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IBT's Top Ten Holiday Tips Minimize Challenges for Children with Autism and Their Families

The Institute for Behavioral Training (IBT) issues ten tips to help children with autism and their families overcome the challenges of the holiday season.

LOS ANGELES (Nov. 19, 2013) – The Institute for Behavioral Training (IBT) this week released ten of its top tips to minimize challenges for families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) during the holiday season.

IBT is a leading training institute that provides innovative programs to meet the current and emerging needs of parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, and human service professionals across the globe.

“The holiday season is usually a time for celebration and joy, but many families of children with autism find that it can also be a time of stress,” says IBT director Cecilia Knight, MA, BCBA. “These children typically have a tough time coping with change, including different places and different people, and they are often sensitive to loud sounds, bright lights, and even touch. These ten tips are effective for many families with children with autism.”

Knight says families can prevent or reduce most stressful situations with the following ten tips:

1. Make a schedule of activities each day (using pictures or words) to ensure that expectations are clear for the whole family. Set this up ahead of time to help prepare your child for the events of the day and minimize negative reactions to unexpected activities. Also, don't over schedule the day! Make sure there are plenty of opportunities for breaks and down time.
2. Have your child assist in the order of events or reinforcement schedule for each day (grocery store first, arcade second, then library). This will provide him/her with choices and a sense of control over portions of the day.
3. Take a day trip. Visit a museum or sporting event together; boredom can be your worst enemy.
4. Bring toys, video games, or other entertainment to keep kids occupied during commutes or wait time.
5. Remember to take visual cues (i.e., schedules and communication devices) with you on outings.
6. Try to identify the most important part of an occasion and limit your participation to that time period. Visits, family gatherings, and large events can be stressful for kids/teens. If Aunt Edna's Thanksgiving Extravaganza always lasts four hours, plan to arrive just in time for the meal and then leave in a reasonable amount of time to avoid meltdowns.
7. Create fun in the home with inexpensive ways to entertain your child/teen. For example, create a scavenger hunt, organize arts and crafts activities, build a fort, or play a family game of Twister.

8. Have reasonable expectations, and pick your battles! If your child/teen is a picky eater, focus more on table manners or his/her interaction with family during the holiday feast, instead of pushing him/her to eat a plateful of new foods.

9. Be consistent; schedule lunch, snacks, TV, chores, outdoor activities, or arts and crafts during the same time each day to avoid frustration during vacation.

10. Identify the holiday stressors; either work on them ahead of time or manage them in the vacation schedule. For example, if the endless hugs from family will set your child/teen on the wrong course for the day, then you might need a plan in place to practice that interaction. If that is not possible, then try to manage the situation in the moment with simple and reasonable rules: "Hug three people, and then we will go do something fun together."

For more information about IBT, visit www.ibehavioraltraining.com.

About the Institute for Behavioral Training

IBT is considered the one-stop training hub for individuals of all levels who interact with, teach, care for, and treat individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other development disorders. IBT's programs educate students, parents, professionals, and caregivers on evidence-based techniques using applied behavior analysis (ABA), so they can maximize progress when working with any individual. For more information about IBT, visit www.ibehavioraltraining.com.

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