

Skill-Based Holiday Planning Sheet



Please watch the accompanying video to this worksheet at <https://youtu.be/iBE5ffQ6RFM>

Which skills should you plan for?

*Tis some months before Christmas, but we know full well
That planning things now can prevent holiday H.E.L.**

*Horrible Events and Laments

Difficulty planning

My child or client needs to know exactly what is going on, because their brain struggles to “put it together” on its own

Difficulty transitioning

My child or client struggles going from one activity to another, and the holidays are filled with unfamiliar and frequent activities!

Difficulty with routine changes

My child or client will struggle being out of school/work because school/work provides a consistent routine for them

Sensory difficulties

My child/client has sensory issues and can get overstimulated. The holidays are filled with many high-sensory activities and get-togethers

Trauma

My child/client has a history of trauma, and the holidays are always a tough time for them. They may show signs of depression, or engage in more escalations.

Family/Social Difficulties

My child/client struggles interacting with other peers or family members or my family who we will visit do not understand my child’s needs

Before the Holidays

*With skills now checked off, we can now think things through
So that supports are in place, both for them and for you!*

Schedule and structure

Every day should have its own schedule. If there is “down time”, that should be scheduled. Each day should have its own page or chart to visually show what will be happening. You may need to use pictures if your child/client cannot read. Try and keep the holiday routine as consistent as possible

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Social Difficulties

Assess downtime

Every person is different in how much downtime they need and how well it can be handled. Find the balance of supervised/structured activities and independent downtime that your child/client needs, and **put it in the schedule**

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Social Difficulties

Have other caregivers lined up

Primary caregivers will need breaks, not only for avoiding burnout for also enjoying their own holiday traditions. This includes you! Have a partner or friend scheduled to relieve you for at least 45 minutes each day. Consistency in this relief may be helpful

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes

□ Have Proactive Conversations

As you get your plan together, make sure you include your child/client! Ask them what they think of the routine you come up with. Consider their feedback and make deals

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Don't fool yourself

Mindsets of "They will pull it together" and "Well, they did *ok* last year..." will not help you prepare for the holidays. Plan ahead and avoid procrastinating—your "Holiday Self" will thank you!

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Have a mental health appointment set up

If your child/client is set up with a therapist, have an appointment pre-scheduled to occur sometime during the holidays. They may have suggestions on working with your child/client on trauma and behaviors

Trauma, Social/Family

During the Holidays

*Supports are in place, and that's all and good
And don't forget that your child would do well if they could.†*

†<https://youtu.be/jvzQQdFAL-Q>

□ Avoid first-thing expectations

Allow mornings to be a nice, long transition into the day, and avoid waking your child/client up with immediate expectations. Consider visualizing their morning routine so you can avoid talking

Planning, Transitioning, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Use visuals to decrease planning need

Whenever you are giving your child/client information verbally, ask yourself if you should be using visuals rather than words. This is especially helpful if the discussion is around planning, or if it requires abstract thought

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Go over expectations at least twice

Before an activity (familiar or new), go over expectations using the Proactive Conversation model. If the activity is in the community, go over expectations *right* before the activity (e.g. in the parking lot before getting out of the car)

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Social/Family

□ Keep transitions quiet

Encourage everyone to be quiet during big transitions. Play quiet Christmas music or hand out sensory items. (This may be especially helpful during long car rides—have periodic intervals of quiet time, perhaps 15 minutes of every hour)

Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Always have sensory items available

Bring calming activities of various types everywhere to help your child regulate their sensory systems. Music, tactile toys, or distractions (like puzzles) can all help. You may want to allow for more electronic time than you would during non-holiday times, if these devices calm your child/client

Sensory Difficulties

□ Check in every day

Check in to see how your child/client is feeling about how things are going and what is planned. Find out if they have any concerns about upcoming activities, even fun events such as opening presents

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Reinforce good behavior and good follow-through

Make sure you show your child/client that you appreciate their good behavior, as well as when they follow through on Proactive Plans. Maybe this is just verbal encouragement, or something like an extra scoop of ice cream or a meal out

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Be willing and prepared to adjust expectations

When you know that your child/client is showing signs that expectations are getting too high for their current cognitive skill abilities, be prepared with alternative activities, or visuals you will need to have a Proactive Conversation about what the new plan could look like

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family

□ Increase supports during intense/exciting situations

Opening presents in a calm and regulated way takes a tremendous amount of cognitive skills and energy. Your child will need additional supports in all areas, and will likely need to have expectations adjusted significantly during these times

Planning, Transitioning, Routine Changes, Sensory Difficulties, Trauma, Social/Family