

## The Neurodiversity Times

### Managing Holiday Stress

The holidays can be very stressful. Here are some tips for managing stress during this time of year.

**1. Manage your own stress.** Not only are you setting an example, there's just no way to stop your children from sensing your stress and being affected by it. It's kind of like the safety message we hear every time we get on an airplane: if you are flying with a child and the oxygen masks drop, you should put yours on first and then put on the child's. You're no good to anyone if you can't function. Try to be self-aware. Set aside time for yourself. Create code words that your partner and friends can use to let you know when you are starting to act like a snippy, crazy person. Practice self-care. Get enough sleep. Speaking of sleep...

**2. As much as possible, keep routines the same.** Kids do best when routines are predictable — and healthy. This is particularly true for sleep. As tempting as it may be to let kids stay up late and sleep late throughout the holidays, try to stay within an hour of usual times, except for special occasions (like New Year's Eve). We all do better when we stick to our sleep routines. Same goes for mealtimes (be sure your kids get three healthy meals a day, preferably with you and not in front of the television). As you think about how your children will spend the holidays...

**3. Manage expectations.** My youngest child has a way of getting incredibly excited for Christmas, expecting that he will get that incredibly expensive and hard-to-find Lego set, and that we will spend every day of vacation visiting museums and doing other activities, preferably with his friends — and then getting sad when he gets something slightly different and has to amuse himself some days. This is true for lots of kids, and is very preventable. Up front, let kids know what they can and can't expect. You don't have to give away the surprise, but you could, as a family, say that everyone gets one big but not break-the-bank gift (and otherwise set parameters on gifts). And you can sit together, look at the calendar, and let your kids know what you can and cannot pull off when it comes to vacation activities. As you think about activities...

**4. Keep kids active.** Speaking of television, sitting in front of it (or a gaming console or an iPad or phone) all day isn't good for anyone, and exercise is a known stress-buster. Send them outside. Go to the park. Take advantage of free swim time at the local Y. Go for walks together. That together part is key...

**5. Spend some time together.** Real time, where you are sharing an activity. Going to the movies or having a family movie night is fine (and a nice way to end a crazy day), but try to do things that involve actual interaction. Play games together. Visit a museum together. Bake cookies. Which is a good example of how you can...

**6. Build some family holiday rituals, if you don't have them already.** Whether it's holiday baking, or making homemade gifts together, or a particular concert you always wanted to attend, or some friends you invite every year, create things you can do together every year that are meaningful and fun. There are plenty of things you *have* to do. Make your family rituals things you *want* to do. And as you build your rituals...

**7. Choose something to do as a family that helps others.** Choose toys for a toy drive. Go through clothes in the closet and bring gently used ones to a shelter or clothing drive. Donating money to causes is always great, but look for things that your children can actively participate in, preferably that you can do as a family. Try not to think of it as another family chore. Instead, think of it as a way to not only teach kindness, but to keep perspective on the holidays — and on what's way more important than presents or parties.

That's a perspective we all need — and the perspective that could save all of us a lot of stress.

## HOLIDAY NEWSLETTER 2019

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# OT, PT & Adapted PE

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

The purpose of occupational therapy (OT) in the public school setting is to support positive educational outcomes as described by the State of California Performance Plan (CDE 2007-2008). Based on the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) practice framework, OTs work with the educational team to support a child's ability to access their educational curriculum and benefit from their overall educational program. School-based occupational therapy is designed to affect the student's ability to learn, function and profit from his/her educational experience, rather than be an isolated service he/she benefits from. When a certified occupational therapist is working in an educational model, their primary role is to provide direct or consultative services to help children to fulfill their role as students by teaching and developing skills in the deficit areas, and the students are then provided with an opportunity to practice these skills in the natural classroom setting. SMMUSD occupational therapists design and implement programming to improve inclusion and accessibility of the curriculum, and collaborate with classroom teachers providing consultation on strategies that support student success.

## ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Adapted Physical Education is physical education, which has been adapted or modified, so that it is as appropriate for the person with a learning difference as it is for a person without a learning difference. Federal law mandates that physical education be provided to students with disabilities and defines Physical Education as the development of:

- physical and motor skills
- fundamental motor skills and patterns (throwing, catching, walking, running, etc.)
- skills in aquatics, dance, and individual and group games and sports (including intramural and lifetime sports)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) uses the term disability as a diagnostic category that qualifies students for special services. The APE teacher is a direct service provider, not a related service provider, because physical education for children with disabilities is a federally mandated component of special education services [U.S.C.A. 1402 (25)]. This means that physical education needs to be provided to the student with a disability as part of the special education services that child receives. This is contrasted with physical therapy and occupational therapy, which are related services. These therapies are provided to the child with disabilities only if he/she needs them to benefit from instruction.

## PHYSICAL THERAPY

Physical Therapy (PT) is a related service under Part B and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Physical Therapy is available as a "related service" under IDEA in a child's IEP when the service is required for a child with a disability to benefit from his or her special education program. Educationally necessary PT means that a child with a disability has a need for improvement in his or her functional skills related to his or her performance in the educational environment. Physical therapists look at the child's ability to **physically access** the classroom and campus environments and focus on the child's ability in a variety of areas. Emphasis must be placed on the context of the child's learning and activity. Physical therapists in SMMUSD work collaboratively with a student's IEP team and participate in evaluation, program planning, and intervention. As a member of the IEP team, physical therapists design and implement physical therapy interventions—including teaching and training of family and education personnel and measurement and documentation of progress—to help the student achieve his/her IEP goal. Physical therapists assist students in accessing school environments and benefiting from their educational program.



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### Why Is there a Shortage of Special Education Teachers?

In all regions of the United States, the shortage of special education teachers is present. They impede students with special needs from reaching their full academic potential, and hinder an entire school system's ability to prepare all students for the college or career phase of their lives. The lack of special education teachers is a direct result of high turnover and recruitment challenges. With a high volume of paperwork, heavy workloads paired with lack of support and, thus, professional isolation, it takes an extremely motivated, passionate individual to take on the challenge. There's also a shortage in qualified faculty (those with degrees/experience in the special needs and education fields) because of increasing education costs. Attending college these days is an investment and because of a lack of substantial income, many don't have the opportunity to get a degree. To make matters worse, most qualified personnel aren't willing to work in certain communities. There's a big difference between urban, rural and suburban settings, what with vastly dissimilar crime rates, poverty rates etc. <https://alignstaffing.com/education-staffing/why-the-shortage-in-special-education-teachers/>

Here in Santa Monica we are very lucky to have recruited and retained amazing special education teachers and specialists; however, it can be difficult to retain staff. The demands placed on special education teachers, specialists, and paraeducators are very high. They often feel underappreciated for their efforts. During the holidays, let's thank a special educator and let them know that they are appreciated.

*Thank you educators for all you do to make SMMUSD amazing!*

*Thank you SMMUSD families for partnering with us to provide students with a wonderful education!*

Wishing all of our families a very Happy Holiday Season & Happy New Year from the Department of Special Education!!!

