

The holidays are here and with this very special time of year comes holiday parties, music, dressing up, lots of food, visitors and traveling! While these can be very exciting things to some people, to a child with sensory processing issues the holidays can feel more like loud noises, uncomfortable clothing, sitting for long periods of time at dinner, unfamiliar foods, unexpected hugs and a change in routine. For those of us who are challenged adjusting to day light savings time when that alarm clock goes off 1 hour earlier, imagine the challenges of the holidays when a typical day suddenly doesn't feel quite so typical. Thankfully, there are ways to prepare and navigate these changes so that everyone can participate in the holiday cheer.

### **In order to prepare for travel:**

- Discuss the specifics of traveling before the trip. This will help your child prepare for what to expect on a plane, train or car including when to sit with a seatbelt on, when they can get up and walk around, and when they have to stand in a line, etc. See your occupational or speech therapist for additional ideas on stories that may help guide your travels.
- If possible, visit the airport or train station in advance. Visit the ticket counter and watch the planes take off and land.
- Make a scrap book with your child that includes one page per day of your travels. Each page should include the people that you may meet (use real photos if you can) and places that you may go. Review the book before your trip and then take it with you. While you are on your trip, take some time at the end of the day to reflect and have your child draw a picture of their favorite thing they did or saw! This may help motivate them to continue to use it throughout their trip.
- If your child has difficulties with dressing or wearing certain clothing, have them help pack their clothes. Trial the clothes at home so that they know what they have packed and also that the clothing items are tolerable. If the weather will be different than home, show them a visual of the weather at your vacation spot. This may help guide your packing and help them understand why shorts may be necessary over snow boots.
- If your child has sensitivities to clothing and you purchase new clothes for your trip be sure to wash the clothes several times before trialing and wearing them.
- Prepare with reading materials, fidgets and comfort items such as blankets during the flight or drive.
- Make a calendar countdown to your trip. Take a calendar with you to help them visualize how long the trip will be and to assist in transitioning back home.

### **In order to prepare for the return home:**

- Use the calendar to prepare for which day you are leaving to head back home. Discuss how many days before you get home, return to school and back to your regular schedule.
- Gather souvenirs during your trip to add to the scrap book. Discuss bringing it in to show friends, other family members or bringing the book into show-and-tell at school.

## **In order to prepare for mealtime and family gatherings:**

- Provide movement breaks as often as possible, especially before mealtime and traveling which should include 5-10 minutes of heavy work. Finding a quiet space for a break may be beneficial as well. \*See list of heavy work ideas below.
- Allow your child to assist with setting the table (plates, soda bottles), cooking (stirring, kneading dough), and moving chairs to the correct placements (or pushing them in/out). Set up a designated space for the children to help that includes extra dough, cookie decorating and/or different textured items to provide tactile experiences for them.
- Determine a signal (secret code) between you and your child that will indicate that they need a break when they are in an environment that is challenging for them.
- Prepare other family members of your child's needs by explaining the implications of loud voices and unexpected touch.

## **Heavy work ideas:**

- Any activity that involves pushing, pulling, dragging, lifting or jumping- carrying laundry, boxes with books, grocery bags, pushing vacuum, etc
- Pull or push boxes (more resistance on a carpeted floor)
- Play "magic carpet" and have a sibling or family member pull the child on a sheet, mat or small rug
- Have the child pull pillows or couch cushions into a "mountain" pile in a safe place for them to jump in and climb through and under.
- Roll your child up in a blanket or yoga mat like a burrito or hot dog
- "Make a pizza" by rolling a large yoga/therapy ball over your child while they lay flat
- Pull weighted items in a wagon or cart
- Make a "sandwich" with them in between two pillows while pressure is provided
- Give big hugs and squeezes
- Wheel barrow walking or animal walks- bear walk, frog jump, commando crawl, or log roll
- Engage in exercises such as wall push-ups, sit ups, planks, or jumping-jacks

Keep in mind what your child might need in order to be comfortable. Be prepared to review your plans with your child several times as they might need the repetition in order to feel comfortable with the change of routine. Children need structure and routine and benefit tremendously from maintaining eating and sleeping schedules. We hope that these suggestions will help support your child and your family throughout the holiday season. We wish you all safe travels, happy holidays and a healthy, joyful new year!

We look forward to seeing you in 2015!