

Before You Celebrate Thanksgiving with Your Loved One Who has Autism



Know Your Loved One with Autism



You know your child, spouse, grandchild or friend with autism better than anyone else. Think about them as you would any other loved one. What do they love to eat? What do they care about? If you're not sure (if, for instance, you're a grandparent living at a distance), just ask.



Think About Your Loved One's Needs



Many people with autism find large gatherings difficult. They may also have aversions or intolerances to certain foods. Some people with autism might act oddly during the Thanksgiving meal, or need time and space to get away. Consider these needs when making plans; again, if you're not sure, just ask.



Prepare Your Home (Or Help Your Host Prepare)



If a person with autism needs a getaway, prepare one before the big day. Some ideas: set up a quiet bedroom with familiar toys, videos, books or other soothing items. Add familiar or fun sensory items: a therapy ball, a mini-trampoline, or even a squeeze toy can be a terrific calming tool.



Prepare Your Guests



If you're inviting guests who don't know your loved one with autism, it might be in everyone's best interest to prepare them. Explain any differences or quirks that might be off-putting or confusing. Suggest ideas for how best to promote positive interactions ("Jimmy really loves trains - maybe you could bring some photos of your model layout!").



Pick Some Thanksgiving Treats



Just like everyone else, people with autism have favorite foods, songs, toys and activities. Plan a few for everyone - **INCLUDING** your loved one with autism. Does she love peanuts? Is he a huge fan of vanilla ice cream? Choosing special treats can help make everyone feel loved and cared for.



Take Pictures to Help Prepare



Most people with autism dislike surprises and new settings. If you're traveling to a new or rarely visited place with your autistic loved one, photos can help prepare. What will the dining room look like? Where will he sit? If there's a special quiet space, what will that look like?



Talk About Your Plans



Before you go (or welcome guests), use photos and other communication tools to help you discuss what's coming, what's expected, and how to manage tricky moments. If you have a young child with autism, how long must they stay at the table? Where should they go if they feel overwhelmed? Must they share toys? What if they aren't having fun?



Have an "Escape Plan" Ready



Even with the world's best planning, Thanksgiving can be ... just too much. Discuss with others what "too much" might look like, and how you'll handle it. That way, if your loved one with autism simply melts down, you'll be able to handle the situation with calm and grace (or at least without undue freaking out!).

Information gathered from Lisa Jo Rudy,
[http:// autism.about.com/od/copingwithautism/bb/beforeturkey.htm](http://autism.about.com/od/copingwithautism/bb/beforeturkey.htm)

