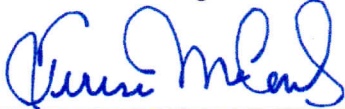


**SPECIALIZED FAMILY CARE
Provider Training**

Category:	Caregiving
Title:	Holidays with Individuals with Special Needs
Materials:	Article
Goal:	Provider knows how to plan for enjoyable holiday celebrations
Credit Hours:	1
Date Developed:	December 2014
Developed by:	Donna McCune, Family Based Care Specialist

This Training Packet was approved for the Specialized Family Care Training Program by:



12/8/2014

Specialized Family Care Program Manager

Date

Training Objectives:

- Provider knows factors to consider when planning holiday celebrations
- Provider, individual in care and family enjoy holiday celebrations

Training Procedures:

- Provider initiated self study
- Test completed by Provider
- Review of test responses by Family Based Care Specialist and Provider

I certify that I have completed all the materials associated with this training module. I feel that I have a basic understanding of the material completed.

Specialized Family Care Provider

Date

Reviewed by: _____

Family Based Care Specialist

Date

This Program is funded by the WV Department of Health & Human Resources, Bureau for Children & Families and administered by the Center for Excellence in Disabilities, West Virginia University.

WVDHHR/CED/SFC/HOLIDAYS WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS/DECEMBER 2014

Holidays with Individuals with Special Needs

Holiday celebrations are supposed to be fun but, realistically, they are not always so for a variety of reasons. Along with holidays comes stress. We put pressure upon ourselves to conform to the traditional way of celebrating holidays, whatever that may mean for your family. Fun activities are mingled with stress. Celebrating the holidays with a child or adult who has special needs can add to the holiday stress, but doesn't have to be that way for you or the individual with some advance planning.

Know Your Individual

As you plan for the holidays, do so with knowledge of the individual's routines, habits, likes/dislikes and background (if not a biological part of your family). Factoring in all you know about the person whom you are parenting will assist you in planning the way your family might wish to celebrate the holidays.

1. Is a set routine important for him/her? Perhaps you know that sticking to a set routine is important and that deviation from this is difficult for your loved one.
2. Does your individual enjoy being in a crowd of people? Maybe you know that crowds are not enjoyed and insisting that he/she be part of an activity where there is a large crowd is not wise.
3. Does your individual have memories of past holiday celebrations? Perhaps the individual for whom you provide love and care joined your family as a result of foster care or adoption. Prior experiences, good or bad, might have an impact on an individual's view of the holidays. They may miss something which was special to them in their family of origin. They may have unhappy memories, but feel guilty that they are in a much better situation now. He/she might feel that allowing themselves to enjoy the holidays with you means they are being disloyal to their biological family. Take into consideration the religious exposure of the individual and how the holiday is celebrated in faiths other than yours. Seek ways for them to continue to participate in aspects of this. Don't take it personally if all your best efforts to plan a happy holiday celebration seem unappreciated.
4. Is it possible to allow your individual to have input into what he/she would like to do to celebrate the holiday? He/she may have an idea that is outside your norm, but would be meaningful to him/her.

Type of Event

Plan ahead for the events in which you and your family might wish to participate.

1. Is this something that your member with special needs would enjoy? While you don't want to exclude the individual with special needs, it is ok to participate in an activity without the individual. Don't insist the individual attend a gathering which you know he/she will not enjoy and be uncomfortable.

2. Where is the event going to occur? Will the event be at your home or elsewhere? Is this a new setting? This is not a time to introduce him/her to a new setting with all the extra stimulation the holiday time can bring. If it is an event which you feel is important for your family to attend as a whole, then perhaps you can prepare the individual for the event by visiting the setting where it will occur ahead of time, whether it be at a park, mall, church, etc.
3. Does the facility meet any needed special accommodations in regard to mobility, seating, toileting, etc.? Is it an event where an early departure, if needed, can be done with ease and minimum disruption to others present?
4. What is the time frame of the event? You know your individual's cues which indicate he/she may be getting restless or stressed, resulting in negative behaviors. Is it possible to attend only a portion of the event?

Other People

While it is not possible to control others, having an idea of who is going to be present at the event is helpful.

1. Is the event one in which your individual will come into contact with strangers only, or is it an event in which he/she will see familiar faces? You can decide if seeing familiar faces increases your individual's enjoyment at an event. Perhaps a friend or another family can be invited to attend. If it's an extended family gathering, you may want to show him/her photos of the folks who will be there.
2. How will you handle annoying people? We all have been in situations where some people can get on our last nerve with their questions, unsolicited advice and attitudes. Decide ahead of time how you and your family might handle those settings with extended family and/or friends who can be annoying. You might use the situation as an opportunity to educate the person on any special needs which your individual has. You can be prepared to change the subject. If the event involves an overnight you might want to consider staying in a nearby hotel, providing the option of a break if needed.
3. Is it possible to prepare the host/hostess of the event about any special needs/circumstances which might impact your visit? Smaller celebrations where you know the host/hostess and he/she knows you and your family often are more successful. When going to an event where there is not this familiarity it might be wise to contact the host/hostess ahead of time to inform of any helpful hints which might make their entertaining role easier. Would it be helpful for them to know your person is a picky eater and may not like or be able to eat the food served and that they shouldn't take it personally? Perhaps you can offer to bring a food item that you know your person likes. Would it be helpful to know that your individual has a short attention span and that sometimes you leave early from events when you sense he/she is getting restless? If your individual is afraid of or allergic to pets, you might want to inquire about whether Fluffy will be part of the crowd. Does your individual have special toileting needs? You might want to inquire if this accommodation is possible within

their home. Will the home accommodate a wheelchair or any other equipment needed?

Be Prepared

Plan ahead for a holiday event by carrying needed supplies with you to accommodate your individual's needs, whether this is hygiene products, special foods, extra clothing, or medications (which are secured from others). Bringing along a soothing activity or item which he/she enjoys such as a toy, book or electronic game, etc. can be helpful. Often you will be able to know from past experiences whether he/she will be able to easily engage in group activities with others or whether the preference is for a solitary activity.

Food

Holiday gatherings are not a good time to attempt to get your individual with special needs to eat new foods. Insure that there is at least one food available that he/she will eat, even if it means taking the food with you. Don't comment if that is all he/she will eat. Change the subject if grandma makes comments like, "Is that all he is going to eat?" The goal is to get through the meal with the least amount of trauma for the individual who may already be experiencing too much stimulation with sights, sounds, smells, people, etc.

Clothing

Some individuals are sensitive to certain types of clothing. Others may be dressed in their "Sunday best" but if this is not something your individual normally wears or can tolerate, find something which is more comfortable for him/her.

Decorations

Consider how you will decorate your home for the holidays. Less is sometimes more when it comes to decorations for an individual who is sensitive to sounds, sights, lights, etc. That heirloom decoration may need to be placed out of reach or not displayed at all if there is concern that it could be broken. Find a way to include the individual in assisting with the decorating as they are able.

Gifts

Your individual may be showered with gifts that are meaningless to him/her, but are the usual "norm" for someone his/her age. It is helpful to give well-meaning relatives some hints on what he/she likes. Your individual may hoard a particular item which brings enjoyment to them such as calendars, keys, etc. If you don't feel too overburdened by their obsession, then the gift of another like item will mean more to them than an expensive gift.

Meeting the Needs of Other Family Members

Others members of the family may feel left out or slighted if holiday events always center around the special accommodations and arrangements made for the individual with special needs. Allow time for enjoyable activities with them too. Take advantage of available respite as needed to spend time with other loved ones in the family, participating in activities they enjoy. This will make for a happier and more cooperative household.

Meet Your Own Needs

Caring for an individual with special needs can be challenging. It is a 24/7 job. And, this is not your only role in the family. You are often parenting other children, being a spouse, maintaining your household and juggling responsibilities beyond your home. Look at ways you can lighten your load. Your holidays don't have to be perfect and you don't have to fall into the trap of attempting to have the perfect holiday which the media and advertising portrays. Don't be afraid to ask for help from others. Take some respite just for yourself to have some alone time or spend time with friends celebrating a special holiday event. Learn to say "no". Declining invitations is ok.

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Specialized Family Care Program