Holiday Strategies and Gift Giving Ideas for Kids with Special Needs

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Some Things to Think About

Having a child with special needs may require some modifications to your holiday traditions in order to make it work for you and your child.

- Be aware of your child’s medical or social needs away from home
- Accessibility issues
- Family traditions
General Tips

- Try to stick to your routine as much as possible (bedtime, storytime, etc.)
- Decide if you’re going to keep therapy appointments or not
- Choose your holiday events and gatherings carefully
  - don’t take on too many events or gatherings
  - put your child’s safety, routine and well-being first
  - consider suggesting changes to family tradition if it will be too difficult for you or your child(ren)
  - sometimes low key is best!
Tips for Gatherings

❖ Prepare your child
  ❖ Where are we going?
  ❖ How long will we be there?
  ❖ Who will we see?
  ❖ What will we be doing?

❖ Use visual tools
  ❖ Pictures of relatives and their houses
Packing for Gatherings

❖ Pack some essentials
  ❖ Food
  ❖ Medication/supplies
  ❖ Change of clothes/diaper bag
  ❖ Soothing items such as a blanket, favorite toy, music, DVD player, iPod/iPad
Tips for Gatherings in Your Home

- **Special Toys**
  - Think about putting away toys that are “special” to your child or could get taken apart, etc...before you have visitors.
  - Prepare your child by telling them this will keep toy “safe.”

- **Quiet place**
  - Make sure your child can still access a quiet place with additional people visiting their home
  - Designate a place ahead of time
Tips for Visiting Friends/Family

- Prepare Your Host
  - Prepare your host for what to expect (your child’s habits and needs)
  - Information about pet allergies, fear of pets or if child may be rough with pets
  - If they ask what you need, **tell them** (favorite foods, etc.)
  - Tell them you may only be able to stay for a short time
More Tips for Visiting Friends/Family

- Easing in
  - ask if there is a quiet place for you and your child(ren) to go if necessary
  - talk to family about greeting kids quietly, letting them ease in...decompress
A Few More Tips for Visiting Friends/Family...

- Have a Plan B
  - Have a plan for leaving early if needed
  - Create a quiet signal with spouse or family member
  - If you must leave to go home or to a hotel, consider making alternate plans for siblings who may want to stay and play with relatives/friends; then it’s not always about their other sibling
If You Plan to Travel…

❖ Prepare your child(ren) for the trip by telling them:
  ❖ Where you will go
  ❖ How long you will be gone
  ❖ Where you will stay
  ❖ Who you will see

❖ Visual Tools to show your child
  ❖ Places you will go
  ❖ Who you will see
  ❖ Pictures of the airport, planes, etc.
If You Plan to Travel...

- Things to pack
  - pack toys or items to keep your child busy while traveling
  - pack your food and medication as separate carry-ons
If You Plan to Travel...

- **Special Requests**
  - When your tickets are booked you can indicate child has a disability and make special requests like assistance to gate, early boarding early and seating preferences.
  - Contact the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov) or 866-289-9673 with any questions regarding travel and your child with special needs or to look at recent changes to screenings regarding children under 12.
  - If you are staying at a hotel, plan ahead and ask if you can check in early or check out late.
If You Plan to Travel...

- If traveling by car
  - Plan stops if driving several hours, map out parks, McDonald’s or other places to stop and stretch, get wiggles out
  - Let your child know when a break is coming (give them a set amount of time to avoid meltdowns)
  - Use timers like a “Time Timer” to show your child how long it will be until the next stop
Safety/Emergency Paperwork

- Carry emergency contact info with you (name, contact information, diagnosis, pertinent health info, likes & dislikes and a recent picture)
- Dress kids similarly in case they wander off and you have to remember what they are wearing; easier to spot
- Take a picture of your child(ren) with your cell phone/camera, as soon as you arrive somewhere, then you have a picture of what they’re wearing if they wander off and you need to describe them to security or law enforcement
- Medical Alert/Emergency ID on child
Gift Giving Ideas
For Kids with Special Needs
Hints for Gifts

- Provide recommendations and focus on the child’s interests. What activities does your child enjoy and is physically able to do?
  - Music
  - Books
  - Arts and Crafts
  - Gross Motor Toys
  - Games
  - LEGO

- Age ranges on toy labels don’t always apply

- If your child has severe allergies, look into hypo-allergenic and/or organically made toys

- Suggest contributing towards a large item, like a trampoline or therapy equipment
Classes

- Have family contribute to the cost of a membership fee or monthly class tuition. There are many places in the SCV that offer classes for children with special needs.
  - Martial Arts
  - Music or art lessons
  - Gymnastics and swim schools

- Other places that offer classes that might be appropriate for your child
  - My Gym
  - Gymboree
  - Sing, Sign, & Play
  - Parks and Recreation classes

- Ask your city’s Parks and Recreation program about accommodations for children with special needs
Memberships or Season Passes

Memberships or season passes to local attractions make a great holiday gift because they can be used all year long and can be enjoyed by the entire family.

- L.A. Zoo
- Kidspace Children’s Museum
- Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
- The Aquarium of the Pacific at Long Beach
- Six Flags Magic Mountain and Hurricane Harbor
- Legoland
- California Science Center
Other Ideas

Subscriptions to monthly magazines
- Highlights
- National Geographic Kids
- Discovery Kids
- American Girl

Gift Certificates
- Bowling
- Movies
- Fin’s Glow Zone/mini golf
- Indoor bounce places
- Ice Skating
- Toy Stores
- Favorite Restaurants
Electronics

- Have family contribute to the cost of an iPad, iPad Mini, Wii or a laptop
- iTunes/App Store gift cards (these can be gifted directly to email addresses)
- Websites that have ideas for Apps
  - Tech in Special Ed
  - Apps for Children with Special Needs
  - Moms with Apps
  - Happi Pappi
Specialized Catalogs/Online Sites

- Toys R Us
  www.toysrus.com/DifferentlyAbled
- Super Duper Inc
  www.superduperinc.com
- National Lekotek Center
  www.lekotek.org
- Southpaw Enterprises
  www.southpawenterprises.com
- Pocket Full of Therapy
  www.pfot.com
- Abilitations
  www.abilitations.com
- Integrations
  www.integrations.com
- Playworks
  www.playworks.net
- Beyond Play
  www.beyondplay.com
...Happy Holidays!!

SEASONS GREETINGS

Happy Hannukah
¡Feliz Navidad!

Frohe Weihnachten

Happy Kwanzaa

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Joyeux Noel

Sung Tan Chuk Ha

Happy Christmas

Sarbatori vesele

Laimingu Kalėdu