



Winter Newsletter

Tom and Karen Chapman care coordination services



**NIH Autism Center
of Excellence**

Winter fun

The winter holidays are a festive time, often filled with family gatherings, seasonal parties and special events, but they can also be stressful. Families who have children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face a particular set of challenges as routines are disrupted and schools close for winter break.

Visiting family members, going new places, and taking in the sights and sounds of the holidays can be overwhelming or cause anxiety for children with ASD. Planning ahead with your child can help relieve some of the stress of the season. Here are some tips for parents and caregivers of kids with ASD:

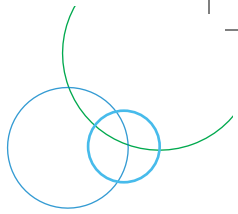
- Reflect on your holiday traditions and how your child will interact with these traditions based on his sensory and behavioral profile.
- Draw pictures about the holidays with your child and discuss them.
- Prepare your child for outings, parties and events by rehearsing social scenarios. If possible, make sure there will be a quiet, calm place for your child to retreat to where you are going.
- Be ready with activities for your child in case he is not interested in holiday activities or traditions.

- Prepare your child's favorite foods in case he does not like or want the holiday meal, or have him eat beforehand.
- Practice opening gifts.
- Get a list of gift ideas for relatives from your child's teachers and therapists.
- Watch your child for signs of anxiety or distress throughout family gatherings or events, and have an exit strategy.

Travel tips for ASD families

Many families plan to travel to see relatives for the holidays, whether by car, train, bus or airplane. When traveling with a child with ASD, preparation is important. Here are a few ways you can make your holiday trips easier for the whole family:

- Prep your child for different environments they will encounter as you travel through role-playing and teaching stories.
- Contact guest services at airports, train stations and hotels for support and special accommodations such as early boarding, special meals, rental equipment and more.



- Bring your child's favorite toys, books and snacks for comfort.
- Anticipate sensory issues: Pack ear plugs, noise-cancelling headphones or music players.
- Have a family safety plan and make sure your child has a form of ID on him at all times.
- Use praise, stickers or small toys to reinforce good behavior throughout your trip.
- Create a schedule and stick to it.

Bundling up

As colder weather arrives, sweaters and winter coats are brought out of storage to keep kids warm and healthy through the winter months. Some children with ASD may have sensory sensitivities and object to these additional layers, or they might be bothered by the change in routine. To ease the transition, plan ahead. Practice with

your child putting on his coat—even for just a few minutes at a time—and motivate him to keep it on with small rewards. Reinforce the new routine of dressing for the weather through a visual schedule or a mantra, such as, “The weather is cold. We wear our coats outside.” Make dressing for the weather more fun by choosing winter clothing with your child’s favorite character or color on it.

Why research?

At Marcus Autism Center, we’re committed to providing the best possible care for kids living with autism now and transforming the future of autism through research. Because of our mission, we are always looking for study participants.

To learn more about our research program visit marcus.org/research or call our recruitment coordinators at **404-785-7600**.