

Autism and the Holidays



HAPPY
NEW YEAR



The Holidays could mean.....

- **Eating different foods**
- **Having company over**
- **Lots of activities and noise**
- **Change of schedule**
- **No school**
- **Getting or giving presents**

.....sounds great right!?

Holidays for someone with Autism can mean:

Not liking the food being served.

or

Not being able to eat the food that is served.



What can we do?

- **Try some of these foods ahead of time to desensitize or see if they might like them.**
- **Make the foods he/she likes in a format that might mirror some traditional holiday foods.**
- **Use of “first_____then_____” (if the reason is not sensory based)**
- **Make sure all family members are aware of any dietary concerns**

Holidays for someone with Autism can mean:

Having people over who do not know you. Extended family. They may only come once a year or even be a new partner of someone in your family and not understand:

- **Your diet**
- **Your need for structure and routine**
- **The way you move**
- **The way you talk, make sounds or don't talk**
- **The way you don't like to be touched**
- **The way things might upset you**
- **The way you might be different**

What can we do?

- Provide social stories ahead of time. Help the person with autism know who is coming over. Create a book of picture and names of those coming over.
- Role play how to interact with during holiday gatherings.
- Go to loud places ahead of time to get used to the sound and activity.
- Communicate with those coming over about the unique things they might see (embrace what is unique)
- Create some form of structure and routine
- Create a schedule and social story for the structure and routine you make

What can we do?

- Practice unfamiliar situations: holiday greetings, specific etiquette, buffet style eating, manners, appropriate portions, receiving gifts, opening gifts, responding to what is in a gift (when it is something you don't like, when you want someone else's gift, etc), and more.
- Create social stories for the above
- Plan ahead
- Plan for worst case scenario

Holidays for someone with Autism can mean:

There might be more noise and activity than the person with autism is used to.



What can we do?

Have the strategies available to use that work when it is too loud.

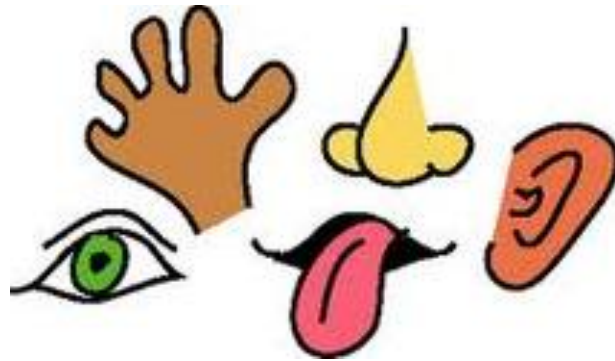
- Headsets
- Ipod/ipad
- Fiddle items

Create a social story about the noise level



Holidays for someone with Autism can
mean:

Sensory overload.



What can we do?

- If child has sensitivity in regards to smells lesson the amount of smells that are present (ie: scented candles)
- If the child can be visually overload you might consider less decorations.

What can we do?

Teach child with autism how to communicate when they have a need to take a break so that during the holidays they can communicate the need to take a break.

What can we do?

Create a quiet room where child can retreat and relax while waiting for the big meal. This is a great place to keep a bag of your child's favorite toys, books and other independent activities.

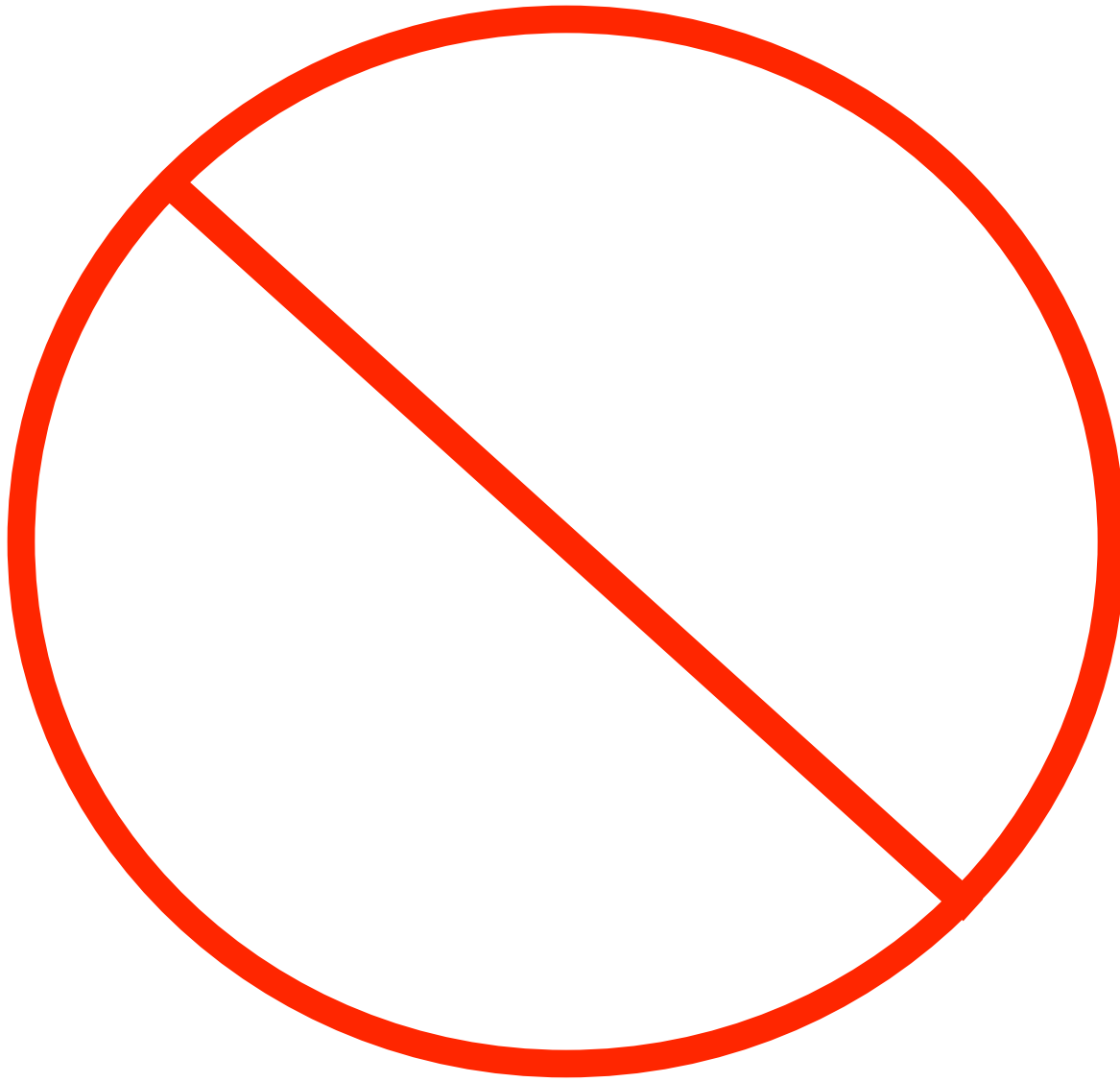
Holidays for someone with Autism can
mean:

Change in the schedule/routine



What can we do?

- **Create a schedule/routine for the day**
- **Make it visual**
- **Make it in a format that is understandable to the person with autism.**
- **Let others know of this routine.**
- **Go over schedule ahead of time.**



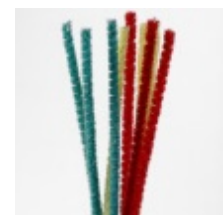
**No, not today,
canceled, not a
choice.....**

Teaching flexibility using Popsicle sticks and pipe cleaners

Talk about how sometimes people just want things to go their way, and if they don't get their way they explode! Explain how that is being rigid, like a popsicle stick. And rigid people don't get what they want or what they expect, (then press on the popsicle stick), they just keep trying to make things go their way, and then BOOM, they explode! Then show how the popsicle stick snapped/breaks.



Then talk about how other people can bend and change when they need to in a situation, like when their schedule changes, or to be okay with a different kind of cereal in the morning, or find other fun things to do when rain cancels a trip to the zoo. That's being flexible like a pipe cleaner – it can bend when it needs to and then it can straighten back out again like it was. A person that can do that is flexible. Show how the pipe cleaner bends and goes back to straight. You can then use the popsicle sticks and the pipe cleaners as a visual to remind the child how to be flexible.



What can we do?

- Use a reward system that child is familiar with.
- “I am working for _____”
- “First _____ then _____”

Holidays for someone with Autism can
mean:

No School!



What can we do?

- Use a calendar for the month showing every day that has school and the day of the holiday event and cross off each day as it goes.
- Go over the calendar everyday.
- Keep a schedule when off school

Holidays for someone with Autism can
mean:

Dressing up in
clothes that might be
new or uncomfortable.

What can we do?

- Have child wear outfit prior to this day to make sure that they are comfortable.
- If child has sensory issues help them be ok with new outfit:
 - ✓ Cut tags/labels off
 - ✓ Pre-wash so they are soft
 - ✓ Make sure fit right

Holidays might mean giving or getting presents.

- There might be gifts exchanged
- Unwrapping of gifts
- Receiving gifts you do not like
- Wanting someone else's gifts

What can we do?

- ***Involve the child in giving***
 - help buy gift
 - help wrap gifts
 - Decide where the gift will be placed under the tree

By participating your child might be more interested in the process and excitement and interest in seeing other people's reaction to the gift.

What can we do?

- ***Practice how to receive gifts:***
 - Role play receiving a gift
 - Role play thanking someone for a gift
 - Role play how to react if you like or do not like your gift
 - Write thank you notes together
 - Social stories for all of the above

Other things to think of

- Make sure that the person with autism has access to things that they are familiar with and enjoy (IPAD, specific toys, computer, books, etc)
- If event is not at your house let host know in advance of any specific needs, bring any specific foods necessary, go to visit the house prior if possible, bring or identify specific seating needs, etc
- Make sure that the parents of a child with autism is prepared to answer questions or provide information (practice this ahead of time)

Thank you!

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AiepA : Advocate and Instructional Expert for People with Autism

