



December Monthly Topic

Family Gatherings

The holiday season is full of opportunities to get together with family and loved ones. These gatherings can be a challenge for children with sensory needs, autism, or speech-language delays. Here are some tips to help keep the peace and joy in the season.

Sensory Strategies

- ✓ If your child is sensitive to noise, arrive early so the volume level rises slowly over time. And don't forget noise cancelling headphones if it gets too loud.
- ✓ Have your child complete sensory diet activities before being asked to sit for a long period at the table. Ask your therapist for ideas.
- ✓ Allow your child to take a movement break during the meal. Or, have your child move to a quiet place in the house to take a break. Taking a break is always better than a meltdown at the table.
- ✓ Bring a length of Theraband to loop around the legs of your child's chair to provide an appropriate way of gaining sensory input without kicking the table (or a cousin).
- ✓ If you are sleeping over at a relative's house, consider bringing a set of your child's sheets. Children who have tactile sensitivities may find it difficult to tolerate the novel sensation of different pillows, sheets, or blankets.
- ✓ On days when the typical routine is not possible, make a visual schedule so that the child knows what to expect.

Speech and Language Activities

- ✓ Speak to your child about the steps involved in getting ready for guests (ex: *First* we clean the house; *Next* we cook the food, etc.) This will target sequencing abilities and vocabulary development.
- ✓ Cooking is a great activity to increase language development, improve sequencing skills, and problem solving. Let your child help in the kitchen and then he can tell the family about the items he helped to cook and the steps involved.
- ✓ Practice using appropriate greetings for when family arrives, including the social rules of gift giving and receiving.
- ✓ Come up with a list of holiday vocabulary words that contain your child's speech sound. Practice those words in short phrases (ex: I see _____ ; I get _____ ; I hear _____) This way your child is prepared to use those improved articulation skills in front of the family.
- ✓ If you have family coming to visit, use picture to talk about who is coming over. Also, practice saying: Hi uncle Jim, etc.