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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter



Issue No. 4

Preparing for the Holidays

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Letter From Your Editor

By Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Happy Holidays! Feliz Navidad! Mele Kalikimaka! Kamgan Ukudigaa!
Annaurri Anirug! Xristos Khuwdziti Kax Sh Kaxtoolxet!! Quyanalghii Kuusma!

No matter how you say it, the holidays are an exciting time of year for both staff and students. The anticipation of time off from school, spending time with family and friends, and all of the fun projects that are done in classrooms everywhere make for a joyful, and sometimes stressful, environment.

This time of year does not have to be stressful. As a teacher, classroom paraprofessional, or administrator, it can be helpful to remember a few things:

1. The kids are just as excited, or even more so, than you are. They just are not as good at containing that excitement. Give your class time daily leading up to the break to talk about why the holidays are exciting for them (this is a great snack or calendar activity).
2. The routine that is normally in place may be disrupted and a sense of safety missing. Even for students who are able to "go with the flow" having a lot of changes can be very difficult. Talk about changes to the day every morning and review them as needed throughout the day.
3. Sometimes, you just have to ditch the lesson plan and go with the flow. That is okay! Grab a great holiday story, read aloud to the group, and then let them have free time to draw or color their own holiday pictures.

The more that adults in the school embrace the excitement that inevitably comes with a holiday, instead of the stress, the more kids will embrace that excitement as well.

Merry Christmas and Schastlivogo Rozhdestva!
Jennifer

Holiday Preparations at Home and School

By *Olivia Yancey, SESA Hearing Impairment Specialist*

Holidays for many involve hours spent catching up with friends and family over meals, games, conversation, and movies. Throughout this mixture of social events is a common thread, language. Individuals with hearing loss often have a different communication mode or limited access to spoken language with their assistive listening devices. Here are some suggested strategies that the IEP team can use to help prepare an individual with hearing loss participate in the mixture of holiday events.

Playing Games: Games have rules to be followed, goals to accomplish, and jokes that are shared among the players. If the student with hearing loss doesn't already know this information, unintended isolation, listening fatigue, or limited enjoyment of the game may occur.

- Before the holiday: collaborate with family if there is a yearly game, movie, or skit that can be pre-taught at school.
- Rules, common phrases of teasing/banter, and goals for specific games can be taught during language lessons or during social skills training.
- If the student uses American Sign Language to communicate, consider sending home pre-sorted sign language cards that support communication

during games (e.g., Your Turn, My Turn, I won. You Won. We tied. Good job. Keep going. Count. Pair. Same). These can be placed in the board game box for easy access.

Routines: At school, there might be a routine for checking hearing aids and cochlear implants, a visual schedule that shows what is occurring, or a person to go to if they don't understand what was said.

- For younger students, school and family members should collaborate on creating a visual schedule of when to check hearing aids or cochlear implants, and when special events are occurring during the holiday.

Technology:

- Students with hearing loss may need to use their personal FM microphone system during the holiday meal preparations, at the far end of the table to hear their family, or plugged into the TV to hear the movie. Depending on who owns the microphone (i.e., school or family), having the personal FM microphone at home during the holidays can be helpful.
- Closed Captions for educational movies is an accommodation that is recommended for school staff to use for students with hearing loss. This can be a feature easily added to the family movie night. Special education teachers and general education teachers who are providing these supports at school can role-play or teach the student how to set this up.

Holiday Tips for Home and School *By Samantha Weiland, SESA Autism Impairment Specialist*

Holidays are a time of celebration, family gatherings, and sometimes travel. Having time off from school or work can be a positive thought, however, it can be a stressful and an over-stimulating experience. Students with Autism Impairment thrive on highly structured routines and are comfortable if they have the opportunity to anticipate activities or events. Students with Autism Impairment may have difficulty with the holidays because there is not a structured routine and they are dealing with the unknown on a daily basis. They are also dealing with fluctuating sleep schedules and different dietary exposures. They tend to be picky eaters because of sensory related challenges and need adequate sleep to help them be organized.

What Can Teachers Do?

- Keep the students to their highly structured routine even during the last week of school before the holiday break. The structure of their daily school routine will diminish stress and anxiety for the students. You can schedule a class holiday party the last day before the holiday. It would be beneficial to have the holiday party towards the end of the school day.
- During snack time, try to introduce foods students may eat with their families during the holidays. Continue to have highly preferred foods available for your students. Some may not even attempt to eat the food introduced to them and that is okay. You can encourage students to smell the food and put it down, taste the food, or even just holding the food before putting it down.

Students need to have positive and stress free experiences when trying new foods.

- Work with teachers and administrators to modify the student's amount of participation in the holiday performance. You know your students best, sometimes it is beneficial to have your own holiday performance or holiday related activities in the classroom to prevent anxiety and over-stimulation.
- Incorporate social stories about the holidays into daily lesson plans. Provide a copy of those social stories to go home to families. The social stories can include gift opening, appropriate interaction with family, traveling, etc.

What Can Parents Do?

- Each day for 2-4 weeks before the holiday parents can start reading the social stories about holiday expectations and experiences. Also presenting pictures of family members and friends with their names prior to seeing them will help the students have familiarity when family and friends come to visit.
- Holiday meals may be different from what students would generally eat. Students should be encouraged, but not forced, to try new foods. Be prepared with your student's favorite and familiar food.
- A week before students return to school after the holiday, it is important to have them on a consistent and reasonable sleep schedule. Have scheduled activities for your student to help them get into a routine and have daily structure.

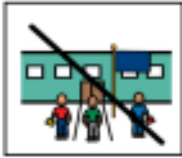
Just a few friendly tips for making the holidays at home and school less stressful and more fun!

A Holiday Social Story Example

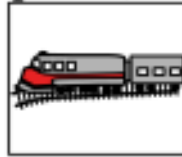
What do the holidays look like?



You will have NO SCHOOL for a few days or weeks.



You might travel by: plane, car, train, or bus.



You might stay at home or a hotel.



You might see family or friends.



You might try new foods like pie, turkey, cranberries, or mashed potatoes.



What are you doing for the holidays?

Holidays and Your Child with a Visual Impairment
By Angel Black, SESA Vision Impairment Specialist

The holidays will soon be upon us! I don't know about your family, but with mine, our calm, organized, predictable schedule turns completely upside down! This can create a great deal of apprehension for the child that has low vision/blindness. Traveling to new places, long car trips, airplane rides, and new people everywhere can be unsettling and even frightening for some children. But, rest assured, handled

in the correct fashion your child can approach the holiday season with confidence that the holidays are wonderful and going to new and strange places is a great deal of fun!

When planning for the holidays try to include your child in the preparation:

- When decorating your home, include your child in the process and be sure to leave some decorations at "eye" level so your child can enjoy them too.
- Involve your child in creating a Christmas list for all the people you want to buy gifts for. Brainstorm ideas together, go shopping together to buy the items on the list, and come home and wrap them together. So much fun and so much learning!
- Create braille gift tags and tactile wrapping paper. Your child will love creating special things that only they can do.
- When un-wrapping gifts make sure your child sits by the person so they can be close enough to "see" the person open it.
- If you buy a real Christmas tree, involve your child in picking the perfect tree for your family. This is a high sensory activity and your child will love the smells and the tactual experience of touching the tree you choose.

If you're taking a road trip the following ideas might be helpful:

- Traveling at night is a great idea, if possible.
- Bring tactile books with lots of amazing textures.
- Map out fun places to stop, explore, and let weary travelers out to take a much-needed break.
- Get a travel tray that fits over a car seat, add Velcro to the tray, and then add favorite tactile and noisemaking toys. These can stick to the tray to be played with and they won't fall on the floor or get lost.
- Or, a bucket of toys that your child can reach in and grab what they want.
- Lots of music and books on tape.

If flying:

- Talk to your child a lot. Explaining exactly what you'll be doing, how it might feel, don't leave any surprises.
- Do a "walk-through" at home. Create social stories for any part of the process that could be causing your child anxiety.
- Contact the airlines prior to travel if you need any assistance at the airport.

When you arrive:

- Walk your child through the new environment, allowing them to explore and get comfortable in these new surroundings. Make sure there is a safe path in each room without obstructions or possible danger areas where your child could get hurt.

The most important thing you can do for you child is to prepare them. Talk, talk, and talk some more. If all the crowds, noise, and activity get to be too much, allow your child some quiet time. We all need to take a break every once in a while, and children with low vision/blindness may need that more than you realize. Learn to recognize the signs when the sensory input is too much for your child.

Holiday Tips for School and Home

By Meriah Cory, *SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist*

The holiday season is a wonderful, and yet stressful, time for everyone. There is the anticipation of the family get-togethers, the hope for special gifts under the tree, and the joy that comes with having a few weeks off from school (well, for the kids anyway!). And for our students with multiple disabilities and complex communication needs, the season is filled with just as much excitement and anticipation, they just cannot always let us know what they are thinking. Here are some tips for home and school to help get our kids involved in all aspects of the holiday season.

Holidays at School

During the holiday season, many schools have special Thanksgiving and Christmas activities. Classrooms are decorated, special books are read, and holiday programs are prepared. For students with multiple disabilities and complex communication, try the following so they can join in the fun:

- Use Christmas lights and sparkly garland to decorate the classroom, but put it at the eye level of the child in a wheelchair, or about halfway up the wall.
- When reading special stories, use tactile objects such as a stuffed snowman, a piece of garland, or some jingle bells with your student. This is a great way for them to experience what you are reading.
- Not all of our students with multiple disabilities can eat orally, but that doesn't mean they don't enjoy the smells associated with Christmas. When talking about holiday meals and what to expect, bring in different spices for all of the kids to smell.
- There are many different ways for students who are non-verbal or limitedly verbal to participate in a holiday program. Record the refrain of a popular Christmas song on a BigMac, give the student picture icons to hold up when it is time for their line, or give them a great drum solo during their favorite song (this can even be done via switch on the iPad, if necessary!)
- Create a tactile anticipation book with your students. Bring in different wrapping paper, bows, ribbons, bells, etc. Talk about the items and have the students glue what is special to them on cardstock. Use o-rings to put it together, and you have a great book they can share with those at home.


Holidays at Home

Things at home may be very hustle and bustle during the holiday time. Cookies are baking, presents are being wrapped, and bedtimes are being fought (after all, there is not school tomorrow!). So many activities are happening, and they are all great times to share experiences with your child with multiple disabilities and complex communication.

- Baking cookies or other holiday treats is a family tradition in many homes. Hook up a switch to the mixer, and let your child with complex disabilities help out. Or, give your child their own bowl and spoon, and put a small amount of what you are making in it. Let them stir away (and get messy) without

sacrificing the final product.

- Snuggle up for a great holiday movie. This is a great time to just be able to relax and not place any demands on yourself or on your child. And who doesn't want some extra snuggle time?
- Try to keep kids on a good sleep routine. This will prevent them from being worn out during the day, being frustrated and crabby, and for students with medical needs, will help their medications stay regular.
- Take a lot of pictures and email them to school. Your child cannot necessarily share what happened at home or what the best gift was. This will allow the teachers to know and talk about the holiday break with your child.



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graph TD; A[DECISION TO MAKE REFERRAL] --> B[REFERRAL APPLICATION IS COMPLETED/SUBMITTED]; B --> C[DETERMINATION OF LEVEL OF SERVICE]; C --> D[PLAN OF SERVICE IS DEVELOPED]; D --> E[ONGOING SUPPORT & SERVICES];
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DECISION TO MAKE REFERRAL

- The local school determines the need for a referral.
- District Special Education Director reviews and submits referral packet.

REFERRAL APPLICATION IS COMPLETED/SUBMITTED

Required Documents:

- Initial Referral Form
- Mutual Exchange of Information to be signed by parent/guardian
- Copy of current Evaluation Summary Eligibility Report (ESER)
- Copy of current Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Diagnostic information supporting eligibility
- Permission to Photograph/Video/Use and Publish to the Internet (if applicable)

DETERMINATION OF LEVEL OF SERVICE

- Based upon SESA program overhead sites, district need, and use follow-through of services received.

PLAN OF SERVICE IS DEVELOPED

- A SESA specialist is assigned and will work with the Special Education Director and teacher to develop a plan of service based on student and local staff needs.

ONGOING SUPPORT & SERVICES


- A SESA specialist will make recommendations, provide support, training and resources to school staff and families.
- Resources from the SESA Library are also available.

SESA REFERRAL PROCESS

Looking to make a referral for SESA services?

Click on the image to check out the referral process from decision to site visit!

To access SESA services, please complete a [referral packet](#)

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