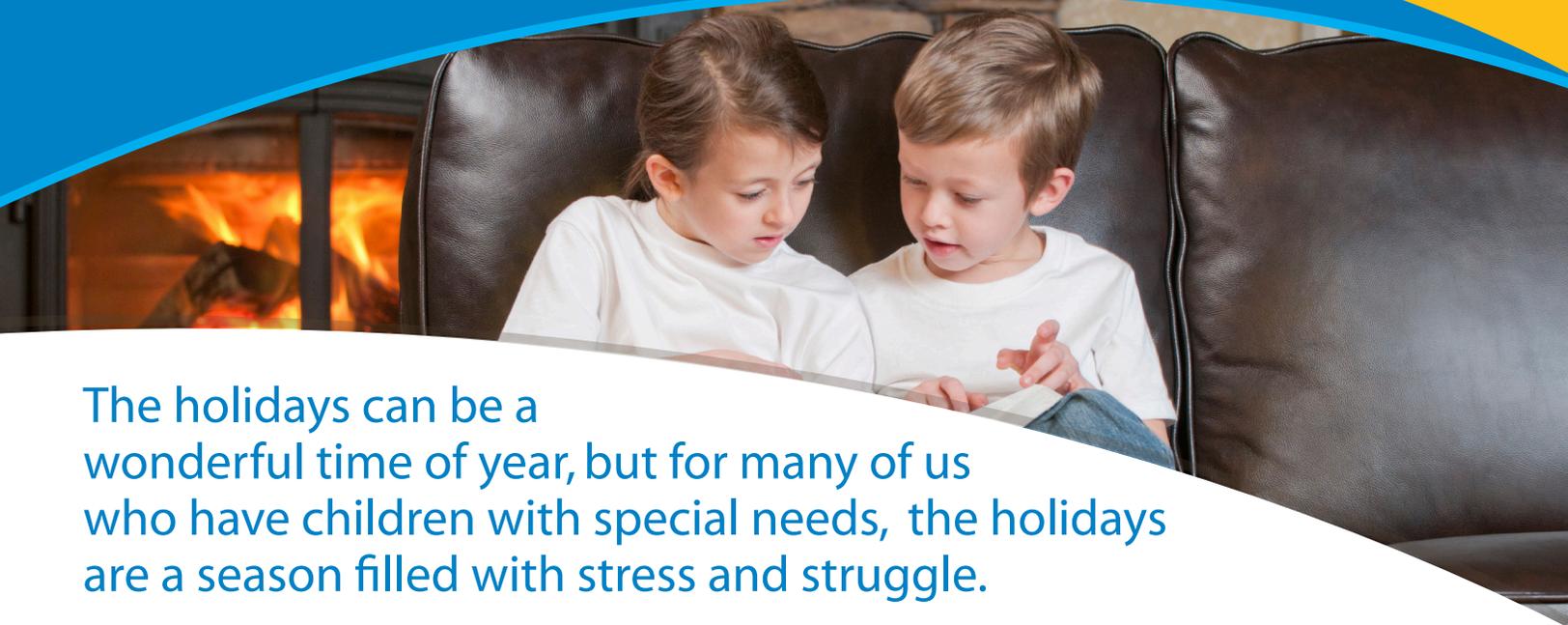


The Most Unpredictable Time of Year: ADHD Holiday Survival Tips



The holidays can be a wonderful time of year, but for many of us who have children with special needs, the holidays are a season filled with stress and struggle.

When you're parenting a child with ADHD, sensory issues, or other social disorders, you can expect your pumpkin pie to be served with a large helping of sensory overload, inappropriate responses, meltdowns and disappointments.

And, while the holidays are often a time to revel in the unexpected, many kids and adults are simply unable to enjoy these aspects of the season. However, it is possible to have a peaceful, enjoyable holiday season free of epic tantrums or battles. Follow these critical tips to stop your holiday celebrations from unraveling.

1 Be Structured

During the holiday months, our calendars fill quickly with special events, shopping, and other festive responsibilities. This often requires us to change normal routines and schedules to accommodate the season's merriment. But a jam-packed schedule can negatively impact a child who needs routine, structure and predictability. During these months, create a calendar in advance and make sure your child has access to it so that they know what is coming and can set expectations. Also, **be willing to plan time between events**, especially if they involve your child's stress triggers such as meeting new people, loud noise, crowds, etc. Stick to your normal routines, schedules, and dietary restrictions as much as possible. This may seem difficult given the holiday parties and experiences, but you'll be thankful you did if you see other children spin out of control from stress while your child remains happy and calm.

2 Be Prepared

The saying “failure to plan is planning to fail” couldn’t be more accurate in this situation. The holidays put us all in situations with higher expectations and social and emotional requirements. This may be very challenging and seem nearly impossible for children who have special needs. From meeting long-lost relatives who want close physical affection, to constantly being tempted by off-diet foods, to spending hard-earned money on others, your children will be tested in new ways during this season, any of which could sabotage the fun if not carefully considered and planned. Be prepared for new experiences and prepare for the unexpected by practicing proper social skills and conversation starters, discussing expectations, and equipping yourself with tools that help your child feel more comfortable and regulated. **And be willing to say “no.” You simply can’t do everything.** While this will look different for each family, the key is to think through your commitments and your child’s triggers and then plan coping strategies ahead of time.

3 Be Flexible and Intentional

The many requirements of the holidays can create stress even for those with the best coping and social skills. For those who struggle, the stressors can be even tougher and cause withdrawal, depression, and a general hatred of the season. That’s why it’s important to focus on only what matters most and prioritize those gifts above all else. **Focus on those holiday experiences and memories that matter most to your family and be willing to say “no” to the rest.** This will create a much more meaningful and rich holiday for your entire family, and limit the times a meltdown or struggle can happen. And, if something just isn’t working, like a service project or holiday craft, scrap it. No recipe or handmade ornament is worth ruining the season and damaging relationships!

4 Be Active

Baby, it's cold outside! So, 'tis the season to be sedentary, right? Wrong. Exercise is critical for physical, spiritual and emotional health. Exercise engages the attention system and enables proper executive functioning, including sequencing, memory and organization. Perhaps more importantly during this time of year, exercise improves our attitude. So, if you want your little elves to stay focused, regulated, and happy this holiday season, be sure that exercise remains on your to-do list. Consider creating an indoor play gym equipped with a small trampoline, mini-basketball hoop, hula hoop, and jump rope in your garage or basement. Do indoor obstacle courses that include running up and down stairs or crab crawling. Or exercise the old fashioned way by bundling up and playing out in the snow as a family. Keep movement engaging, fun, and part of the daily routine to minimize complaining.

5 Be A Parent First

We all wear many hats in life: employee, sister, brother, church member, etc. However, during the holidays, our to-do lists and roles often double because of the nature of the season. That's why **it is critical to make the choice to be a parent first.** While you may enjoy attending every party, caroling, and seeing Santa, too many activities could make your child spin out of control, ruining the experience for you and others. Parenting involves sacrifice, especially during the holidays. So, remember who you are the other 10 months out of the year: a parent first and foremost. This is the best gift you can give your child this season, being present, engaged, and focused on helping him to navigate and enjoy the holidays with as little stress as possible.

While it takes effort, more planning and commitment, choosing to be structured, flexible, prepared, and active during the holidays will put more joy under the tree.

If you'd like to know more about how to parent and educate a child with learning struggles, you can visit us at [BridgewayAcademy.com](https://www.BridgewayAcademy.com) or give us a call at **800.863.1474.**