



AST Autism Spectrum Therapies

Creating Futures For Individuals With Autism

Reducing Holiday Stress for Families of Children with Autism

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.

This information is provided by Autism Spectrum Therapies (AST), an agency providing autism services to individuals and families. More information about AST can be found on their website at

www.autismtherapies.com



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Information visit
www.autismtherapies.com
or call
(866) AST-1520