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LEARNING CONNECTIONS, INC.*Developing Social Understanding and Skills Since 2001*

Preparing for the Holiday Season

Tips for Making the Holiday Break a Social Success!

By Debra Schipper, M.Ed. CEO/Lead ASD Specialist

With two weeks off from school, the usual routine suspended, and the likelihood of extra special people and places to experience, children with autism spectrum disorders are as excited as anyone, but they may also be more anxious and perhaps less prepared than most. Parents and friends can maximize the benefits of break and set these children up for some extra success with social interaction and relationship-building! Here are some ideas to keep in mind while preparing for this special time:

TIP #1 Create a calendar for the break and a visual schedule for each day to reduce some of the anxiety "free" time can cause. Highlight potentially stimulating activities and allow for preparation time before and down time afterward. Avoid too much "electronic" stimulation by putting a variety of other fun activities on each day's agenda.

TIP #2 Prime Children's skills and prepare them well in advance of guests' arrivals:

- Show children/teens pictures of who will be coming and help them review names and other

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Kate Doman
Director of Social Skills Programs

In September we welcomed the promotion of Kate to Director of Social Skills Programs. During several seasons at WMLC, Kate has been involved in the Lotus Learning and Social Skills programs as a Senior ASD Support Specialist. Kate's interest in serving special needs populations began through a Minnetonka high school job as a respite care provider and developed into serving ASD populations while obtaining her

key information about each person. Suggest possible conversation or small talk topics for each person.

- Review any food choices/menus and give reminders about table manners.
- Review the basics - Greetings, Introductions, Handshakes with the right grip and one nice look "right in the person's eyes," Taking turns talking and listening, "K.I.S.S."ing it (Keeping It Short and Simple) when talking, Giving and Receiving compliments, and Bidding Farewell at the end of the visit.
- Review the agenda for the visit and offer ideas and options for children's participation in the different parts of the activities.
- Remind children of their personal physical and behavioral signs that they need a break, review or create a "silent signal" to cue your child that a break appears needed, and prepare a break place and activity with a timer for children to use as needed.
- Plan and pace the activities, sights, sounds, and smells so as not to be overwhelming. Include "comfort" activities in the schedule.

TIP #3 Plan a play date or outing and prepare to facilitate at least portions of the time to help children practice friendship-making skills. Plan for quiet and active play time. Give time reminders to help prepare for transitions before, within, and at the end of activities. Plan non-competitive games or review self-management and "scripts" for winning and losing.

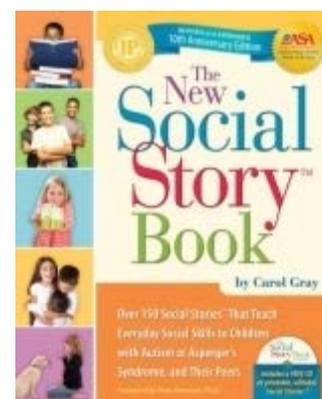
TIP #4 Write social stories to build social understanding and prepare children for special times during the holiday. Build meaning into the celebrations by explaining the reasons for the family traditions.

TIP #5 Review manners and expectations around opening and responding to gifts, including "scripts" for what to say (and not say) to express appreciation for gifts. We sometimes call this the "Social Fake."

TIP #6 Review "hidden agenda" items for various situations and behaviors and words that people will expect (and will make good impressions), as well as

Bachelor's degree in Psychology at University of Wisconsin-Madison. When Kate, the self-proclaimed "workaholic," isn't at WMLC she enjoys drinking coffee, spending time with family, boating and sailing on Lake Minnetonka and being active outdoors.

Please feel free to contact Kate with any ASD support or social skills questions you may have at 952-474-0227 or by e-mail at kdoman@wmlc.biz



Social Stories

What is a Social Story? In 1991, Carol Gray developed the strategy of Social Stories. Social Stories model appropriate social interaction by describing a situation with relevant social cues, other's perspectives, and a suggested appropriate response. For more information on writing Social Stories click [here](#).

Example

This afternoon Grandma and Grandpa are coming over to celebrate the holidays.

When they get here I will say, "Hello" and give them each a

"unexpected" behaviors that may surprise or annoy others and possibly cause them to think negative thoughts when they see them.

Above all, relax, don't plan too much, but plan some time each day to spend just enjoying and affirming your children and your relationships with each other. After all, children learn best about making and keeping friends by watching and learning from what you and others who care about them say and do to show and teach them.

hug.

My grandparents and parents will talk for a while. I can play with my toys.

If it gets too loud or I need a break I can go play in my room.

When my mom says it's time to open presents I will sit on the floor with a calm body in the living room.

A grown-up will give me a gift to open.

After I open it, I say, "Thank-you," even if it's something I don't like.

I can have fun with my family by keeping a calm body.



Holiday Recipe

Viva's Holiday Punch

From our WMLC client created cookbook.

- 1 46 oz. bottle cran-raspberry juice (or cran-strawberry)
- 1 12 oz. can frozen orange/pineapple juice (undiluted)
- 1 2 liter bottle Sprite or 7-UP
- 1 bottle non-alcoholic



SOCIAL SKILLS THERAPY

Social Skills Course Offerings

WMLC strives to provide the best social skills programming for children and young adults. Click on the "Get Started" button to check out the excellent courses we are offering this term!

[Get Started](#)



Therapeutic Recreation Activities

For children age 8+ check out our monthly Sleepovers and Friday Open Social Activities. For the older crowd age 16+ check out our Bold Connections activities offered on Thursday evenings and one Saturday a month.

sparkling burgundy juice
Canned cherry pop, juice
or sprite (for ice ring)
Fresh or frozen
strawberries (or fruit of
choice)

Ice Ring: Fill ring with
juice, canned cherry pop
or Sprite until about 3/4
full. Add fruit of choice.
Freeze.

Punch: Mix cran-
raspberry juice,
orange/pineapple juice,
Sprite and non-alcoholic
sparkling burgundy juice
together in a punch bowl.
Add ice ring and serve.

*Makes a beautiful
delicious punch that will
add something special to
your holiday celebration.*

To order a copy of our
cookbook e-mail
nringgenberg@wmlc.biz



Holiday Craft Activity

Make Snow Dough! You will need:

- * 1 cup baking soda
- * 1/2 cup cornstarch
- * 3/4 cup water
- * a drop of peppermint extract
- * iridescent glitter

In a saucepan over medium heat combine the baking soda with cornstarch, water and peppermint extract. Stir until soft dough forms. Allow to cool. Sprinkle glitter over the dough and knead to combine. Snow dough can be stored in an air-tight container.



Metro Friendship Foundation

Be sure to check out next months newsletter for information about the upcoming Metro Friendship Foundation (MFF) fundraiser.

Click [here](#) to find out



App Suggestion

*By Jaclyn Hutchins, M.A., CCC-SLP
Family Speech and Therapy Services at
WMLC Edina*

This months suggestion is called Toontastic! Toontastic for iPad is one of my favorite apps to target language and social language skills. Toontastic is an engaging app that allows students to create and animate stories. It can be used to enhance narrative development as it teaches kids to structure their story according to the grammar of setup/conflict/challenge/climax/resolution.

The planning processes involved in this app also work to improve executive functioning skills. This app can also be used to practice social skills through animated role-play and by contrasting stories in which characters use expected and unexpected behaviors.

The educational possibilities of this app are limitless!

Click [here](#) to find out more about this app.

Click [here](#) to find out more about Family Speech and Therapy Services.

more about MFF.

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