

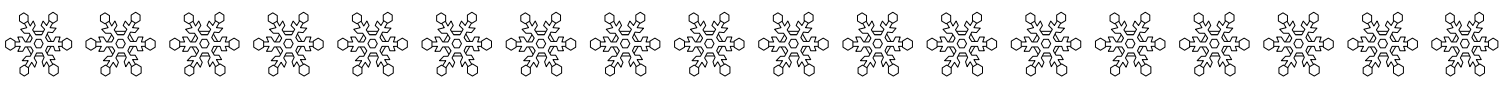


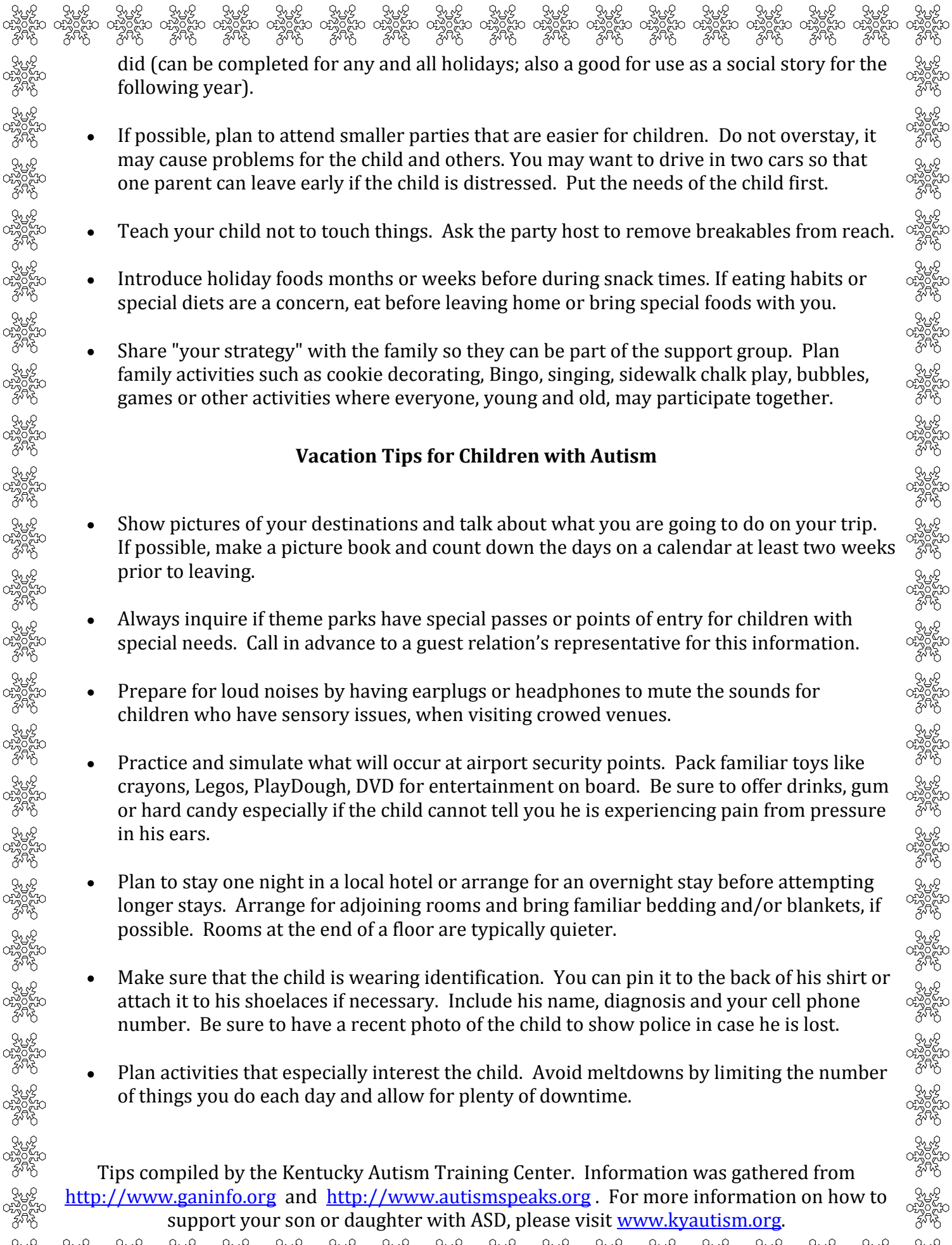
# A Collection of Holiday Tips and Suggestions:

The holiday season is a joyful time, but it can also be incredibly stressful for both children with ASD and their families. Here are some tips that might help your family during the holiday season:

- Plan ahead whenever possible. Compile a list of activities that can help your child fill his or her time wherever you go.
- Use rehearsal and role-play to give children practice ahead of time in dealing with new social situations, or work together to write a "social story" that incorporates all the elements of an upcoming event or visit to better prepare them for that situation.
- If you are going to visit family or friends, make sure there is a quiet, calm place for retreat.
- Keep an eye out for signs of anxiety or distress, including an increase in behaviors such as humming or rocking - they may indicate it's time for a break.
- Engage kids with autism in repetitive, independent activities such as stringing popcorn for trimming the tree, giving out Halloween candy, spinning the dreidel, or setting out plates/cups/etc for dinner.
- Practice unwrapping gifts ahead of time, which will help a child with autism learn the understanding and the meaning of gifts.
- Take toys and other gifts out of the box before wrapping them. It is more fun and less frustrating if a child with autism can open the gift and play with it immediately. May be important to have a timer or way to communicate that play with the specific gift is over and it is time to open another gift.
- Try to relax and have a good time. If you are tense your child may sense that something isn't right.
- Get a list of gift ideas for relatives from your child's teacher and therapists.
- Don't shield your child from the extended family. If there are family members unfamiliar to your child, accessing a webcam and utilizing a program such as Skype will help your child to feel more comfortable when they physically meet the extended family.
- Take pictures when you and your child pick out a Halloween costume, carve a pumpkin, knock on someone's door, eat Halloween candy, etc. Make a book about your holiday by gluing the pictures onto construction paper, writing a short sentence under each picture, and stapling the pages together. When someone asks your child a question regarding the holidays, your child can use the book as a visual cue to help tell about the things he or she

Tips compiled by the Kentucky Autism Training Center. Information was gathered from <http://www.ganinfo.org> and <http://www.autismspeaks.org>. For more information on how to support your son or daughter with ASD, please visit [www.kyautism.org](http://www.kyautism.org).





did (can be completed for any and all holidays; also a good for use as a social story for the following year).

- If possible, plan to attend smaller parties that are easier for children. Do not overstay, it may cause problems for the child and others. You may want to drive in two cars so that one parent can leave early if the child is distressed. Put the needs of the child first.
- Teach your child not to touch things. Ask the party host to remove breakables from reach.
- Introduce holiday foods months or weeks before during snack times. If eating habits or special diets are a concern, eat before leaving home or bring special foods with you.
- Share "your strategy" with the family so they can be part of the support group. Plan family activities such as cookie decorating, Bingo, singing, sidewalk chalk play, bubbles, games or other activities where everyone, young and old, may participate together.

### **Vacation Tips for Children with Autism**

- Show pictures of your destinations and talk about what you are going to do on your trip. If possible, make a picture book and count down the days on a calendar at least two weeks prior to leaving.
- Always inquire if theme parks have special passes or points of entry for children with special needs. Call in advance to a guest relation's representative for this information.
- Prepare for loud noises by having earplugs or headphones to mute the sounds for children who have sensory issues, when visiting crowded venues.
- Practice and simulate what will occur at airport security points. Pack familiar toys like crayons, Legos, PlayDough, DVD for entertainment on board. Be sure to offer drinks, gum or hard candy especially if the child cannot tell you he is experiencing pain from pressure in his ears.
- Plan to stay one night in a local hotel or arrange for an overnight stay before attempting longer stays. Arrange for adjoining rooms and bring familiar bedding and/or blankets, if possible. Rooms at the end of a floor are typically quieter.
- Make sure that the child is wearing identification. You can pin it to the back of his shirt or attach it to his shoelaces if necessary. Include his name, diagnosis and your cell phone number. Be sure to have a recent photo of the child to show police in case he is lost.
- Plan activities that especially interest the child. Avoid meltdowns by limiting the number of things you do each day and allow for plenty of downtime.

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