

## Sensory Strategies: How to Make the Holidays Happy

It will soon be that time of year again! Facing the holidays with a loved one with sensory concerns can feel incredibly daunting, but using some of these simple strategies can help make the most wonderful time of the year actually wonderful. Helpful sensory strategies include:

**Sensory retreat** – When decorating for the holidays, consider creating a small “get away” for your child where they can go when feeling overwhelmed. To help increase the likelihood that they will use the space, have them help create the space and take that opportunity to talk about its benefits and ways in which to use it.

**Keep routine/prepare for variations** – The holiday season can often feel anything but routine and so it can be helpful and calming to have some of the predictability that comes with a set schedule to offset that novelty. What parts of the day can you help remain the same? Naptime? Bath routine? Consider preparing your child when large variations from routine will occur and review with them what to expect (ex. the family holiday party).

**Food** – Let's face it, the holidays tend to involve a lot of foods that we do not typically eat (thank goodness fruit cake is only acceptable once a year). For children who may be picky about what and where they're willing to eat, having a clear plan and expectations regarding food can be very helpful. Is there a specific food that you can be sure to bring with you to parties if you are not certain your child will eat any food there?

**Parties** – Between Ugly Sweater parties, dessert swaps, and the annual giant family party, the holiday season can be full of get togethers.



Before accepting invitations, think about if it would be helpful to limit the number, type, or even the time of day you attend gatherings. Often bringing a sensory/ coping backpack with a variety of calming activities and foods can be helpful to successfully survive a holiday party.

**Gifts** – Consider limiting the number or variety of new gifts your child receives during the holidays. What types of toys are they likely to respond the best to? Would it be helpful to wait to open some gifts until after the holiday “craziness” has passed?

**Expectations** – Keeping realistic expectations during the holidays can be especially important in helping to ensure a happy and healthy season for your family. What are the experiences that are most important to you? For example, do you really need to go sit on Santa's lap or is that an activity that is okay for you to skip? Planning ahead can help expectations remain realistic, and can also assist in addressing common concerns before they overwhelm the situation.

Perhaps most importantly, find ways to spend meaningful time with your loved ones in ways that are the least stressful and most rewarding. There are no right or wrong ways to celebrate, foods to eat, or traditions to do each year and the more you can embrace your version of the holidays, the more enjoyable and meaningful you can make this season.