

Sensory Friendly Tips for Holidays

The holidays can be an overwhelming time for individuals with sensory processing difficulties. Changes in routine, unfamiliar places and people, as well as novel decorations and foods overwhelm many. These tips from Fraser Pediatric Therapy staff make the holidays more inclusive for those with sensory needs.

Halloween

- Prepare your child ahead of time for what to expect. Read a children's book about Halloween, find a social story, or watch YouTube videos about trick-or-treating to decrease the anxiety that comes with unfamiliar events.
- Have your child pick out his/her costume. Practice wearing the costume ahead of time, even for a few minutes each day, to find out what parts might be itchy or irritating. Your child can wear fitted compression clothing under his/her costume to reduce irritation, or opt for a Halloween cotton t-shirt if a costume is too uncomfortable
- When carving pumpkins, allow your child to use a spoon or wear vinyl gloves if the inside texture will be distressing for them or color or paint on the outside of the pumpkin rather than carve.
- Practice trick-or-treating ahead of time by walking from room to room in your house or by walking a path around the neighborhood. Stick to what is familiar.
- Keep an eye out for teal pumpkins as these indicate houses offering non-food treats for children with dietary restrictions.

Thanksgiving and Winter Holidays

- Dress clothes can be uncomfortable. Allow your child to wear the clothes in which they feel comfortable to avoid distress.
- If your child is a picky eater, find alternatives for them, such as eating before you go or bring some favorite snacks.
- Explain ahead of time how sensory processing affects your child and what reactions they might see.
- Provide family members with ideas for how to connect with your child; rather than saying "She doesn't like hugs." or "Don't tickle him." you could say "She's great at giving high fives." or "He looks like he needs some space right now."
- Find a quiet space that your child can retreat to take a break if they need it.
- Bring any sensory supports that are helpful to calm them (e.g. weighted blanket, noise canceling headphones, chewy, etc).
- If it is an unfamiliar house, ask if you can bring your child to see it a day ahead of time, if possible, or show your child pictures of the house and the people who will be there so they are prepared.
- Limit decorations in your home. Opt for non-blinking lights, and play soft, mellow music.
- Look for sensory friendly Santa events. Last year these were offered in Blaine, Duluth, Edina and St. Paul. Plan ahead as these events sell out or may require reservations.

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