

Holiday Tips for Families Living with Autism



The holiday period can be a stressful time for those on the autism spectrum because it is a breach in their daily routine. However, if we anticipate the holidays and what they entail before they arrive, the person with autism can be made more comfortable and at ease—ensuring joy for all throughout the holidays!

At ASA, all tips are transferable—pass them along! These tips can be easily adapted by a parent, a friend, a sibling or any family member. Try them out with your loved one on the spectrum. A few tips can really pay off big.

"Everyone in the car!" Starting Off on Successful Outings

- To help day trips run more smoothly, travel in two cars so that one person can return home with your loved one on the autism spectrum if he/she gets distressed.
- Eat before leaving home or bring food with you.
- Bring a quiet toy, like a calculator, to a restaurant, during religious services or other social activity.

"We are going to Grandma's!" Tips for Social Gatherings

- When going to large social gatherings, arrive early to let the person on the autism spectrum get accustomed to the growing number of people.
- If he/she becomes distressed during a social gathering, pick a quiet place to go or take him out for a walk.
- When visiting someone's home, ask to remove breakables from reach; think carefully about visiting those who refuse to accommodate your request.
- Bring a preferred item, favorite toys or stuffed animals to a family gathering or other social event.
- Before going to a family event, look at individual pictures of family members and teach him/her their names.
- Before going to a social event, use "social stories" and practice simple courtesy phrases and responses to questions, either verbal, with pictures, or gestures. ("How are you?" "I am fine." "How is school?" "Good.")
- Let trusted others spend time with your child if they volunteer.
- Ask for help if you need it. Families and friends are often eager to participate.

"Do we have to go to the mall???" Shopping Without Stress

- To help your loved one with autism get used to malls, go early before the stores open. Walk around, get familiar with the building, buy a snack when the stores open, and leave. Extend the amount of time at the mall each time you go.
- When shopping, be positive and give small rewards, such as a piece of candy, for staying with you.

- To teach your child not to touch things when shopping, visit a clothing store or another store with unbreakable objects; this gives him/her an opportunity to model behavior and minimize risk.
- When shopping, bring a helper to have an extra set of eyes and hands until you are confident of a safe experience.
- Provide headphones or earplugs to the person with autism spectrum to moderate the noise and activity around them.

Going to Worship Services

- Talk with the worship leader about what he/she might expect and how the congregation might support the family.
- Arrange for a friend or neighbor to come with you to stay with siblings should the person with autism spectrum need to leave during the worship service.
- Bring a quiet object of concentration, such as a rubber band, pictures, books, or an object of visual focus, can be very helpful, particularly if it has religious significance to enhance the worship experience.
- Have the child or adult on the spectrum help out. Depending on their ability, they can:
 - Greet people with a smile, and hand out service bulletins.
 - Gather up the bulletins and papers left in the pews after the service, restoring order to the sanctuary.
 - Assist in holiday volunteer activities of the congregation, such as the delivery of cards, toys or food.
- For detailed tips for worship services, read our [Living with Autism](#) series.

Above all...

Be Consistent. Remember to apply the techniques used to involve the person with autism in daily activities to these special activities.

Discuss your expectations. Unwelcome surprises are never fun for anyone.

Be prepared and stand firm. Accept well-meaning but unwanted advice with the phrase, "I'll have to think about that," and smile.

Be safe and have fun!

Enjoy the holiday season!

Your friends at the Autism Society of America