

AUTISM AWARENESS

SHAKE THE GLOBE



EMBRACE ALL

HOLIDAY CONSIDERATIONS

**AUTISM SERVICES INC.**
OF WINDSOR & ESSEX COUNTY

COMMUNITY PARTNERS



Your child will likely feel overwhelmed, stressed, and uncomfortable at gatherings.

A few ways to help your child through the stress of the holidays are:

- Bringing their favourite toy and activity for comfort
- Identify a quiet space for your child everywhere you go
- Bring noise-cancelling headphones or other sensory tools that are known to be helpful in stressful settings.
- Keep visits short and set clear information of where you will be and how long you will be there (i.e., set a timer, create a visual schedule).
- Schedule downtime and sensory breaks.
- Provide familiar and safe foods

GATHERINGS





GIFT GIVING



Practice- Some kids do not understand the idea of unwrapping a gift. Practice by wrapping up some of your child's favourite things and teach them that by unwrapping the gift there is something fun for them inside. You could also consider practicing what to do after opening a present like saying thank you or giving a hug.

What to give- Make sure you give ideas to family and friends about what would make a good gift and anything to avoid.

Make it easy- Keep packaging simple and batteries on hand, or already installed, this limits the time your child will have to wait to use a new item. If your child has trouble with fine motor tasks encourage the use of a minimum amount of tape and ribbons to make it easier to unwrap.

Manage other's expectations- Remind family and friends how your child does best just before present opening begins and whether to anticipate things like "thank you," rushing through the opening process and wandering away mid opening.

It's time to open! - Present giving time can be overwhelming. Allow your child to take their time opening presents or rush, maybe do just a few at a time, then take a break and open more later.



FOOD & MEALS



The holidays

are a time of year that often has a strong focus on foods. Be mindful that this can be a "sensory overload" and overwhelming for our kids who have selective food preferences. All of the heightened sounds, smells, sights, textures (not to mention excitement and changes in routines) may be too much for our kids to handle at meal times.

It is never appropriate to orally "force-feed" our kids, and the holidays are no exception. Holiday time can be very stressful. When in a situation that is causing you as the caregiver increased stress, if safe to do so, take a minute to step away and calm your breathing.

Use the holidays as a time to explore food in a playful way with the focus on having fun and engaging with your child. Traditions such as baking and building gingerbread houses are good examples to have opportunities to look, touch, smell food items with no pressure to taste or eat the food.

Be mindful of including "safe" accepted foods during holiday meals and letting children leave the table after about 30 minutes.



The holiday season can be especially challenging for families with children who thrive on routines and structured environments. Extended breaks from educational settings often lead to challenges like regression and the need for recoupment, making it essential to maintain some consistency during this time.

Here are some helpful tips to navigate the busyness of the upcoming holiday season:

- Set Daily Goals: Encourage engagement and productivity by establishing small, achievable goals for your child each day.
- Maintain a Consistent Sleep Schedule: Stick to a regular bedtime and wake-up routine as much as possible to provide stability.
- Provide Advance Notice: When plans involve changes in people, places, or activities, let your child know ahead of time to help them prepare.
- Incorporate Learning Tasks: Reach out to your child's teacher for suggestions on educational activities that can be integrated into the holiday routine.
- Use a Daily Agenda: Create a visual or written schedule, such as a planner, a chart, or a virtual calendar, to help your child anticipate and organize their day.
- Offer a Safe Space: If your child feels overwhelmed, ensure they have a quiet area or calming activity to take some personal time until they're ready to rejoin.
- Advocate for Their Needs: When visiting family and friends, communicate your child's sensory or dietary preferences to ensure they feel comfortable and included.



The holiday season can be a busy and chaotic time, but it's important to cherish the moments we share with our loved ones. We hope these tips bring ease and joy to your celebrations, helping you and your family create a holiday season filled with love and happiness.