

Holiday Break Helpful Hints

It's time for the holiday break from school and your kiddo is fueled with excitement for the time off to spend with family doing exciting activities... Activities out of the normal routine that you have worked so hard to master since August. Parents know that the long days ahead will be chalk full of fast-paced, exciting, magical memories, and some memories you may not want to put in your scrapbook. Cherished time with loved ones away from the mundane can quickly turn into a countdown for the break to end. So, what are some ways you can help your child be more successful through the challenges of a break from school, and to aim for more fun this holiday season?

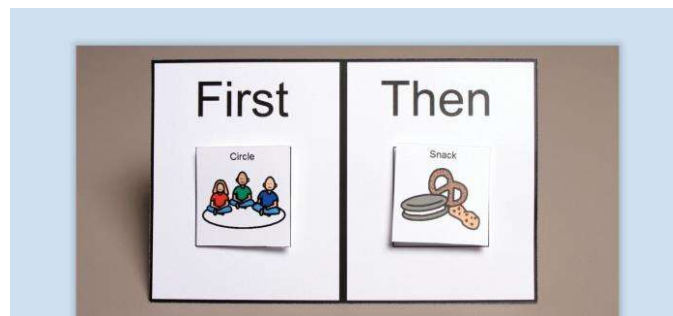
Young minds who crave consistency with their routines may struggle with the change of schedule that a break from school brings. Providing **visual schedules** for the child to have an idea of what each day is going to hold allows the child to have a sense of control over their day and be aware of incoming transitions. Specific events that frequently trigger big emotions may need a smaller “micro-schedule” which breaks down the steps to a process with pictures for the child to work through.



Visual timers will be your best friend! I suggest ordering a small pack of magnetic/clip virtual timers and keeping them in various frequently trafficked places so that you always have them on hand. Timers can help with transitions, time preferred-activities, or even come in with the assist when met with an unplanned bout of waiting (holiday lines are no joke!). There are many creative ways to use a timer, and you won't regret having one on hand!



A simple chart can help keep a child's brain on track when they are not particularly thrilled about the present activity. Creating a **First/Then Chart** on something as simple as a napkin at the table can be a visual tool to help you from repeating yourself to a child who just can't wait to go to Grandma's house! First/Then Charts are a simple and clear way of showing kids that we will first do something (maybe more undesired), then we will get to do something of their choice. Using that visual timer during the choice activity can help the child stay on track!



Social Stories are stories written to help a child learn about a specific situation that may occur in their life, providing them with skills or language that they can use to cope. Social stories can be used leading up to the event and during the event of interest. Writing your own story with specific examples of what a child may struggle with is key. For example: If you are traveling this wintertime, you may write a story that explains you will be away from home, provides pictures of the place they will be staying, and shows examples of some of the activities they may do while they are there. These stories work best when practiced/read repeatedly, maybe each day or prior to the activity of focus each time.

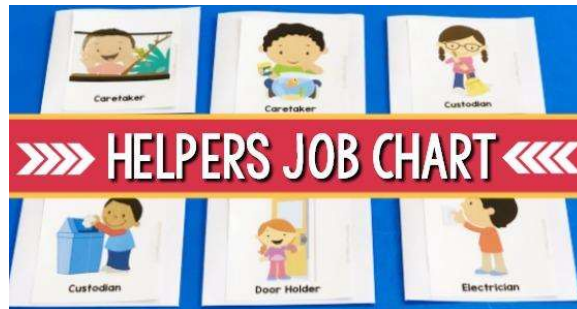


Choices are coming in at best friend #2! When our routines are thrown off, we struggle to feel in control of our lives. The hustle and bustle of the holiday season with predetermined activities and long hours spent in unfamiliar places is difficult for anyone, especially kids. When children are begging for more agency over their decisions, providing two choices which still achieve the same overall goal can help your child feel more in control and independent. Choices are not a way of giving in; it is helping the child get what they need to be successful, within reason of the choices you provide. You have the control if you are providing the choices, and the child feels more in control when they are able to make a choice for themselves. If the child is unable to make a safe choice from what you provide independently, you can help them make the choice and follow through with it.



While at school, chances are your child has independent responsibilities to take care of themselves and may even have a classroom job. **Home helper jobs** are any jobs that your child can assist with at home independently. Have your kids choose a job each day and

have them complete this job each time it is possible! For example: Lights helpers can make sure the lights are turned off in any room before everyone leaves, or trash collectors can help clear the small trash bins in various rooms around the house and bring to the large can. You can pick jobs that fit the needs of your home, while teaching a valuable skill to your child that is at their independence level.



Schools typically provide some format of a self-regulation experience or station that is designated for calming your body and mind. Being able to step through the stages of self-regulation can be difficult, especially if you do not have a safe place to do so, so teaching your child about a **self-regulation space** that is pre-determined, pre-taught and full of resources to regulate, is helpful. Taking smaller, adapted versions of these resources when you may be away from home is helpful too. Whatever tools you choose to use to help you identify the big emotion and soothe your brain and body should be taught to the child at baseline emotions and practiced before big emotions take over. Self-regulation for kids can be an emotional process, and at times language can overwhelm them, so providing visuals for this process is extremely helpful.



Morning Meetings are not just for teachers – you can do them at home too! Any sense of familiarity with school can help a child feel more comfortable over the winter break away from their typical schedule. Creating a short (but meaningful!) Morning Meeting for your family can help everyone start their day off right and give an opportunity to put a lot of skills into practice. Brain Smart Starts, visual schedules, “I love you” rituals, safe place practice, choices, home helper jobs, and so much more can be found in a morning meeting at home. It’s time for everyone to come together and connect to start the day.



During the holiday season, everyone deserves a bit of peace. I hope these tips can help create room for more light during your holiday break.

Warm Wishes,

Allison Factor