

## Holiday Tip Sheet for Young Children, & Children with Autism

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- **Start introducing and practicing with new foods.**
  - If something is not in a child's normal food rotation, but will likely be on the holiday dinner table, try introducing it ahead of time, slowly. This can also help determine if there's a need to have back up options available - like having plain green beans in addition to the green bean casserole.
- **Familiarize family with communication methods.**
  - If a child uses an alternative form of communication, such as a tablet or picture cards, let family know ahead of time. Provide them with details on how the system works and how they can best interact with it.
- **Practice alternative greetings and saying 'no':**
  - Not every child is going to want to hug and kiss every aunt they encounter this holiday season. Work with kids (and family!) on alternative greetings, like hi-fives or fist bumps, if they aren't up for hugs. Respecting a child's no is important - if they don't want to hi-five, fist bump, hug, or kiss family members, that's ok!
- **Determine where kids can go if overwhelmed**
  - New places bring a lot of challenges, but determining ahead of time where a child can step away if they are feeling overwhelmed can help. Find out if there's an extra room or space that can be reserved as a place separate from noise, people, or overstimulation for a child to calm down.
- **Bring Familiar Items**
  - Speaking of going new places, it is helpful to bring along familiar items to ease the challenge of being in a new place. A couple of toys, the tablet, headphones, a blanket, or whatever a child finds comfort in should be packed up, too.
- **Have new or special items on hand**
  - On the flip-side, having new or special toys, or treats on hand can help keep kids engaged on long car trips. Special items can make daunting or challenging tasks - like traveling - fun!
- **Plan for shorter visits**
  - Sometimes kids' tolerance for new environments, experiences, and people can vary. It's okay to plan for shorter visits or to need to leave an event earlier than planned. Give yourself grace and flexibility with your schedule.
- **Have a "Fun Backpack"**
  - For shopping trips, have a "fun backpack" or other small bag of toys that is ONLY available when you go shopping. This keeps the toys novel and engaging. Then, help your child into the cart and give them the fun backpack! This can prevent some of the difficulties that can arise when shopping and those requests for all the cool toys and treats they see on the shelves – because they are already occupied with interesting items. Snacks are great for this, too! There is nothing wrong with bringing a snack for your child to consume while shopping.

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- **Keep to routines as much as possible**
  - When traveling or out of school its important to stick to normal routines and rhythms as much possible. Sleep is important and can affect your whole day – so try to keep to regular bedtimes for your kids even when they are on a break from school or their normal routine.
  - Build in down-time BEFORE problems arise. If the cousins are getting rowdy and you just know tears are around the corner – put on a video and let everyone chill for a bit. Even better, build this in ahead of time. Plan a half hour of quiet time in the middle of the day, read a book to the kids, watch a movie, play a quiet card game – something where they can relax and rest a bit – and you may find that the rest of the evening goes more smoothly.
  - And don't forget snacks! Kids may not eat as much at mealtimes because it's unfamiliar food or a different environment than they are used to, or they are trying to hurry and finish so they can go play with their cousins, or maybe they are distracted and laughing at their sibling's funny faces! It's a good idea to offer regular snacks to kids even if you're still stuffed from that amazing meal.