

Tips for Teachers:

Seasonal Helps for Kids with Special Needs



Think Sensory!

Many teachers and parents comment on how children are often more spirited and sometimes difficult to manage during the holiday season. Truthfully, the added lights and decorations simply add to the stimuli that the nervous system is trying to process. It is important to take a sensory look at decorating ideas as you approach the holiday season. Tinsel and foil are pretty because they reflect light. But for children with difficulties in sensory processing, the shimmering effect can actually be a painful piece of information for their eyes to process.

Stringing holiday lights in a room, especially the new bright and energy-efficient LED lights, can add sensory information so complicated to process that it might affect the behavior of a child. If you plan to use a strand of holiday lights (especially the LED variety), try removing some bulbs so the strand of lights is not so bright. If possible, select the frosted bulbs, as these will cast a much softer glow on a room. If the softer bulbs are available, string multiple strands around the room and turn off the fluorescent light source in the room. This lighting is actually preferable to many sensory palates, as fluorescent lights are a known source of agitation for children with sensory disorders.

Soft lights and a room full of quiet anticipation. What a great way to introduce the story of a wondrous starry night sky over Bethlehem!

Relief for Seasonal Stress

Families who are affected by disability often experience additional stress during the holiday season. The simple act of a change in seasonal wardrobe (such as needing heavier coats, hats, or tights) can bring about stresses that deplete the energies of the family. Additionally, changes in routine due to holiday schedules can produce hidden anxiety that reveals itself at unpredictable times.

Consider the following ways to minister to families of children with disabilities during the holiday season:

- Make these families aware of any changes in routine, schedule, or classroom personnel ahead of time. Parents (or caregivers) may be able to explain these changes to their child at home and proactively avoid classroom stress.
- If possible, choose familiar faces when selecting substitute teachers.
- Extend extra grace and hospitality to families who arrive late to Sunday school. You never know the difficulties that were involved in something as simple as dressing a child for colder weather that day.
- Be generous with your praise. Small kindnesses are cherished when families are under extra stress and tension.
- Offer a respite team of familiar faces and friends who will spend an evening providing child care for the family so that parents can do holiday shopping.