



## Five Tips for Accommodating Children with Disabilities During the Holidays

If you are hosting a holiday celebration this year and are expecting a young guest with a disability, you may be wondering how to accommodate them. Here, we have laid out five tips to help you be the best host possible:

If the child is in a wheelchair, make your home as accessible as you can. First, consider your entryway. Do you have a porch with steps? If so, you may want to purchase a [portable ramp](#). Another option is to assist with either pulling the chair up backward, slowly bumping it up the steps, or carrying the chair and child into the house. Make sure you ask for input from the child and the parents on how to do this – they will have a good sense of how to safely navigate such obstacles. Also, you will want to think about bathroom access. Will a wheelchair be able to fit through the doorway? You may also want to install a [temporary grab bar](#) near the toilet. If your guests are staying overnight, you will also need to think about shower accommodations such as a [bench or chair](#). Finally, make sure that the areas of the house in which the main activities are happening are wheelchair-accessible. For example, if you want to have a buffet-style dinner but your kitchen is very cramped, consider bringing the food out to the dining room instead.

Think about ways to reduce the child's stress. This is especially important for children with [developmental delays](#) resulting in emotional, behavioral, or cognitive challenges. Some children may quickly become overwhelmed by crowds and constant activity. Try to have a room available where they can go to wind down, perhaps with a book, puzzle, or favorite TV show. Also, keep an open mind about what host/guest roles should be. Many children are calmer and more comfortable with socializing when they have a task. If the child offers to help, or their parents suggest that they could be of use, give them something to do.

Consider dietary requirements. Many children with disabilities such as [cerebral palsy](#) or [seizure disorders](#) are unable to eat certain foods. Ask in advance what they can and cannot have. Try to prepare at least a couple of dishes that they will be able to enjoy. Children with chewing and swallowing issues may not be able to eat solid foods, or they may be restricted



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to softer foods. One way you can accommodate them is by having a blender or food processor handy, so they can have a pureed or softer version of some holiday favorites.

Respect differences. Depending on the nature of their disabilities, children may quickly become agitated, make a bit of a mess while eating, or do other things you might find “disruptive.” Keep in mind that a child with sensory processing difficulties who becomes overwhelmed and acts out, or a child with a motor control impairment who drops food on the table or the floor, is not trying to be impolite. If you treat them respectfully, the child will feel much more welcome.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. We have already touched on this topic a bit, but the best way to figure out how to host a child with a disability is to simply ask what you can do to make their visit more enjoyable. Call the child's parents in advance of the holiday. You can explain what accommodations you have already considered, and ask what else they will need from you. For example, “I know Rebecca needs to eat soft foods, so I'll make sure my food processor is available. Beyond that, are there specific foods she has to avoid? I want to make sure she has enough to eat.” A child with disabilities may not need certain accommodations that you have assumed they do, or may need others you have failed to consider. The best way to find out is to simply communicate.

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*Can you think of any tips that aren't in this list? Let us know in the comments!*

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# 5 HOLIDAY TIPS

For accommodating guests  
with disabilities



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