

MAKING THE HOLIDAY ACCESSIBLE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The 4th of July is a time of celebration, marked by fireworks, parades, and gatherings with loved ones. While many people eagerly anticipate this festive holiday, it's important to remember that for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with sensory processing issues, the 4th of July can present unique challenges. **In this article, we aim to raise awareness about how the festivities associated with Independence Day can be overwhelming for some members of our community, and we will provide practical tips on how to make the holiday more inclusive and enjoyable for everyone.**

Sensory processing disorders affect a significant percentage of the population, including five to sixteen percent of school-aged children, according to the University of Southern California (2013). For individuals with sensory issues, the sensory overload associated with the 4th of July can lead to stress and overstimulation. Understanding the impact of sensory processing challenges is the first step toward creating a more inclusive environment during the holiday celebrations.

Inclusivity lies at the heart of making any holiday celebration accessible for individuals with disabilities. Here are some actionable steps you can take to ensure everyone feels welcome and comfortable during your 4th of July activities:

- Spread awareness among your friends, family, and community about the challenges individuals with disabilities may face during the holiday season. Educate them on sensory processing disorders and other disabilities to help create understanding and empathy.
- Involve individuals with disabilities in the planning process. Seek their input and ask about their preferences and needs in advance, before the festivities begin. Remember that everyone is different, so individualized support is key.
- Consider the sensory aspects of your celebrations. If possible, choose quieter locations for gatherings or designate a quiet space where individuals can retreat if they feel overwhelmed. Be mindful of the volume of music or fireworks and provide earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones if necessary.
- Visual aids, such as schedules, social stories, or visual timers, can help individuals with disabilities understand the sequence of events and manage their expectations.
- Loud noises and bright lights are often associated with 4th of July festivities. Communicate with individuals who may be sensitive to these triggers and find ways to mitigate their impact, such as offering noise-reducing headphones or providing sunglasses to reduce glare.
- Be prepared to make reasonable accommodations based on the needs of individuals with disabilities. Respect their boundaries and ensure that the adjustments discussed are implemented to the best of your ability.

By increasing awareness and taking proactive steps, we can make the 4th of July and other holidays more inclusive and enjoyable for individuals with disabilities. Remember, it's essential to prioritize open communication, understanding, and flexibility when planning and participating in holiday celebrations. **Let's work together to create a welcoming environment where everyone can join in the festivities and experience the holidays!**



SCHOOL READINESS AT EARLY HEAD START!

On June 21, 2023, families celebrated 32 Early Head Start graduates for their successful completion of milestones toward School Readiness. Graduates, dressed in caps and gowns, received diplomas, gifts, and much applause! It was a night to remember as families celebrated and played *Candyland*-themed games with Cupcake Mountain as the final destination. A special thanks to Upland Community Church for the use of their building and sound system!

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