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**The SESA office will be closed 12/7/18 to 1/2/19  
We wish you a safe and happy holiday season!**



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## Having a Successful Holiday Season

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### **Letter from the Editor**

by Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Deafblind and Multiple Disability Specialist

“It’s the most wonderful time of the Year”

For many teachers and school staff, the holiday break is truly one of the “most wonderful times of the year”. This is a chance to recharge your battery, visit family and friends that you have not seen in a while, and sleep in! As much as we all enjoy the students we work with, having a break from the routine and the daily demands just feels nice.

But for many kids, the holiday break is NOT “the most wonderful time of the year”. Everything that we love about break can cause a lot of stress- the unknown when you are traveling, being out of your daily routine, being with people you have not

seen in a long time, and a sleep schedule that is all thrown off. When the kids are stressed . . . so are the parents. In order to help our students and families have a wonderful break, it is important that we as teachers and school staff help to prepare the kids. It is also nice to be able to send ideas and activities home with students. Anything from a simple communication board to ASL flashcards, from a specially designed calendar to the link to your favorite classroom mindfulness music.

As the students in your classroom feel the excitement and the change in the air, take the time to help them explore the upcoming break. Remind them of ways that they can stay calm, introduce new and exciting vocabulary, and allow them to be a part of any preparations for materials to take home.

Merry Christmas!

## Setting Your Child with Hearing Loss Up for Success

by Kelsey Koenigs, SESA Deaf & Hard of Hearing Specialist

Holiday spirit is in the air and with it comes an increase in language opportunities. For our kiddos with hearing loss, this may be a source of stress and anxiety due to communication difficulties and/or differences. So, here are some tips for success:

**Role Play with Youngsters:** Have students enact different possible scenarios they may face during the upcoming holidays. Meal time, game time, gift time, etc. During these scenarios, model appropriate behaviors to promote self-advocacy. This may include requesting Close Captioning, asking guests to wear their personal FM microphone system, alerting an adult to a malfunctioning assistive listening device, or making sure they know how to trouble shoot their tech difficulties themselves, etc.

Example:

*There is holiday music playing loudly during dinner conversation. Our student with an assistive listening device is sitting next to the radio/speaker. What can s/he do to advocate for a better listening environment for themselves?*

Possible Solutions: Tell an adult they cannot hear. Ask to have the music turned down or off during conversation time. Have them request to sit farthest away from the music speakers. (Consider teaching them to be proactive by having them make these requests before the scenario can even arise.)

**Get Parents Involved:** If the parents are hosting, educate them (if they don't already know) and encourage them to take the necessary steps to create a deaf-friendly environment during the bustling holidays. Encourage them to offer tips to guests regarding communication with their kiddo. If they spend the holidays as guests elsewhere encourage parents to advocate for their kiddo by sharing those deaf-friendly tips with the hosts. Have them create a special sign or signal with their kiddo that can alert them to communication difficulties or requests for "help" when they are not by their kiddo's side. Ask parents about typical holiday routines/

games/movies. Use that knowledge to pre-teach any vocabulary or to design appropriate accommodations to make sure the student can be involved and engaged in the holiday cheer!

**Make Them the Expert:** Get the kiddos comfortable and confident in their communication involving holiday topics and vocabulary. For our ASL users this may look like reviewing signs and practicing games that involve them teaching these signs to their family and friends. Have them help you create sign cards with English print that they can put up around the house as labels, or give to communication partners to aid in conversation. For our LSL kiddos, have them practice reading their favorite holiday book out loud and encourage them to read this to/with their family and friends.

## Holiday Success

by Angel Black, Vision Impairment & Multiple Disability Specialist



Most children thrive on routines, knowing what is going to happen next, and predictability. The holidays are typically full of novel experiences, new adventures, having few or even no routines, participating in different activities than at any other time of year, and even traveling to places we've never been. For the student with a visual impairment, the holidays are anything but routine! They can cause sensory overload, stress and anxiousness in a student with low vision. To help prepare your student with a visual impairment for possible situations they may find uncomfortable over the holiday season, I want to use a term you are all very familiar with – “pre-teach.” This means to teach about something that will happen but has not happened yet. To arm your students with strategies that will help them confront the stressors of the holidays and replace them with the joys of the holiday season.

- Many students with low vision/blindness have a difficult time in noisy places. Think shopping malls, homes and rooms filled to the brim with people, and parties that come with loud voices and even louder music. A solution could be ear buds so that the student can listen to calming music without bothering anyone else, noise reducing ear phones, or even permission to find a quiet place (if possible) to take a break.
- Talk about specific situations that may worry your student. For example, your student is nervous about flying to see relatives. Break down each step of airplane

travel, explaining what will happen at each step and what the student will be doing. Practice until the student feels comfortable with the entire process.

- Prepare your student about social situations they may find themselves in. Pre-teach appropriate responses and practice dialogue. I once had a student with blindness who was nervous about going to a dinner party with his family. His fear? Steak. He was afraid they would serve steak or another type of food that needed to be cut with a knife and he was not comfortable with that task. Again, practice! Practice skills the student is working on, because practice makes perfect. By the time, my student arrived at that dinner party he was feeling confident and looking-forward to cutting up his steak completely independently.

Preparing your student for similar uncomfortable situations before they happen is a sure-fire way of assuring them that their holiday will be filled with wonderful moments of joy and tons of fun, because they are ready!

## Communicate, Partner, Reinforce!

Aimee Smith, AARC Autism Resource Specialist

The holidays can be stressful for families, however there are ways that you can support the transition and also continue supporting the student's goals outside of the school day. The key is to communicate and be individualized with each family.

- Communicate with your parents. Find out what their plans are for the holidays and how you can support them. Do they need visual supports, timers, etc.?
- How can your parents promote independence in their daily activities? Check out the AARC's recent [\*\*Tip of the Month Article\*\*](#) on promoting independence during the holidays for tips and supports!
- If your students use a communication system or device, make sure that your parents know how to use it and can trouble shoot if there are issues. Provide your families with ideas to encourage communication, verbal or nonverbal, that are appropriate for your student's level.
- Think about what goals your students may regress on over break, without continued practice. What can you provide to your families for additional practice? Examples include flashcards that parents can review 5 minutes every day with their child or independent practice programs that can provide you with data (i.e. Khan Academy, IXL.com, etc.). What reinforcement can you use to encourage students to want to continue practice over break?
- What routines, procedures, behavior plans, etc. can be reinforced at home? What tools do you use at school that you can send home to support your families?

The key factor in continued progress is to communicate with your parents and work with them as partners. Support them in the areas that they find struggle over the holidays and choose the most important, bite-sized strategies for them to continue reinforcing what the team has been working on throughout the fall.

## Bridging the Gap

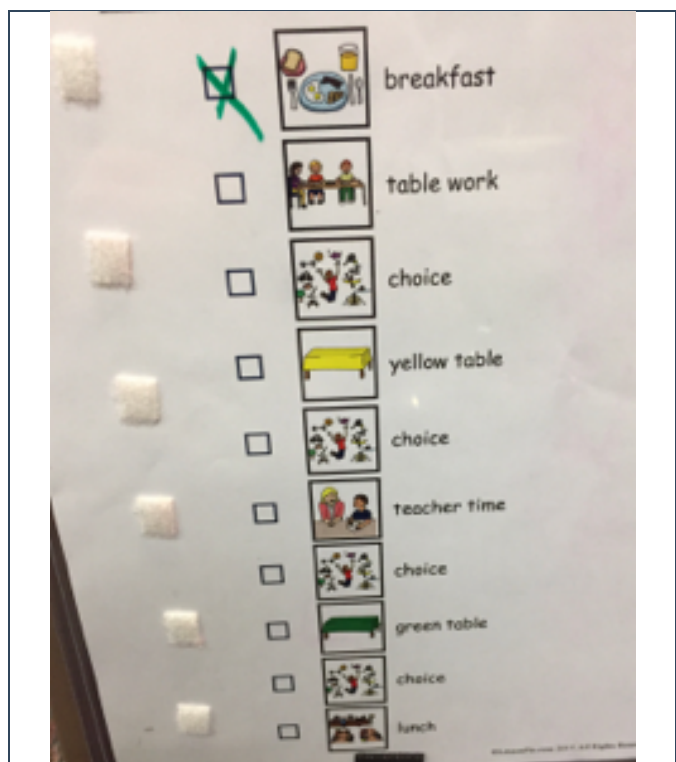
by Brian Babcock, SESA Autism Specialist

We know that communication between home and school is one of our most valuable resources. Some parents visit our classroom regularly, observe routines, and exchange stories of successful interventions and student growth. Others rely on our phone calls, notes, and meetings to keep up with the day-to-day happenings at school.

As long breaks approach, consider providing parents and caregivers with concrete examples of the supports you use when targeting specific skills in your classroom:

- Are you having success with social stories or a particular song during bathroom breaks?
- What language do you use when giving directions?
- Is your student choosing a specific sensory break over others?
- Does your FIRST/THEN board make non-preferred tasks more inviting?
- Consider sharing resources to maintain student momentum, while supporting routines at home.

**Hesitant to lend out classroom materials?** Take pictures of your *social stories*, *check lists*, and *schedules*. Many apps allow you to send messages from your phone without including your private number. **Remind** is one app designed for teacher communication with parents. Others are available online. **AirDrop** and thumb drives are alternative ways to share. Be mindful of media releases and communicate with your administrator when sharing images of students.



**Videos are quick, concise and easily shared on most devices these days.** Capture video footage of your student using visual supports, communication systems or token reward systems as he successfully transitions or engages a challenging task. Share clips with parents. *If you are unfamiliar with iMovie or would like to view examples, follow this [link](#).*

Taking a moment to capture and share successful strategies will support students in generalizing their skills. Providing predictable expectations and language across the home and school environments can help ease the stress of transitioning into (and out of) long breaks. Visual examples are an efficient way to provide busy parents and caregivers a glimpse of the strategies you use to guide their student's success. You might provide the insight and inspiration parents and caregivers need to create their own.

## Setting Students Up for Success BEFORE Break

by Amy Topmiller, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist

The holidays can be a busy stressful time for everyone. As a teacher, my patience depleted as the holidays approached. For students with disabilities, the holidays can be a time of extreme stress and unpredictability. Often times, students don't know how to cope with this stress and as a result, an increase in behaviors occur. Here are some quick and easy tips to incorporate in the school day to help be proactive, rather than reactive in giving them the tools they need to self-regulate.



Use visuals like a calendar to help students understand the duration of the break. Students can take the calendars home to keep track of the time that passes. This also helps them transition back to school when the break is over.

Incorporating Mindfulness exercises (resources below) one or two times a day to help regulate their bodies. Create a quiet and calm environment, dimming the lights, providing a space to relax comfortably. Reminding them this is a tool they can use at home too.

### [Left Brain Buddha](#)

### [Mindfulness Meditation for Kids](#)

[Article](#) on the benefits of mindfulness

Maybe you had a [Zones of Regulation](#) display that hasn't been utilized much since the start of the year, maybe you aren't even sure what [Zones of Regulation](#) are. Whether you

are a beginner or a frequent user of the zones, modeling your own feelings using visual supports, will help students understand their feelings too.

One way to incorporate zones into another strategy mentioned above is to have students identify pre and post zones for a mindfulness activity. This helps students recognize the differences in how they feel before and after utilizing this tool. It can lend itself to additional conversations about what yellow and red zones might look and feel like for individuals and what tools in their tool box they can use to self-regulate.

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## Setting the Most Complex Students up to Enjoy the Holidays

Jennifer Schroeder, SESA Deafblind and Multiple Disability Specialist

The sound of Christmas music in my office, at my house, or from my computer. The smell of cinnamon. The Christmas lights twinkling inside and out and the tree decorated with shiny ornaments. When I can see, smell, and hear those things, I know that Christmas is right around the corner.

But what about our students who do not see, hear, or smell the way that we do? Students with complex medical and physical disabilities who may not have had the opportunity to taste something cinnamon-ey, listen to Frosty the Snowman, or see the twinkly lights on the tree? How can we help those students understand that a holiday is coming up and that it is one with so many different sights, sounds, and smell?

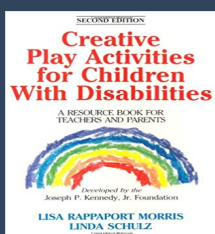
**Vocabulary Boxes:** What are some of the important words for the holidays? Is it *lights*? Or, maybe it is *star*. For some kids, it is *Father Christmas* or a *menorah*. How can we help the kids learn those important words? Vocabulary boxes are a great way to introduce vocabulary using as many of the senses as possible: touch, taste, smell, hearing, vision, proprioception, and vestibular. You can add a string of Christmas lights that you can turn on and off (with a switch!); for students who can't see the lights, how do they feel? Are they big or little? Is the music loud or soft? Is it fast or slow? If you have a bag of toys, the kids can carry it (proprioception) and decide if it is heavy or light. Pull the kids on a sled or a sleigh or let them help shovel some snow (proprioception and vestibular). You can have cotton balls that smell of cinnamon, vanilla, cloves, and orange. For kids that are able to eat, have some gingerbread, stuffing, or turkey. Vocabulary boxes are not about books, they are about the actual items and then learning about the vocabulary. You may need picture vocabulary, vocabulary on a device, tactile sign, or a combination of things. Have fun with it! The more the kids learn, the better they will understand what is happening at home over the holidays!

**Book Boxes:** This is similar to a vocabulary box, but it is based on a book. You can pick a book for Christmas, Hanukkah, Snow, Slavic, or really anything holiday break-related. To go along with the book, you simply find small items to match the

pages. As you read, you pass around the objects. Students may feel and hear a chain rattle for Scrooge, touch or lick some snow, use a BigMac to add a repetitive line such as "my true love gave to me...". This type of activity works really well with a group. Students learn the new vocabulary, get to experience items tactually as well as through vision, smell, taste, and hearing. And because it matches a book, figuring out what to put in the box is quick and easy.

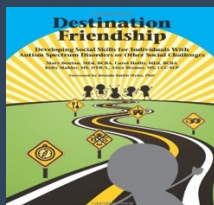
The more our students can experience, the more they can learn. Giving them time to explore and interact with items from the holidays is a great way for them to not only to learn, but have an idea about what is coming up at home. Remember, if you do any tactile signing, picture vocabulary, or speech device vocabulary, be sure to send a picture or video home so that mom and dad can do it, too.

## SESA Library Resources



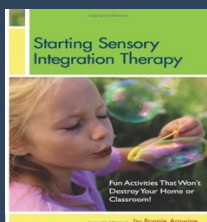
### ***Creative Play Activities for Children with Disabilities: A Resource Book For Teachers And Parents***

by Lisa Rappaport Morris, Linda Schulz. 2nd ed. Human Kinetics Books, c1989. Description: " ... you will discover 250 games and activities designed to help infants to 8-year-olds with all types of disabilities grow through play. Many activities describe special adaptations for children with physical, visual, or hearing impairments. **Read More**



### ***Destination Friendship: Developing Social Skills for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Other Social Challenges***

by Mary Benton ... [et al.]; foreword by Brenda Smith Myles. AAPC Pub., c2012. Description: A curriculum for teaching friendship skills using a fun group format. Participants take part in hands-on activities that are geared to their strengths and preferred learning styles.



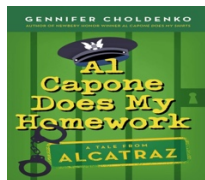
### ***Starting Sensory Integration Therapy: Fun Activities That Won't Destroy Your Home or Classroom!***

by Bonnie Arnwine; illustrated by Olivia McCoy. Future Horizons, c2007. Description: " ... a great resource for busy parents whose children are starting therapy. **Read More**



## Kids Books: Students Can Read for Fun!

Here are a few titles that would be fun for independent reading



### ***The Al Capone Series***

by Gennifer Choldenko.

Description of Al Capone Does My Homework: "Moose Flanagan, who lives on Alcatraz along with his family and the families of the other prison guards, faces new challenges when his father is promoted to Associate Warden"-- Provided by publisher.



### ***All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome***

by Kathy Hoopmann. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006.

Description: A delightful and playful look at Asperger syndrome, inspired by feline characteristics.

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## Problem Solving Books

Julia Cook writes amusing kids' books on solving problems. View the list of available titles [here](#).

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## High Interest-Low Vocabulary Books

Check out titles by these authors for fun reading:

- Elaine Pageler
- Penn Mullin
- Eleanor Robins
- Bob Wright

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For more information on any of the resources listed above, or questions about the SESA Lending Library, please visit our [website](#) or contact our Librarian, [Anne Freitag](#)

