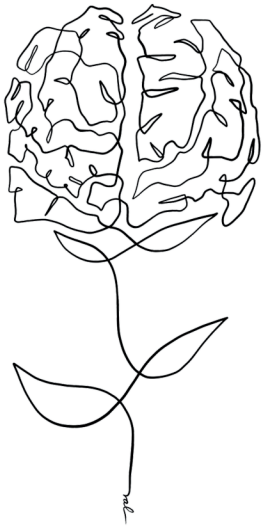
Brain Blossom PROGRAM™

BRAIN-BASED HOLIDAY TOOLKIT

BRAIN-BASED TIPS *for the* HOLIDAY SEASON



The holidays can be stressful for everyone, especially children who struggle with behavioral, learning, and social challenges. These brain-based tips are here to lower the unique stress the season can bring, so your family can have as much fun as possible.

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PART ONE

PLAN AHEAD

Prediction lowers stress. The more your child can see what's coming, the less demand the day carries.

01 CREATE YOUR OWN TRADITIONS

It's perfectly okay to modify traditions, create your own, or step back from family traditions if that's what's best for your child. Your family's typical "traditions" may not fit your child, and the demand they create can lead to stress and, therefore, "behaviors". If traditions are changing this year, prepare everyone ahead of time, not just by talking about the changes but by showing what will happen.

02 MAKE A PLAN WAY AHEAD & SHARE IT

Build your brain-based holiday plan well before the day, then share it with the guests and family who will be there: your plan for food, treats, and brain breaks, and what helps your child most. Most family members want to help gatherings go well but don't know how. A direct, kind conversation ahead of time gives everyone prediction, so your child's needs don't become a point of stress on the day.

03 MAKE A BRAIN BLOSSOM STORY FOR THE DAY

Using pictures, draw out what "big" days will look like, including the preparation days. Show who will be visiting, where you'll be going, and what the schedule will be. Going somewhere new? Ask your host to send photos so your child can see it first. Pictures build visual imagery, which increases prediction and decreases stress far more than talking or lists alone. Use the story throughout the day as a reminder of what's to come.

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04 CREATE PREDICTION PEGS FOR THE DAY

A prediction peg is a routine that helps your child anticipate what comes next. A bedtime routine might be bath, pajamas, teeth, a book, then hugs. Skip the book, and stress (and "behaviors") are likely to follow.

Stay within your regular prediction pegs as much as you can. Then choose a time of day, transition, or activity that tends to be harder (like mornings, dinner, leaving the house, or coming home) and build a very predictable routine around it. Plan it with your child ahead of time and make a big effort to stick to it. Transitions get smoother, with fewer struggles.

05 WAIT TO PUT GIFTS OUT

Have you ever been teased with a secret or a gift long before you could have it? It isn't much fun. A pile of beautifully wrapped presents sitting out for days or weeks can create real stress, especially for kids who have trouble "seeing the future" and planning. Consider waiting until the night before to place gifts under the tree. Your child gets the surprise and can open them right away. It's an easy way to decrease demand.



THERE ARE NO PURPOSELESS BEHAVIORS

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PART TWO

THE SENSORY SEASON

Lights, sounds, smells, and a house that suddenly looks different all add up.

06 SET UP A LOW-SENSORY SPACE

More lights, sounds, people, and activity mean more sensory demand at home or in the classroom, and that may create a stress response. Keep this in mind if you notice "behaviors" creeping in. Counteract the overload with a room or space that has fewer sensory demands. Let your child know they can choose a break there any time they feel overwhelmed, and that sometimes you might remind them. Plan it together ahead of time so it feels like a strategy, not a punishment.

07 GIVE THEM CONTROL OVER THE DECORATIONS

Bright, flashing, changing lights, big Santas, moving reindeer: it can all be a lot to take in. Even rearranging furniture or changing the décor may be triggering for your child. Get the whole family involved in deciding which decorations go up inside and outside the house. A little choice and control lets everyone feel festive without feeling overstimulated.

08 BE MINDFUL OF SCENTS

Smells are an often-overlooked sensory demand. Candles and essential oils are a favorite this time of year, but scents can be very triggering for some people. Let your child help choose the scent for the day (diffusing essential oils is gentler than scented candles), or simply leave them out altogether.

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PART THREE

GATHERINGS & GUESTS

Socializing is a demand of its own, and the holidays are full of it.

09 LEARN YOUR CHILD'S STRESS TRIGGERS

Behavior is communication. When your child melts down, withdraws, gets silly, or runs off, they are often deflecting a demand that feels like too much. Notice what tends to come right before: noise, crowds, a change in plans, being put on the spot. Knowing your child's patterns lets you lower the demand before it builds.

10 PLAN BRAIN BREAKS AHEAD OF TIME

Plan a safe brain break with your child before the gathering: a walk, coloring in a quiet room, listening to music, or simply connecting with you away from the crowd. Build in movement breaks during the festivities, too. The key is planning it together ahead of time and letting your child pick.

11 PLAN HOW YOUR CHILD WILL INTERACT

Work with your child ahead of time on how to greet guests and family, what to do socially, and how to ask for a break if they need one. A plan takes the pressure off in the moment, for your child and for you.

12 DON'T FORCE HUGS OR PHYSICAL CONTACT

A hug from a relative your child rarely sees can be a big sensory and social demand. Let your child choose how to say hello, whether that's a wave, a high five, or a smile, and let family know ahead of time that this is part of your plan.

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PART FOUR

AT THE TABLE

Holiday food carries expectations. A little planning lightens them.

13 SUGAR IS A STRESS TO THE SYSTEM

Many of us were raised to see sugary snacks as a special treat, and the holidays have no shortage of them. But sugar is a stressor to the system. Create traditions and food options that are low-inflammatory while still leaving room for a few treats. Involve your child ahead of time so no one feels deprived. Instead, everyone gets to try new and fun things.

14 LOWER DEMAND AT THE DINNER TABLE

Gathering around a table with the expectation of eating what's served may not be the best fit for your child, and that's okay. Ahead of time, talk through what food will be offered and what your child's choices will be. Don't try to navigate it on the fly. Bonus: visit the store together beforehand and let your child pick a treat or two to bring along.

A LITTLE PREP MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

For more brain-based tips, and to find a Brain Blossom provider near you, visit brain-blossom.com.

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