
PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

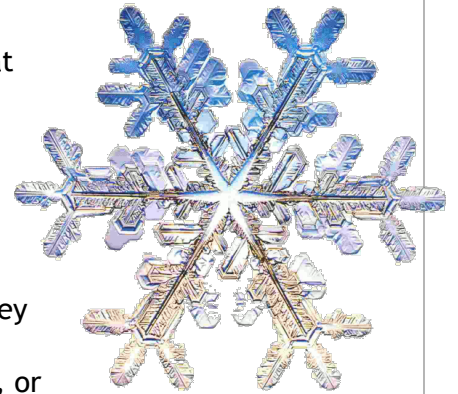
The Christmas Season and school vacation can be a time of fun and excitement but it can also be a very stressful time for families. Christmas can be a time that assaults our children's senses. Here are some tips that may help you prepare your family for the holiday season.

Be Pro-active. If you know what your child's triggers are create a plan to help set your family and your child up for success. Extended family members may not understand your child's diagnoses or the impact that holiday celebrations have on your child; do not feel guilty for setting appropriate parameters that work for your family.

Start to talk about Christmas and school vacation now. You can make a holiday scrapbook talking about the people that you will visit, Christmas traditions, etc. Read it together often. Start to talk about past Christmas stories or have your child tell you about what they remember about Christmas holidays. It is a good chance to ask older children what they like about Christmas vacation, what stresses them, or what support they think they will need.

Be Prepared for the Event. Have a fun bag packed that is meant for entertainment while visiting or attending engagements. Fill it with fun items but don't forget the necessities: head phones or ear plugs, calming activities, soothing and/or security items.

Be Aware of Sensory Overload. Flashing lights on trees, loud Christmas carols, people in costume, etc. can overload your child's senses. There is so much disorganized noise everyone we go during the holiday season (music, loud voices, multiple conversations, as well as visual noise, bright lights, decorations, etc) that your child may feel overwhelmed quicker than usual. Strong smells during Christmas can bring back memories as well as feelings of being overwhelmed. Be a detective and discover what scents bother your child and what scents they enjoy. Put their favourite smell in a ziplock bag; if a smell is bothering them they can choose a different smell. Be aware of sensory overload with new clothes. Make sure you trial run new clothes if you want your child to wear something



special. Fancy clothes can be itchy and uncomfortable. Set your child up for success with comfortable clothing and bring familiar and/or preferred clothing to change into later if necessary.

Keep it Simple. A consistent schedule and structure are important especially with no school to create a framework for the day. Let your child know what is happening the next day so they have time to process and ask questions. Do not overschedule. For the wellbeing of your whole family you may need to say no to some invitations, cancel some engagements if it is an “off” day or reschedule. Be prepared to be flexible and replace the time with fun family time that better suits the abilities of your family in that moment.



Do Not Rush. Set your family up for success by giving yourselves lots of time to get to and from different events. Rushing creates anxiety and anxiety can create difficult moments or meltdowns. Have a bag of fun activities to do, or sing Christmas carols in the car if you arrive early. Use being early into fun family time; tell jokes, draw pictures on frosted windows, have a favourite book on CD, have the supplies to make paper chains, etc. For older children reading, game time, movies, drawing, sketching, doodling are all good ways of passing the time if you are early. See it as a positive, not a waste of time. Being early gives everyone a chance to breathe and relax before entering a hectic environment.

Have a Code Word. This works well for older children to be able to indicate that they have had too much stimulation and need a break or need to leave. The code word keeps your child from being embarrassed to ask to leave or to say out loud that they need help. Bathrooms are a great place to take a few moments to decompress and get out of the noise. Finding a quiet room where they can listen to music and have some quiet, alone time is important. Create a plan when you arrive at company or family’s homes. It is important that your child knows that you understand how hard a social outing can be for them and that you are there to help them be successful.



Have fun



Be Realistic!



Enjoy each other!



If you would like help creating a personalized plan for your family please make an appointment with Tracy Tomiak, Family Liaison Counsellor by calling the front office and talking with Alison or Genevieve.