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Keep The Holidays Sensory-sational!

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Keep The Holidays Sensory-sational!

Many children can be over-stimulated or under-stimulated by one of their senses including: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and/or movement. A sensory sensitive child can be easily overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of the holiday season—the bright lights, the extra sounds, party music, loud excited voices, and lots of people in a small space. A child may misinterpret these inputs from the environment making them feel uncomfortable or scared, which can lead to a flight or fight response.

Here are some tips to keep in mind during the holidays.



Keep it Quiet

The auditory system is the first to shut down when we're feeling over-stimulated. Try using ear plugs, noise cancelling headphones, headphones with music, or allow your child to wear a hat or hoodie especially when in busy places.

Take a break from the crowd!

Provide a quiet, safe, cozy place for your child to go to when over-stimulated



Be in touch

Allow your child to wear clothing he or she finds comfortable. Avoid pre-party conflict, pick your battles and have a smooth evening!



Prepare for food sensitivities

Bring along foods that you know your child will eat.

Dealing with the "Out of routine"

Use daily calendars or visual schedules to prepare your child for what's coming next. Activities can be listed hourly, daily, or weekly depending on the child's needs. This will help to decrease anxiety for you and your child.



Remember, the holidays are meant to be joyful and happy! Do what is right for you and your child. You don't have to apologize if opting out on some of the festivities is best for you and your family!

Relax and enjoy the holiday season in your own style!





Halloween Food Play

“Don’t play with your food!” “Don’t make such a mess!” We’ve said it ourselves or heard others say these kinds of phrases a million times but if you are a parent to a child with feeding difficulties, wipe these words from your vocabulary! A child’s ability to modulate the sensory properties of food is essential for eating and participating in mealtime experiences. However, a number of children lack this skill due to a number of different reasons. Perhaps they’ve had multiple medical interventions that disrupt their ability to eat by mouth. Perhaps they are over-responsive to touch or smell and their diet is limited. As occupational therapists, we recommend our picky eaters have *multiple* exposures to food in a fun, playful environment. This helps them develop more positive associations with food and learn about food textures, without the pressure to eat. And with Halloween right around the corner, this can be a great time of year to try some spooky, slimy, sticky food play!

Use food play without pressure! The goal is to provide your child with fun experiences with food. If your child is anxious about wet or messy textures, start with textures that your child is comfortable with like macaroni or rice. Make the activity into a game by hiding small pumpkins or pretend spiders inside the tactile bin to go on a “treasure hunt.” Maybe your child is interested in making the slime but is reluctant to touch the texture. Enable his success by giving him a fork or even tongs to dig for treasures.

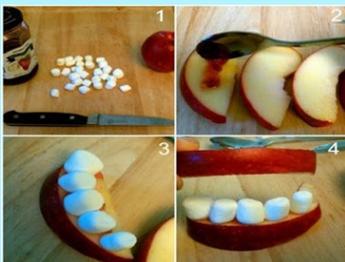
Change how you prepare preferred foods! We know that by changing how your child’s preferred foods look visually (such as the color or shape), you are helping him become more flexible with accepting different food choices. What about cutting up a quesadilla to look like a pumpkin or a mummy? Or use Halloween themed cookie cutters for her sandwiches for school lunch. Try adding a couple drops of orange food coloring to their morning pancakes.

There is no pressure to eat the food! Remember that the goal of these food play activities is to increase the number of positive exposures to food. Today, your child may only feel comfortable *touching* or *kissing* the “apple monster mouth” but not feel ready to eat it yet. Don’t put any pressure on your child to eat their creation, instead praise each interaction with the food. Avoid phrases like “just try it” and instead, model for your child how to eat the food while talking about sensory properties of what you’re eating. For example: “Wow! The apple is so crunchy and the marshmallows are so chewy! I like the sweet flavors.” Or have your child pass out his treats on Halloween night for more opportunities for praise from friends, neighbors, and family members that help provide additional positive reinforcement for food play.

Here are some ideas of different Halloween food play activities:

Apple Monster Mouth

Use a sliced red apple as lips, jam for “glue,” and marshmallows for teeth



Coconut Bananas

Roll bananas in coconut and use different sized chocolate chips for spooky faces



Pumpkins

Use mandarins as the pumpkins and cucumbers as the stem



Want more ideas? Scan QR code to watch a video of 6 different Halloween food play ideas!

