



GUIDE TO A PERFECT GATHERING:

TIPS FOR MANAGING VISITS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

The holiday season is filled with fun activities, plenty of tasty food, and visits with extended family members — a recipe for a happy social time. But for kids with learning, behavioral and social issues due to conditions such as ADHD, social anxiety and processing disorders, it often becomes a time of confusion and frustration. Use these holiday social tips for kids to help your child prepare for family visits, whether at home or away.

IN ADVANCE OF THE GATHERING

Plan Ahead

For teens and young adults, it can help to plan beforehand if family gatherings trigger social anxiety. Set up a plan and boundaries before arrival and determine safe topics of conversation. Focus on topics they feel okay talking about, and give them permission to pivot away from topics they'd rather not discuss.

Stay Ahead of Meltdowns

Give your child a list of the people who will be at the gathering and a schedule of events for special activities, particularly on days with lots of transitions. Whether it's in written form or with pictures for younger kids, your child will feel calmer and safer knowing what is coming up.



For Kids Who Need to Stay Active

Sign up for a local race or be prepared to play your family's favorite outdoor games like Capture the Flag, Red Rover or tag. Board games are also a great way to spend some stress-free time with family.

Eat Clean

If your child has food sensitivities or allergies that prevent him or her from eating holiday treats, plan ahead to offer alternatives like all-natural candy or a gluten-free treat from home. Their behavior and mood could worsen if they are exposed to inflammatory foods (e.g., sugar, artificial colors, and flavors) during events like family gatherings.



PACKING LIST

- ☒ Earplugs
- ☒ Sunglasses
- ☒ Headphones
- ☒ Healthy Treats
- ☒ Comfort Item
- ☒ Calming Essential Oils



DURING THE GATHERING

Take a Break

People who struggle socially often need to have some time out to gather themselves or burn off surplus energy. Explain beforehand to your friends and family that your child sometimes needs to move away from what's happening at the time. Make sure other kids are aware as well so they don't feel slighted when your child retreats.



Dealing with Unsolicited Advice

The problem of unsolicited parenting advice often comes to a head during the holidays, when friends and families spend a lot of time in close proximity. So how can you respond to unwarranted recommendations without ruining the holidays?

- **Be honest.** When a family member dishes up advice you don't agree with, simply thank them for trying to help then firmly note that you're not looking for advice.
- **Use humor.** Cracking a joke can go a long way toward easing the tension when family members are at odds during a large gathering. If your child is throwing a fit, or otherwise acting out, and family members are butting in, try a line like "You should've seen him/her last week when the stock market tanked."
- **Let It Go.** If all else fails? Simply agree with a smile, and then move ahead with whatever you were going to do anyway!



Develop a Secret Signal

Ask your child to give you a secret signal when help is needed. Have fun deciding on the indicator, and use simple ideas, such as a nod, wink or tapping of fingers on a table. When your child gives the sign, respond quickly.

AFTER THE EVENT

Give your child time to decompress and have some alone time after the gathering is over. Try a salt bath with calming music or provide a new book to curl up with in their favorite reading spot. This will end the day on a good note, leaving them with positive memories of their time with family and friends.



Brain Balance Achievement Centers is the leading drug-free program helping kids move beyond challenges to achieve greater success. This personalized program is designed to improve focus, behavior, social skills, anxiety, and academic performance. The program takes an integrative approach to strengthening the brain and its connections through sensory engagement, physical development, academics, and nutrition. Over the past decade, this comprehensive and effective program has helped thousands of individuals nationwide to improve the critical skills needed to create a brighter path for their future.