

Thanksgiving & Family Gathering Tips for Children with Autism



Before Thanksgiving



- 1 **Talk About the Day:** Describe what Thanksgiving will look and sound like so your child knows what to expect.
- 2 **Share with Family:** Let relatives know your child's sensory needs so everyone can support an inclusive environment.
- 3 **Create a Visual Schedule:** Use pictures or icons to show the day's routine – getting dressed, dinner, dessert, rest.
- 4 **Practice and Role-Play:** Rehearse greetings and asking for breaks to build confidence.
- 5 **Try Sensory Experiences Early:** Cook one dish ahead, test lighting or scents, and play Thanksgiving sounds like dishes clinking or gentle chatter.
- 6 **Pack a Comfort Kit:** Include headphones, familiar snacks, fidgets, and a cozy toy or blanket.
- 7 **Talk to Your Behavior Frontiers Team:** Ask your clinical team to help practice greetings, meals, or break cues.

During Thanksgiving



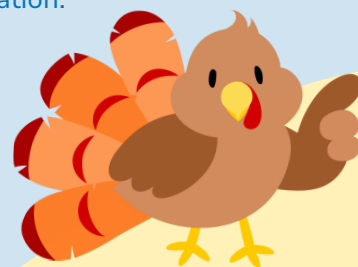
- 1 **Create a Calm Space:** Set up a quiet area with soft lighting where your child can recharge.
- 2 **Offer Familiar Foods:** Bring foods your child already knows or practiced eating earlier in the week.
- 3 **Offer Participation:** Let your child stir, set cups, or help wipe the table to feel included.
- 4 **Adjust for Sensory Needs:** Lower music, soften lighting, and allow gentle movement breaks.
- 5 **Encourage Flexibility:** Offer choices, praise brave decisions, and celebrate their participation.



After Thanksgiving



- 1 **Return to Routine:** End the day with a familiar show, story, or bedtime ritual.
- 2 **Celebrate Wins:** Praise small successes like trying new foods or greeting family.
- 3 **Talk About Favorites:** Ask what your child enjoyed most to guide next year's celebration.



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Sensory-Friendly Thanksgiving & Family Gathering Checklist



Use this checklist to plan, prepare, and celebrate your Thanksgiving with confidence.

Before Thanksgiving



- ☐ Talk about what Thanksgiving will look and sound like
- ☐ Let relatives know about your child's sensory needs
- ☐ Create a simple visual schedule for the day
- ☐ Practice greetings or asking for short breaks ahead of time
- ☐ Cook one Thanksgiving dish early to try together
- ☐ Play short clips of Thanksgiving sounds or music
- ☐ Test lighting, scents, and decorations in advance
- ☐ Pack your comfort kit (headphones, snacks, fidgets, blanket)
- ☐ Check in with your Behavior Frontiers team for practice ideas

During Thanksgiving



- ☐ Set up a quiet, cozy space for breaks
- ☐ Offer familiar or practiced foods first
- ☐ Bring comfort kit items to the table if needed
- ☐ Let your child help stir, set cups, or tidy up
- ☐ Lower music and soften lighting for comfort
- ☐ Add short movement or sensory breaks
- ☐ Offer choices and praise calm, flexible moments

After Thanksgiving



- ☐ Return to your usual evening routine
- ☐ Praise small successes and positive moments
- ☐ Talk about your child's favorite parts of the day
- ☐ Note what worked well for next year's celebration



Let us know how we can support you!

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