



Things to Think About!

Surviving the Holidays

By Linda Jorgensen



By Brandan Atkin

Recommended reading:

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/holiday-season.aspx>

Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress/MH00030>

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Families with special needs children also have special needs schedules. Everybody seems to want a chunk of our time. Specialty therapists, school staffs, doctor's offices, home health agencies and state program case workers all want our time and attention "now". Am I the only one to notice that? And those are our routine days. You know, the days when we have nothing else to do like laundry, grocery shopping, and toilet scrubbing.

Just about the time I get everyone settled to a dull roar here come the holidays. I don't know about everyone else but the holiday season starts early at our house. By mid-October we're up to our armpits in chocolate eyeballs and candy corn then do an immediate segue into turkey gravy followed full bore by candy canes in December. The week between Christmas and New Year's Day seems to be open season for all the agencies and programs that need year end reports or perform recertification home visits. (Last year I had 4 home visits in that week. So much for our holiday break...) By the time January rolls around I am wrestling with a freezer overflowing with leftover holiday goodies, fighting off a food coma and in desperate need of a very long nap.

Given how crazy just the holiday season can be my husband and I sat down several years ago and decided that frazzled holidays just weren't any fun and we were going to change. We decided to plan early. Yep. WAY early. We start writing our lists and checking them twice about mid-July. October plans for Halloween go on a list, Thanksgiving activities and family plans are discussed and Christmas gets a thorough going over. We both get a copy and they go in our planners.

The Family Plan ~ Set Priorities and Budget Your Time

The first item on our list is "parental preservation". Take care of yourselves, first. All of the Holidays are much more fun if everyone stays healthy. Getting flu shots as soon as they become available, eating properly, frequent hand washing, scheduling personal quiet time and regular date nights. Yes, I said "schedule". I block out time on the family calendar to spend time reading a book or soaking in the tub. If someone calls and the time slot is taken we find an open time slot somewhere else. Stick to your exercise routine. Take warm baths and get plenty of sleep. You'll feel better and so will everyone else around you.

The Holidays

Halloween can be a lot of fun. We decide early on what we want to do for the month. We are not going to run ourselves into the ground trying to do everything. Sit down as a family and discuss what activities your family really enjoys at Halloween. Do you enjoy corn mazes and haunted houses or do you prefer to decorate your home and trick-or-treat? Or would you all rather attend a fall festival? In our household our daughter's wheelchair generally gets stuck in the corn mazes and haunted houses are far too scary for her. We opt for a spooky

movie night at home and attend our church costume party a few days before Halloween. Whatever it is you enjoy, decide what it is, and get it on your calendar. Be sure to leave a few days open for relaxation along the way.

Thanksgiving is another family challenge. A Norman Rockwell family gathering may be your ideal but it isn't always realistic. Try to pin down where your family will be for Thanksgiving Day early in the month and plan accordingly. Enlist help from family members if you need it. If you're having dinner at home you can plan your menu and shop early. If you're traveling the earlier your plans are arranged the better. Don't leave everything to the last minute. I'm betting if you call Grandma early in the month and volunteer to bring a specific dish she'll be more than pleased to put you on her menu list.

And then there's Christmas. We start our shopping early in the year, refuse to shop on Black Friday and instead spend the day decorating the house using the old principal, "Less is more". We only put out those items that are beautiful, bring us joy, and are easily maintained. Christmas lights outside are put up early in October here. Let's face it. In our area we often have snow by Halloween so we put them up on the roof early if we want them in December. We just don't turn the switch on until after Thanksgiving.

We've discovered the joys of comparison shopping on-line and free holiday shipping for the last few gift items we really need to wait until December to purchase. And there aren't many. We order those no later than December 5th. All craft projects should be done by Thanksgiving weekend and we even get some of the gift wrapping

completed early. The year my husband and I were up until 0330 in the morning on Christmas Day wrapping gifts only to stumble out of bed two hours later and watch our bright eyed children disembowel every carefully wrapped box was the year we decided no gift wrapping on Christmas Eve! We need the sleep.

Then there is the schedule. Sometime in mid-November pull out your main calendar and, with your family's help, list obligations and favorite family activities for the month, starting with the most important activities first. Remain flexible and keep in mind you may need to cancel or postpone a few. If you spend time attending weekly rehabilitation sessions talk with your child's specialists about cutting back on therapy visits during the holidays. We try to schedule at least two weeks without therapy visits to allow for all the last minute recertification home visits and reports that have to be completed. Don't forget to schedule some family at-home time, too. If too many things are scheduled they become tasks and life becomes miserable. Plan nights for Christmas movies and popcorn or just plain quiet time. You don't have to do everything but whatever you do, plan what you like and make it fun.

By planning ahead, managing your time and spending, being creative and enjoying time together as a family you may not need that long nap in January after all!

**We hope you all have a wonderful Holiday Season.
Merry Christmas!
Linda and the SNRP Technical Support Team**

