

Home for the Holidays Sensory Strategies

Review of Sensory Integration

Taste
Smell
Vestibular (movement)
Visual
Auditory
Proprioception

These areas can be greatly affected by changes in routine/schedule, changes in food options and novel scents of the season...or increased visual stimulation such as more people and decorations...It can be very overwhelming for students and adults alike. Think of the human senses. Smells at Christmas can be strong, sounds can be too loud and lights can be too bright.

This year's celebrations may be VERY different for all of us compared to previous years due to COVID-19 recommendations to prevent the spread of the disease. These sensory strategies can be applied to all environments, whether it be at home or a family gathering. VIDEO- for mask wearing and social distancing.

1. Routines are very important. When days are going to be unpredictable, try to make sure the morning and evening routines are similar. If you know the plans for the next day, prewarn your student on novel events.
2. Sensory Scheduling- Monitor the amount of time you spend and try to space out visits to family over the course of days if possible to prevent overstimulation/shutdown possibilities. Know your child's sensory triggers so you can plan around them, teach family members triggers as well to promote inclusion in as many activities as possible.
3. Try counting down days with a schedule or advent calender to reduce anxiety and prevent overscheduling
4. Preparation is key- if possible, the use of social stories, visual schedules and timers can benefit. Stick to your student's sensory diet/sensory breaks as much as possible.
5. If you do plan to visit, decide on a quiet space for your child to regroup if needed, or a sign for a sensory break from an overwhelming environment.
6. Don't forget their already proven sensory strategies to take along with you i.e. noise cancelling headphones, fidgets, weighted materials, iPad etc. You may also consider gathering items for a calming bag that can be used in a variety of environments.

7. Boundaries- Don't be afraid to say no to having extra visitors over to your home, or to say no to extra outings to facilitate regulation and peace for your family's holiday season.
8. Try matching activities to your child's sensory needs- for example, opening gifts in another room, fussy eaters could eat at a smaller table or even before you go. Spread out the amount of gift opening over time, instead of in all one sitting.
9. Monitor the amount of unexpected hugs or pats from unknowing family members. The recommendation for social distancing assists with unsolicited tactile input.
10. Lastly- keep in mind that sensory overload will happen. Meltdowns will occur. Monitor your own sensory needs as well and learn your triggers to facilitate your own needs being met during the holiday season to prevent burnout. Keeping yourself regulated can really help avoid sensory clashes in the household.