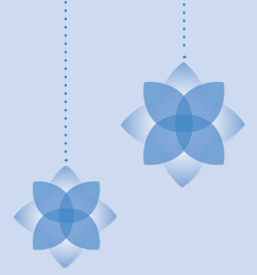


10 TIPS for Inclusive Celebrations



The holidays are a wonderful time to connect with family, but for individuals with I/DD, celebrations can often be overwhelming. Disruptions in routine, increased noise and activity, and exposure to triggers have the potential to make the holidays a challenging time. But managing expectations and planning ahead can help create a more inclusive and comfortable environment for everyone.

Here are a few tips for holiday celebrations everyone can enjoy.



1. Keep everyone informed

The holidays may go more smoothly if individuals with I/DD know what to expect, especially if routines are important to them. Be sure they know about celebrations in advance and how things might be different from their usual activities.

2. Provide a quiet space

If the noise, lights, or activity get overwhelming, ensure that a quiet place is available to decompress. "Having a quiet space apart from the over-stimulation is the most critical – whether during dining or social time," says Dania Nussbaumer, Director of Client Services at Pharmacy Alternatives and mother of a daughter with special needs. "Being near enough to the activity to feel a part of it without being in the center is usually a win."

3. Stay on schedule

As much as possible, align holiday activities with individuals' usual schedules. If disruptions can't be avoided, be sure the individual knows ahead of time.

4. Prepare for transitions

Help with transitions by sticking to the schedule and providing cues when an activity is about to end or a new one is about to start.

5. Be prepared

Think about what might go wrong and take steps to prevent it. Have things like headphones and sunglasses available for individuals who might need them. Try to avoid triggers to help keep the celebration comfortable for everyone.

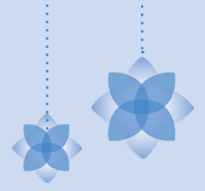
6. Infuse the familiar

Favorite foods and activities can help individuals with I/DD feel more comfortable. Focus on any traditions or holiday activities individuals may be looking forward to. "Having routine favorites like music, a book, favorite blanket, or TV show on hand is a must," says Nussbaumer. "It reaffirms a comfort zone and familiarity."

7. Set expectations with family and friends

During the holidays, individuals with I/DD may interact with family members they haven't seen in a while. Helping friends and family

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understand what to expect and what triggers (loud talking, physical contact, etc.) to avoid will make everyone more comfortable.

Looking for a little help this holiday season?

Parents and caregivers of individuals with I/DD face some unique challenges when planning for the holidays. If you need advice or ideas for inclusive activities, Nussbaumer recommends reaching out to your local chapter of The Arc. Visit thearc.org to find chapters and other resources in your area.

8. Prevent the spread of viruses

Respiratory viruses, like COVID, the flu, and RSV, circulate at this time of year, and individuals with I/DD are especially vulnerable. Keeping gatherings small and asking those who are sick not to attend can help prevent the spread of illnesses. In locations where weather permits, an open window or celebrating outside can help keep everyone safe.

9. Know when it's time to go

Watch for signs that things are becoming overwhelming or overstimulating. "Read the signs from your loved one," Nussbaumer advises. "If there is anxiety or discomfort, remove them for a walk or distraction as soon as you can."

10. Relax!

The holidays can be stressful for everyone. Remember that it's okay to skip celebrations if they become overwhelming. It doesn't take a big party to build warm memories – quiet time can help deepen connections, reduce stress, and make the holidays brighter.