SENSORY Minute

Why Do Behaviors Increase During the Holidays?

Do you notice an increase in challenging behaviors during the holiday season? It may not be your imagination!

People with sensory processing issues often have difficulty with changes to their schedule, changes in their environment, and changes in people helping them. With vacation time, staff changes are inevitable. Schedules may change to reflect holiday shopping, parties, and other activities. The environment certainly will change with all the lights, music, smells, decorations, presents, and the anticipation of the season.

Consider looking at modifying holiday experiences for the individuals you serve by taking their sensory preferences and challenges into account when decorating, shopping, preparing, and celebrating. Look at the behavior data from last year and aim to decrease it this year.

- Work on sensory stories to help individuals prepare for certain events.
- Plan activity stations that provide just-right challenges for your individuals. For example, have some individuals help mix cookies, others help bake them, and others help decorate them depending on their abilities and needs.
- Complete holiday shopping during times when there are less people out and about.
- Decorate in a soothing winter wonderland. You may need to limit twinkling lights, strong scents, re-arranging furniture, and things hanging from the ceiling.
- Play soft Christmas music or Holiday movies.
- Check to see if you can arrange hosting a Sensory Sensitive Santa to come and visit with individuals.
- Use this time of the year to ask for sensory friendly gifts such as unscented hygiene items, weighted items, and seam free socks or undergarments.
- Increase the 3 Power Sensations prior to events that may be stressful.
- Be aware of any changes in the individual's schedule. Devise a plan on how to communicate changes for each individual. Use pictures or Pec cards, a daily schedule, or a calendar to communicate changes to lessen stress involved with schedule changes.

The *Ready Approach* is authored by the late Bonnie Hanschu and Laura Barker.
Go to
www.sensoryprocessingreadyapproach.com
for more information.