



Autism Services North

Behavior Analysis, Consultation, & Therapy

TIP SHEET

Reducing Holiday Stress

Holidays can be stressful and over-stimulating for anyone, but particularly so for children with autism. Here are some helpful strategies to lessen your child's anxiety and increase your family's enjoyment of the holiday season:

Decorating

- Decorate in gradual stages, rather than changing everything at once.
- Allow your child to interact with the decorations and help put them in place.
- Flashing lights or musical decorations can disturb some children. To see how your child will respond, experience these items in a store or someone else's home first.

Shopping

- Last minute holiday shopping can be stressful for children who rely on routines.
- If you do take your child shopping, allow enough time to gradually adapt to the intense holiday stimuli that stores exhibit this time of year.

Family Routines

- Meet as a family to discuss how to minimize disruptions to established routines and how to support positive behavior when disruptions are inevitable.
- Continue using behavior support strategies during the holidays. Try social stories to help your child cope with changes in routine, and visual supports to help prepare for more complicated days.
- Try using a visual schedule if you are celebrating the holidays on more than one day (e.g., Hanukah) to show when there will be parties/gifts and when there will not.

Gifts

- If you put gifts under the Christmas tree, prepare well ahead of time by teaching that gifts are not to be opened without the family there. Give your child a wrapped box and a reward for keeping it intact.
- Wait until just before the holiday to set out gifts, especially large tempting ones.
- When opening gifts as a family, try passing around an ornament to signal whose turn it is to open the next gift. This helps alleviate disorganization and the frustration of waiting.

Play Time

- Prepare siblings and young relatives to share their new gifts with others.
- If necessary, consider giving your child a quiet space to play with his/her own gifts, away from the temptation of grabbing at other children's toys.