

Supporting Your Autistic Child Through the Summer Holidays



Summer holidays bring a break from school, more family time, and new experiences. But for autistic children, the change in structure and unpredictability can be overwhelming. With some thoughtful planning, you can help your child feel more at ease and ready for a positive holiday experience.

1. Prepare Ahead with Visual Tools

Children thrive on predictability. Visual tools can help your child understand what's coming and reduce anxiety.

- **Countdown Calendar:** Build excitement by counting down to your holiday or special day. Use stickers, paper chains, or apps depending on what works best.
 - **Visual Timetables:** Lay out the days or weeks ahead using images or words. Include events like trips, appointments, or even low-key days like “bike ride” or “bake cookies.”
 - **Photo Previews:** Show your child pictures of places you'll visit—hotels, airports, family homes—to help them feel more familiar before arriving.
 - **Social Stories:** Create short stories (with or without pictures) that explain what will happen during events like flying, staying in a new place, or visiting relatives. This helps your child mentally rehearse new situations.
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2. Stick to a Simple Routine

A full break from school routine can feel unsettling. Try to build a new holiday rhythm with familiar elements:

- Keep wake-up, meal, and bedtime routines as consistent as possible.
 - Break the day into parts: morning, afternoon, and evening. Add one or two structured activities per block.
 - Leave space for flexibility—too much scheduling can also feel overwhelming.
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3. Answer Their Questions in Advance

Holidays can lead to a flood of questions:

“When are we leaving? How long will it take? What do I need to pack?”

- **Q&A Sheet:** Write down your child's repeated questions and your answers. This helps them feel reassured without needing to ask repeatedly.
- Revisit this sheet together in the lead-up to the event to reinforce understanding and reduce worry.



4. Talk About Changes Early

The earlier you introduce changes, the easier they'll be to manage.

- Gradually adjust routines if needed (e.g., if bedtime will be later during holidays).
- Be open and honest about what will be different and what will stay the same.
- Use simple explanations and visual supports to help your child process the information.

5. Plan for Quiet and Rest Time

Busy environments and new experiences can be overstimulating. Your child will need breaks.



- **Schedule Downtime:** Balance busier days with quiet home days. Even within a day, plan relaxing periods between activities.
- **Pack a Comfort Kit:** Bring calming items like noise-cancelling headphones, a comfort toy, books, or sensory aids.
- **Know Your Quiet Spots:** At events or outings, identify quiet spaces ahead of time in case your child needs a break.

6. Involve Your Child in Planning

Giving your child a say in holiday planning can reduce anxiety and increase their enjoyment.

- Let them choose between a few activity options.
 - Involve them in tasks like packing, choosing snacks, or decorating.
 - Make a shared "holiday to-do list" with things they're looking forward to.
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7. Practise New Scenarios

New situations can be made less scary through practice.

- **Role-Play:** Act out travel scenarios, greeting relatives, or restaurant visits at home.
 - **Storytelling:** Use made-up or real stories to talk about what will happen during different holiday events.
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8. Keep Communication Open

Check in regularly with your child to see how they're feeling.

- Talk about what's going well and what might feel hard.
 - Validate their feelings—even if they're excited and anxious at the same time.
 - Remind them (and yourself) that not everything has to go perfectly.
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9. Focus on Enjoyment, Not Perfection

The goal isn't to control every detail—it's to make your child feel safe and supported. Some days might be tricky, and that's okay.

- Celebrate small successes.
 - Adjust plans if needed.
 - Keep expectations flexible and realistic.
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Final Thoughts

Every child is different, and what works for one may not work for another. Use these strategies as a toolkit—try what fits your child best. With preparation, communication, and compassion, you can help make this holiday season less stressful and more joyful for your autistic child—and for the whole family.



Useful websites:

https://doublecareaba.com/post/9-ways-to-prepare-your-child-with-autism-for-the-holidays	
https://www.aspriscs.co.uk/news-blogs/taking-an-autistic-child-on-holiday-a-parent-s-guide/	
https://www.beyondautism.org.uk/resource-hub/what-are-visual-stories/	
https://autismlearningpartners.com/autism-and-holiday-festivities/	
https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/going-out-leisure-and-travel/holidays/parents#H2_9	