

From our February, 2012 Newsletter

Tips for Less Stressful Spring Holidays

We've noted before that holidays may be problematic for a sensory sensitive child, as well as for young children stressed by the change in routine and the unfamiliar sights, sounds, foods, and people. With Passover and Easter fast approaching, here are updated tips that will help ensure that your family's celebrations go smoothly:

Let your kids get involved in holiday activities.

Great fine motor activities before the holidays that your child may enjoy include making placemats or placecards for the Seder or Easter table. Little ones will enjoy gluing shapes or pasting stickers on construction paper mats; older children can make woven mats. But - **don't stress about perfection**. Just as you cherished those first art pieces they brought home from school, applaud your child's crafty contribution to your family celebration, even if it is messy.

One way to reduce the anxiety level: accept that you don't have to do things in any particular way. For example, you needn't dye Easter eggs with your kids, even if that was part of your tradition growing up. Create fun Easter eggs with less mess and no objectionable "smell" for sensory sensitive children by using permanent markers, stickers, and paint.

Cooking together is a great sensory experience.

So let your child help measure, mix and decorate holiday Easter cookies, help blend ingredients for matzoh balls, or dip matzoh in melted chocolates and sprinkle nuts on it for a great Passover snack.

Minimize the element of surprise. Tell your child what will happen at each holiday event before it occurs: who will be there? what will they have to wear? what foods will be served? what is the plan for the day? If the holiday celebration is similar to one your family has had before, show pictures of the previous event to remind them of "who" and "what".

Since even a short Passover celebration may seem long to a child, it's a good idea to gently remind Grandpa ahead of time that it's ok that your child may not be able to sit through it, or that she may not want to partake in dipping parsley in salt water or eating bitter herbs. If your holiday tradition includes songs or prayers that may be unfamiliar to your child, look to [Youtube](#) for videos. (continued on next page)

Give children a role in the holiday event. Some kids do well if given a "job" to do at a family gathering: assign them to take coats from guests to an out of the way room, or to be the greeter (assimilate guests more slowly - often a better choice for some), or the Haggadah distributor. Having a helping role may give children a feeling of security as they have a clear sense of what to do in a chaotic environment.

Reduce the stress level. Have Easter brunch at home instead of in a restaurant! A smart mother on the [SPD Blogger Network](#) suggested a family pancake brunch at home, with kids decorating pancake "eggs" with whipped cream, chocolate chips, bananas, etc. Far less stressful than wrangling kids in a restaurant. For a very low key out-of-the house event, IHOP works, too!

Keep your child moving when possible. Take a walk after (or before) a big holiday meal. Do jumping jacks together in the parking lot or backyard.

Don't stress about holiday clothing. It's not worth forcing your child to wear a holiday outfit that will make them uncomfortable to church, a restaurant, or a family gathering. Being flexible (and bringing a change of clothes) will reduce your anxiety, as well as theirs. ---Contra: But perhaps they'll like dressing up. You'll only know if you try it out - but do it ahead of time, so you can cut out any scratchy tags and remove uncomfortable bows. Wearing a suit without socks or with sneakers is ok, too - just think of it as a fashion statement!

Everyone makes fun of matzoh. Don't make your child eat something they find yucky, even if it's Great-Aunt Joan's celebrated chicken soup or Uncle Henry's Special Holiday Ham. And if they can't handle (or are allergic to) the abundance of desserts found at many family gatherings, make sure you bring acceptable alternatives along.



Prepared by Pediatric Potentials of West Essex, LLC.