

Holiday Harmony: Empowering Families in the Autism Community Winter 2024

Winter 2024 Facets Audio Newsletter Transcript

[Listen to the podcast](#)

- ANNOUNCER: 00:03 Join us on a journey where innovative technology meets storytelling as us AI voices narrate compelling articles in our podcast newsletter.
- ANNOUNCER: 00:16 FACET's 2024 Holiday Audio Newsletter. This publication is brought to you from the Center for Autism Research at Kessler Foundation.
- SARA: 00:28 The holidays are a special time of year, often celebrated with friends and relatives. We know, too, that this busy season can present unique highs and lows for families in the autism community. In this issue of facets, we offer many ideas and strategies to help make the holidays more meaningful and enjoyable. As always, we welcome your feedback. On behalf of Kessler Foundation, I wish you a joyful holiday season. Helen Genova, Ph.D., Associate Director.
- RYAN: 00:00:59 'Tis the Season. By Maya Schwartzman, Research Assistant at the Center for Autism Research.
- XIAOYU 00:01:05 As holiday excitement begins to build, so does the need for careful planning to ensure that individuals on the spectrum enjoy the festivities. The hustle and bustle of the holidays are upon us. All the shopping. Cooking, decorating, and social gatherings can be fun and exciting and often overwhelming particularly for children on the spectrum and their families. Changes in routine, sensory overload and social expectations this time of year can be challenging for autistic youth, says Helen Genova, Associate Director, Center for Autism Research at Kessler Foundation. However, a little planning can go a long way in helping kids understand the holidays, feel supported, and participate in family activities. Plan ahead. Consider how best to involve your child in school and community events and your family's own cultural or religious traditions. That may mean picking and choosing those activities your child will feel most comfortable participating in. Discuss these activities and what they should expect. Help prepare them in advance by practicing greetings, small talk, and other social skills in a low-key setting. Creating social stories can also be helpful in preparing your child and ensuring they feel safe, seen, and supported throughout the season. See the FACETS Summer 2024 newsletter for more on social stories. A link for this issue is in the program notes. Get them involved. Having your child participate in holiday planning will give them a sense of control and help build their comfort and confidence. Encourage them to convey their interests and preferences so that you can adjust plans accordingly. For example, if your child is not into a raucous family football game on Thanksgiving, plan a quiet activity for them to enjoy. Be open to establishing new traditions to accommodate the needs of all family members. Avoid sensory overload. The bright lights, loud music, strong

Holiday Harmony: Empowering Families in the Autism Community Winter 2024

Winter 2024 Facets Audio Newsletter Transcript

smells, and different foods of holiday season may be overwhelming to individuals on the spectrum. To help minimize any issues, choose sensory -friendly decorations. LED lights, for example. offer various settings. Seek out sensory -friendly shops, Santa visits, and other activities. Bring noise -canceling headphones, sunglasses, eye masks, or other aids when at school, community, or other large gatherings. Have a quiet space for your child to escape to if it all becomes too loud or overstimulating, whether at home or visiting family and friends. Maintain a routine. Despite school vacations and changes to your child's usual activity calendar, it's important to maintain core routines and schedules as much as possible, even if you are traveling. This includes mealtimes, bedtime, bathing, and other personal needs. Relax and rejoice. Eat too much at Thanksgiving. Decorate the Christmas tree. Light the menorah for Hanukkah or the Kinera for Kwanzaa. And ring in the New Year. Most of all, rejoice in good health with your loved ones.

SARA: 00:04:05

Holiday Wishlist

RYAN: 00:04:07

It's hard to find the perfect gift, but here are some ideas for autistic youths. Weighted blanket, a potential game -changer in helping them fall asleep. Noise -reducing headphones. Fidget toys like spinners, cubes, and poppets. Kinetic sand, slime, or silly putty. Magnetic tiles or other building sets. Indoor trampoline. Play tents. Sensory puzzles. Beanbag chair, peapod sensory chair or swing. Aquarium or bubble lamp. Toys, books, or games related to your child's interests, hobbies, or obsession, whether arts and crafts, music, superheroes, or princesses.

ANDREW: 00:04:40

In the holiday spirit

SARA: 00:04:40

Once again, Nassen's place is spreading holiday cheer in the local autism community through its annual Toy Drive. It's a busy time of year, but that doesn't stop Nadine Wright Arbubacher from devoting her time and energy to deliver joy and special holiday gifts to individuals on the autism spectrum and their families in and around the greater Newark, New Jersey, area. As the mother of a young adult on the spectrum, she knows firsthand how difficult the holidays can be, especially given the lack of accessible, affordable resources in her community. That's what led her to establish Nassen's Place in 2012, a 501 AC, three -nonprofit organization providing educational and recreational programs to assist families like hers who are living with autism. Nadine and her tireless team of elves are working to make the holidays extra special for these families. Through its annual toy drive, Nassen's Place will distribute gifts to children at its holiday celebration on December 14. Last year's event, which featured sensory -friendly activities, music, refreshments, and surprise guests, drew over 300 people. Events like this succeed only with the support of autism community partners, including Kessler Foundation and other organizations across the state. You can help spread the joys of

Holiday Harmony: Empowering Families in the Autism Community Winter 2024

Winter 2024 Facets Audio Newsletter Transcript

the season. Nassen's Place is collecting unwrapped toys and games for children of all ages, as well as monetary donations that will go to purchase additional gifts. Items will be accepted from November 1 to December 13.

EMMA : 00:06:11

This event celebrates the unity within our community, says Wright Arby Bakker, and we are so very grateful for your support and the difference you make.

SARA: 00:06:20

To learn more about Nassen's Place and how to donate to this year's holiday toy drive, visit nasansplace.org.

XIAOYU: 00:06:28

In this season of giving, there is one more significant way to support the autism community, volunteer to participate in the important and innovative research being conducted at the Center for Autism Research at Kessler Foundation. Your involvement will increase our understanding of autism spectrum disorders and lead to the development of new tools and resources to benefit autistic individuals and their families. To learn more and enroll, links are in the program notes.

ANDREW: 00:06:55

Holiday Hero

CORA: 00:06:57

Diagnosed with autism at age 4, Carrie Magro, Ed, once struggled to communicate. Today, Dr. Magro is an award -winning speaker, best -selling author, film consultant, and founder of KFM Making a Difference, a 501c3 nonprofit organization focused on autism awareness and advocacy. For over 10 years, he has also played Santa at sensory -friendly holiday events across New Jersey. This unique and very personal experience inspired him to write a new children's book. Santa Goes the Extra Mile for Children with Disabilities, available in November on Amazon .com, which is sure to spread joy and understanding this season. To learn more visit kfmmakingadifference.org.

SARA: 00:07:39

New Year. New Focus. By Daniel Sullivan, Research Assistant at the Center for Autism Research.

ERIC: 00:07:48

Individuals on the autism spectrum can identify and express their strengths and improve overall goal achievement. thanks to groundbreaking Kessler Foundation research. As the new year approaches, many individuals begin thinking about resolutions. This often seems to be an appropriate time to make changes in our lives, including those behaviors that may have a negative impact or warrant correction. For example, we may vow to lose weight, exercise more, or become more organized. Despite our best intentions, it's easy to abandon these goals in the first few weeks or months.

SARA: 00:08:25

Capturing strengths

Holiday Harmony: Empowering Families in the Autism Community Winter 2024

Winter 2024 Facets Audio Newsletter Transcript

- ERIC: 00:08:27 Keeping our resolutions and achieving our goals are more likely to be successful when we build on our strengths, our resolutions and achieving our goals are more likely to be successful when we build on our strengths, not weaknesses. Strengths are the inherent, positive character traits and individual skills we use in everyday life. Being aware of these strengths allows us to harness these attributes and work toward our goals with a positive mindset, rather than focus on fixing a weakness.
- SARA: 00:08:50 Positive Strategies
- ERIC: 00:08:52 The established principles of positive psychology are the basis of the work at Kessler Foundation Center for Autism Research. Using a variety of tools, researchers help individuals on the spectrum identify their strengths, incorporate them in their daily lives, and leverage them in the workplace. Many individuals may resolve to find a new job, attend academic or training programs, or participate in community activities. Discovering their strengths is a critical first step, and the Foundation is here to help. We offer several strength -finding studies, including Kessler Foundation Strength Identification and Expression, KF Stride, and Stride into Work.
- SARA: 00:09:34 To learn more and enroll in these studies, links are in the program notes.
- ANNOUNCER: 00:09:39 With listeners spanning across 90 countries, our podcast on SoundCloud offers a fascinating insight into the impactful work of Kessler Foundation. Connect with us on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts.