

Anderson Center Consulting & Training

Holiday Tips

For neurodivergent people, including those with social anxiety, the holidays can be stressful and overwhelming. The social “demands” that occur during the holiday season can impact one’s engagement in holiday celebrations, parties and family gatherings. To help navigate the season, consider the following tips . . .

As the holiday season approaches:

- Reflect on successful and unsuccessful holiday experiences. Identify what was helpful (or not!) and build supportive strategies into upcoming holiday events.
- Consider accepting invitations to fewer parties/events. It’s okay to decline some invitations. Consider your own strengths and “pain points” for social gatherings and choose accordingly. For example, a small home party may be more manageable than a work-related party with dozens of people attending.
- Strive to maintain your personal routines - especially sleep, diet, exercise, and medication.

Be “party ready”

- Ask the host questions about the gathering, such as the menu, suggested attire, length of the gathering, expectation to exchange gifts, etc.
- Identify, in advance, the amount of time you want to spend at a social gathering. You can re-evaluate your planned departure time and decide to leave or stay a bit longer.
- Bring along a trusted companion to help take some of the “social load” off you. Having a “small talk buddy” can reduce your worry about starting conversations or introducing yourself to new people.
- Allow yourself time away from the gathering to decompress, enjoy the quiet, and ready yourself for the remaining time.
- In advance of the gathering, consider preparing a “script” to utilize for various social communications such as introductions, conversation-starters, or departing early.
- Having something in mind can reduce your brain’s “workload” in those moments when you may be feeling more stressed or anxious.
- Bring a “worry stone” or “fidget” to keep in your pocket so a discreet coping strategy is always available.

After the party (or event):

- If you enjoyed your time at the gathering, acknowledge that you had fun! Take note of what you did to help set the stage for success.
- If you experienced feelings of stress, anxiety, or panic, give yourself some time and then think about what may have occasioned those feelings. Identify what you may do differently in the future.

Holiday Tips Travel Card

- Re-evaluate planned departure time.
- Allow time away from gathering to decompress (enjoy some quiet time).
- If you prepared a “script”, bring it with you.
- Use your “worry stone” or fidget as a coping or calming strategy.
- Enjoy the event and have fun!



MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY

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To Create Tips Card

- Print sheet and cut out Holiday Tips Travel Card.
- Laminate or cover the card with clear tape for added durability.
- Carry the card in your pocket when attending events.