



What Should I Do at Family Gatherings?

- Unrealistic expectations
- **Thoughtful planning** makes or breaks you- it can mean the difference between fun and stressful times
- If your holiday is traditionally one of unhappiness and stress, take some time out now to realize you are not alone.

"It will be a traditional Christmas, with presents, crackers, door slamming, and people bursting into tears..." Victoria Wood

Sound familiar?

- **Educate your family about rules and expectations**- you might even draft and send a letter or email to prep the family about what to expect and a bit about kids on the spectrum
- Try to plan for a **quiet space** where kids can gain access to TV, music, or just plain quiet
- **Don't overbook**- Plan for decompression time- don't party hop from place to place

Family Gatherings

- **Plan ahead** and explain to other children in the family if there will be **exceptions to food** at the holiday dinner table- if the child on the spectrum gets to eat French fries, why can't I?
- This will help with setting off tantrums with other small children in the family, also if your child has difficulty with sitting for extended periods of time, **decide who is going to get up and watch them** (keep in mind that other family members who don't understand the disability might take offense at the absence of your presence at the dinner table- even mistaking it for disinterest)
- The dress doesn't make the man- Just because you thought the lederhosen would be "adorable" doesn't mean that your **child will be comfortable** (lederhosen? seriously?!?)
- **A long walk** not only helps with digestion, it gives that nice little exercise break that will help your child to relax





General Vacation Tips

- Choose your vacation **spot and accommodations wisely**
- Look for accommodations (if you are traveling), example Disney offers "fast passes" where you can skip the line- some even offer special discounts!
- **Prep your child for the vacation using picture, social stories, etc.** try even counting down the days until the big event using a calendar where you mark off the days or turn the dates over in a pocket
- **Plan the vacation or trip-** sketch out your day and anticipate those needed breaks- keep in mind that a child on the spectrum might not be interested in the world's largest ball of twine! Think about how a child without a disability reacts after spending the entire day at a theme park- come 6pm, everyone is whining and complaining!
- **Structure your day and communicate that to your child verbally or with pictures**
- Choose "**off season**" when possible- this goes for family gatherings too!!!

General Vacation Tips

- Be flexible and **don't forget to bring your child's favorite things-** a special toy, pillow, blanket, etc. to make them feel more comfortable
- Might want to look into **cards that you can purchase** that communicate what autism is and bring documentation of your child's disability- I've known parents who had a tough time with airport security, tantruming children, etc.
- **Alert airlines or hotels** that you need special assistance
- Look for **vacations planned just for families of children on the spectrum**

"To many people holidays are not voyages of discovery, but a ritual of reassurance." -Philip Andrew Adams



Holiday Tips and Suggestions- 12/06
Dr. Amy Davies Lackey, BCBA
ajdavies@rocketmail.com