

Merry, Not Meltdown-y

Autism-Friendly Navigation of the Holiday Season

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WHY DOES IT MATTER? SEVENTY-ONE PERCENT OF PEOPLE SURVEYED REPORTED REGRET THAT THEY DID NOT TAKE TIME TO UNWIND, HAVE FUN, AND ENJOY THE SEASON.

Holiday Season Challenges

Disappointment

LONG winter break, no school, irregular schedule

Sensory overload

Complicated family dynamics

Violations of boundaries

Grief, sadness

Social demands

FOMO

To-do list

Money

Travel

Plan in Advance

Consider bringing your own food

Prepare for disappointment

Share information about yourself, your child, or your family with friends and extended family before the gathering

Bring sensory and support tools (including electronics if helpful)

Plan and schedule breaks and self-care for yourself

Self-Care: Care for yourself during times of high stress AND decrease your baseline activation.

Be intentional about noticing the joy, being present in the moment, and finding gratitude

Say “no” to events and obligations that are less meaningful, and plan in advance to have the energy to attend what you have to

Keep a routine

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: prioritize sleep, good food, movement, breaks from intense stimuli, and breaks from the news

Add structure to non-school days

Consider a sensory toolkit

Prepare for extra masking and burnout

Have an escape plan and/or quiet place to retreat if needed

Acknowledge your needs and feel safe and confident in your boundaries

Social

Have an escape plan

Practice responding to disappointment

Have a code word with children or loved ones

Consider creating general scripts for handling various types of conversations or interactions

Setting Boundaries/Expectations	Small Talk	Personal or Controversial Topics
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Validate: "I know this is important to you." 2. Communicate my feelings: "I feel _____ and it has [this effect]." 3. Ask for what I need/compromise: "Can we do _____?" "Let's do _____ instead;" "Can we compromise and do _____?" 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have greetings and preferred small talk topics in mind to begin or redirect a conversation. 2. Respond: Use two sentence responses. 3. Exchange: Ask the other person an open question related to the topic. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a plan going in about if and how much you will engage or share your opinion. 2. If sharing / engaging – plan for respectful language and point to stop. 3. Acknowledge: "There is so much information about this right now. It's important to a lot of people." 4. Redirect: "This is an uncomfortable topic, let's move on;" "I don't think everyone here wants to talk about this. Can we shift topics?"

Example Generic Scripts

RESOURCES

ARI's Planning for the Holiday Season guide:
<https://autism.org/holidays-planning-ahead/>

National Autism Resources Free Resources for a Safe and Happy Holiday Season:
https://nationalautismresources.com/free-resources-for-a-safe-and-happy-holiday-season/?srsltid=AfmBOor3Nz2p-N4M1rB0lu_m_oCUsnycV6OLQ0BckhrZnQCuHtwaYHCV

Social Stories™ library:
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/resources/holiday-hints-and-7-social-stories/>

Visuals and organizers templates:
www.template.net

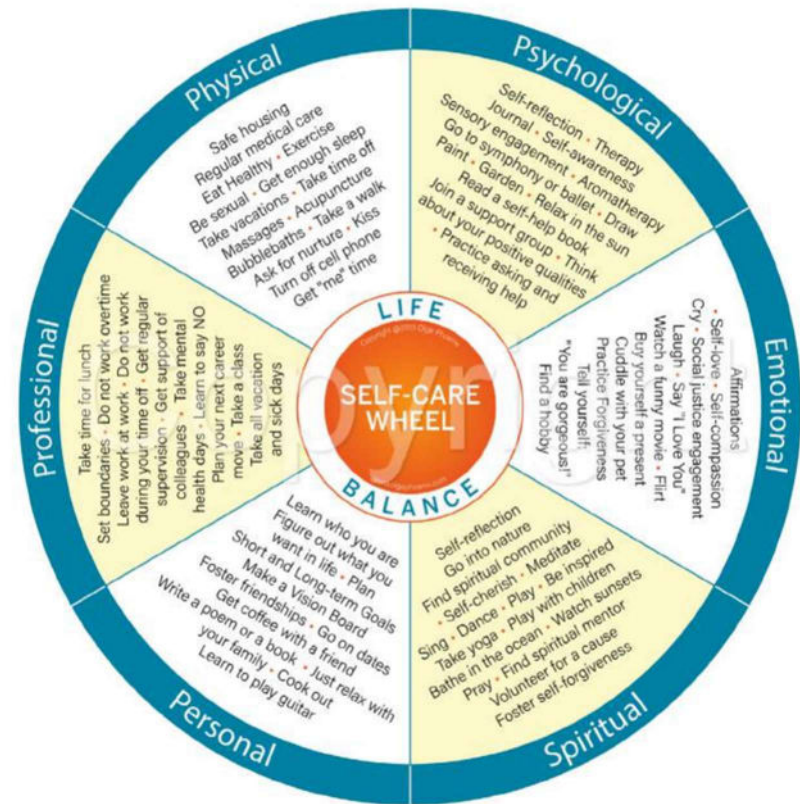


Image Source: Center for Family Services