and decrease their anxiety. If you are traveling for the holiday, write a social story for what will happen at the airport or during the car ride as well as writing one for what will happen during the holiday itself. Many kids with special needs are visual so if you have pictures from past holidays, use them. If not you can use computer images or draw something simple yourself. When writing the social story, think about what is important to your child, not necessarily to you. Keep the story positive.
- ▶ If your child has sensory issues, think ahead of time for anything you can do to ease their anxiety such as headphones, fidget toys, music, new movies or games to take their mind off the changes, gum or chewy candy for an airline descent. Be prepared!

Holiday Prep Ideas



Before

- explain the meaning of the holiday to your family and how it will be celebrated at school and in your home
- discuss or make a social story about when and how specifically the holiday will be celebrated with as many dates, times and details as possible for the child's age
- let your child participate in picking out decorations for the holiday and putting them up
- let your child choose a special decoration for their room or keep their room decoration free if they do not like them
- make or purchase a countdown calendar for that holiday

During

- Make a schedule for each day and have your child help make it if they like to
- Give your child choices that you can, for example, where they would like to sit at the table or what they will have to drink
- Take pictures when you can and share them with your child. They will also be good for social stories and preparation for next year.
- Praise your child whenever possible and set them up for success.

After

- Review the social story or pictures with your child and ask them what their favorite or least favorite parts of the holiday were. Other family members can answer too to help everyone have even more fun next year or the next holiday coming up.



Halloween Social Story Sample



- ▶ On October 31st I will go trick or treating with my friends and family
- ▶ My friends will come over for pizza about 5pm and we'll go trick or treating later when it starts getting dark
- ▶ We ring the doorbell or knock and say "trick or treat". Then we hold out our bag or bucket and get a treat. We say "thank you"
- ▶ We don't go inside the house, stay out front
- ▶ Then we go to the next house together
- ▶ When I'm tired I can tell the adults I'm ready to go home
- ▶ Some houses have scary decorations but they're not real, they are just there for fun
- ▶ The adults will tell us when we can eat the candy
- ▶ Trick or treating is fun!

Thanksgiving Tips *(sample holiday)*



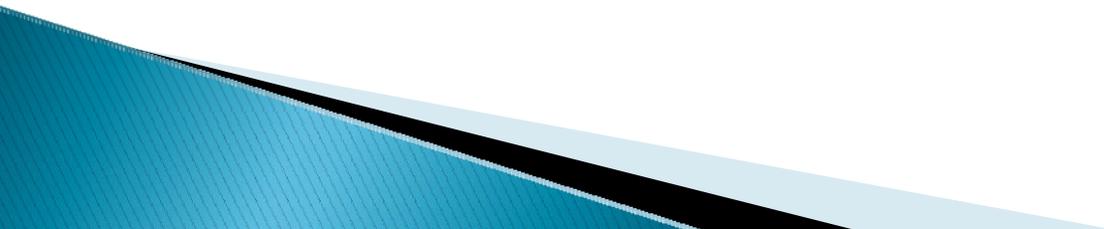
- ▶ Write a social story with or for your child about what will happen on Thanksgiving Day and the days leading up to it
- ▶ Let your child pick out a special dish or drink to prepare and bring
- ▶ Let your child help decide where to put up the decorations they made at school or your family decorations
- ▶ Allow your child to make place cards for all people attending Thanksgiving dinner. This will help them prepare for who they will see. If going to a friend's house, ask them ahead of time who will be there.
- ▶ Give your child a specific job to keep them busy and feeling important
- ▶ Let your child know it is ok to take a break whenever they need it. Pick a place ahead of time where they can go if they feel overwhelmed. If at another house, choose an area and put some of their favorite things there.



Thanksgiving Projects and Resources

- ▶ Webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/thanksgiving.htm– Thanksgiving and Pilgrims
- ▶ Scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/webcast.htm–New Plimoth Plantation Virtual Field Trips
- ▶ Teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com/2009/11/thanksgiving-activities.html – Thanksgiving Activities
- ▶ Thanksgiving Movies for children:
 - 1) A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving
 - 2) Mouse on the Mayflower
 - 3) Winnie the Pooh–Seasons of Giving

Books about Thanksgiving:

- 1) A new look at Thanksgiving by Catherine O’Neill Grace and Margaret M. Bruchac (Grades 3–5)
 - 2) The First Thanksgiving by Linda Hayward (Grades pre–K–1)
 - 3) Clifford’s Thanksgiving Visit by Norman Bridwell (Grades pre–K–2)
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Christmas *(sample short social story)*

- ▶ On Christmas Eve, friends and family are coming to Sam's house for dinner!
- ▶ We will make pies on December 23rd and Sam will get to help Granny
- ▶ Granny and Grandpa will be staying at our house. They are arriving on December 22nd
- ▶ On Christmas Eve, dinner will be early at about 4pm
- ▶ Sam and Jake get to open one present on Christmas eve!
- ▶ On Christmas morning, we will open all the presents together
- ▶ Sam can open one present or many, it's his choice
- ▶ If anyone needs a break from all the excitement, they can take one, that's ok
- ▶ Christmas is going to be fun!



Tips and Tricks Overview



- ▶ Plan ahead whenever possible
- ▶ Write simple social stories or role play
- ▶ Show pictures of family/friends that will visit
- ▶ Plan a quiet area for your child to go when they need a break
- ▶ Watch for signs of increasing anxiety, offer a break
- ▶ Practice things like trick or treating or unwrapping presents ahead of time
- ▶ Talk with your child's teacher to find out schedule changes at school during holiday times. Let your child know these changes.
- ▶ For a plane flight or long car ride, give you child small wrapped new toys from the dollar store throughout the journey, especially when they're being good!
- ▶ For older children, social stories can include fill in the blanks such as the name of your flight attendant or a car bingo game
- ▶ Take pictures whenever you can to share with you child
- ▶ If your child is older, involve them in the holiday planning
- ▶ Offer simple choices whenever possible
- ▶ Praise your child whenever possible as holidays can be stressful
- ▶ Children sense when parents are tense so relax and have fun!

