

# Making the Most of the Holidays

## Tips to Reduce Stress

As the winter holidays approach, this time of year often comes with busier than normal schedules, new stimuli, and more events to attend and prepare for. This requires extra preparation, organization, and logistical planning to keep stress to a minimum. Here are some tips for your family to support your child's learning, social, and/or behavior challenges and reduce holiday-related stress.

### Prepare ahead of time

It's important to plan out traditions carefully. Here are suggestions around décor, celebrations, and strategies to support your child(ren).

- **Have your child be a part of the preparation.** Involve your child in decorating, shopping, and wrapping gifts
- **To avoid an abrupt change,** add decorations slowly and monitor your child's reaction to the environmental changes
- **Rather than reminding your child** not to open gifts daily, consider setting them out the day before or allow one to be opened per day
- **Reduce stimuli** if needed and practice being around more and new stimuli gradually such as candles, smells, lights, etc.
- **Use a visual schedule or calendar** to set expectations (e.g., when presents are being opened, going on vacation)
- **Be mindful of safety** (e.g., plastic instead of glass ornaments, LED candles)

- **Lean on supports** you already have in place (e.g., discuss with your child's therapist or teachers about additional ways to prepare)
- **Talk to family and friends ahead of time** to ensure consistency in strategies across people and settings

### Plan for the day of

Preparing ahead of time will not only help reduce stress, but also allow your child to feel more comfortable participating in holiday activities.

- **Explain and practice social expectations** ahead of time (e.g., sit with the family for dinner for 10 minutes, wave and say hi to your family members)
- **Decide who is doing what.** If you have more than one person to support your child, split up the day so that each family member can enjoy time socializing

- If needed, **introduce your child** to new or unfamiliar experiences slowly
- **Create a goodie bag** of your child's favorite activities to use when needed. Be sure to keep them hidden until you need them
- **Consider eating beforehand** if your child has a hard time sitting at the table or other challenges related to food
- **Do not be afraid to make special requests** (e.g., requesting a quiet room, keeping pets separate, or lowering the music)
- **Create a plan to take a break** if challenging behaviors do arise and discuss with your child how they can let you know they need a break

### Tips for during festivities

Put your plan in action and have fun!

- **Keep an eye out for behaviors** from your child that historically lead to further challenges and react proactively
- **Include your child** in the festivities to keep them busy and engaged
- **If opening gifts is part of your holiday** and a challenge for your child, allow for gift opening at home or stagger gift opening
- **If going somewhere new**, scan for safety concerns so you are prepared
- **Recognize your child's need for your support** and attention and factor in breaks or special 1:1 time as needed
- **If staying at the table is a challenge** for your child, allow breaks or toys at the table to help your child stay engaged

### Leverage your RethinkCare for additional support

For additional support on how to prepare for the Holidays and to further discuss how to make this season a stress-free one for your family, schedule a virtual consultation with a RethinkCare Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

### Additional Resources

[How to Make the Holidays More Fun For Your Child](#)

[How to Take the Stress Out of the Holidays](#)

[16 Ways to Prepare Children with Autism for Holidays](#)

[13 Holiday Survival Tips For Your Child With Special Needs](#)