

Top ways to make Hanukkah autism-friendly



Hanukkah (also known as Chanukah) is the eight-day winter 'festival of lights' celebrated by Jewish people all over the world. Like any celebration, it's a time of joy and togetherness, but for anyone with autism, the stark changes to daily life can be a stressful experience.

Of course, it's important for autistic people to be able to enjoy themselves just as much as anyone else, and there are many ways we can help them to get involved with festivities. Keep reading for some of our top tips for managing autism and Hanukkah.

How you can help people with autism enjoy Hanukkah

As an eight-day celebration, Hanukkah is a long period of time for anyone with autism to handle disruption to their routine. Here are some ways to help them understand what's happening so that they can engage and have fun:

1. Keep familiar food close by

Food is a huge part of Hanukkah, but the traditional dishes can seem very different from everyday meals. Because new tastes, smells and textures can cause sensory issues for people with autism, make sure to have a supply of familiar food close by in case that's what they'd prefer.

2. Use social stories to prepare

For autistic and non-verbal children, social stories can be a fantastic tool for understanding an upcoming situation so they can process it when it happens.

There are pre-written social stories like *Nathan Blows Out The Hanukkah Candles*, or you can create your own on topics such as:

- Lighting the Menorah
- Attending a Hanukkah party
- Visiting the synagogue for services
- Gifts and gelt
- Tastes and smells

Make sure to use pictures as a visual aid!

3. And a comfort item too

Everyone has something that makes them feel more secure, and this is even more the case for autistic people. Whether it's a toy, a blanket, or whatever else, by allowing them to keep it to hand, they'll be better equipped to keep calm in unusual situations.



4. Create a quiet space somewhere in the home

If celebrations are being held at your home, it's important for any autistic people to have a quiet space they can escape to if necessary. Parties in general are a recipe for sensory overload, so the option for a calmer environment is a welcome one.

5. Let party hosts know you're attending

For parties away from home, let the hosts know you're attending, and fill them in on the autistic person's needs. This way, they can do their best to help everyone have an enjoyable time, and prepare things like agreeable food and quiet spaces.

6. Don't feel obliged to stay for the duration

As a parent or guardian of an autistic person, you know their needs better than most people, and it's more than okay to draw a line wherever you might need one. Never feel obliged to go to any parties or gatherings if you don't feel comfortable doing so, and if you do, turning up later and leaving early is fine too.

