

□ Autism-Friendly Holiday Planner

Special Event Survival Sheet for Neurodivergent Kids

& Their Families

□ Why This Exists

Holidays are supposed to be joyful. But for many neurodivergent kids (and their grownups), they're loud, crowded, unpredictable, and exhausting.

This planner helps you:

- Create a sensory-friendly game plan
- Prep your child ahead of time
- Reduce meltdowns and overwhelm
- Advocate with extended family *before* things go sideways

Whether it's Christmas, birthdays, weddings, or family dinners — this helps you make the memory *without losing your mind*.

□ Step 1: Build Your Sensory Plan

Use this checklist to plan ahead:

- Noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs packed
- Sunglasses / dim lighting options if it's bright
- Familiar snacks and drinks
- Comfort items (stuffy, fidget, chewies)
- Outfit chosen for comfort, not just appearance
- Quiet space identified ahead of time (bedroom, car, corner)
- Sensory-friendly exit signal (hand gesture, code word, visual card)

□□ Step 2: Prep With Visuals

Before the event, walk your child through what to expect. You can:

- Draw or print a **visual schedule** of the day

- Use photos of people, places, or gifts they'll encounter
- Role-play social expectations (e.g. opening gifts, saying hello)
- Use storyboards like: "First we go to Grandma's house. Then we eat. Then we open presents. Then we go home."

Repeat this a few times leading up to the day — not just once.

☒ Step 3: Make the Escape Plan

Meltdowns aren't failures — they're communication.

Create a plan you can follow *without drama*:

- Choose an early exit time (and leave on a high note)
- Let your child know: "If it gets too loud, here's what we'll do..."
- Tell the host ahead of time: "We might dip early, no offense intended."
- Have backup activities or comfort movies for when you get home

You don't have to wait until it falls apart to *rescue the day*.

☒ Bonus Tips

- Lower your expectations. Seriously. Connection > perfection.
- Celebrate small wins (stayed 30 min? Ate one bite of food? That counts.)
- Debrief afterward: "What felt good? What felt hard? What should we change next time?"

☒ Final Thought

You deserve to enjoy holidays too — without masking, meltdowns, or martyrdom.

This season, make space for what works for *your* family.

Because joy isn't one-size-fits-all.

And your kid? They deserve a version of celebration that lets them be exactly who they are.