



**Tips to  
survive the  
summer  
holidays**

**Children and Young People's Learning Disability Service Wirral**

Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

## General tips:

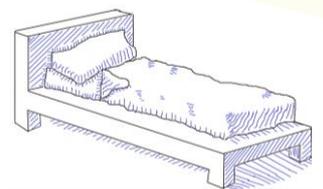
- **Try to keep calm in front of your child at all times** - This is really difficult but makes such a big difference to children, if they see that 'everything's OK' when they look at their parents. It's OK to go to the bathroom for some space, step outside for a few seconds of fresh air, or even scream into a pillow in your bedroom; just try to remain composed around your child. Try to find some time to treat yourself or do something relaxing and enjoyable, even if it's just for a few minutes. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it (from family, friends, or professionals).
- **Make things as fun as possible** – Even tidying up, brushing teeth, getting dressed etc. can be made a bit more fun with smiles, pulling faces, jokes, silly noises, singing, tickles or racing each other. Use lots of praise and encouragement, and try not to rush your child.
- **Support your child to do things they find difficult** – Whilst your child may be OK at getting themselves dressed sometimes, or finding their shoes for school, they may find it more difficult at other times when they're anxious, tired, overexcited, hungry etc. Try not to get into arguments or shouting about how they should be able to do this, but offer support to help and encourage them to manage it on this occasion.
- **Try to keep to a routine** - this will make your child's day more predictable, and help keep them calmer. Use waking up time, mealtimes, activity times, chill out time, bath/shower times, and bedtime to provide structure to your child's day. Without school children often miss this predictability of routine and things can start to feel out of control.
- **Try not to react to negative behaviours your child uses purely to get a response from you** – make sure they're safe, but don't give these behaviours lots of attention. However try to make sure you are giving your child lots of positive attention throughout the day, especially when they are communicating appropriately and displaying behaviours you want to see more of. This way they won't need to resort to the negative behaviours to get a response.
- **Try not to change plans if your child is looking forward to them** – if your child knows you're meant to be doing something, going somewhere or meeting someone, try not to change these plans as it could be a trigger for challenging behaviour. If a plan is not definite, don't mention it until it is, (or suggest it is





'just an idea' if they can cope with this language). However if your child does not want to do something, and you can tell they're having a particularly difficult day, e.g. they're tired, in pain, distressed by an earlier event etc., this might be a time to postpone an activity or plans until they are more able to cope with them.

- **Offer alternative sensory activities to reduce sensory-seeking behaviours** – e.g. if your child keeps turning taps on, set a bucket of water with plastic cups in the garden to play pouring and splashing; if they keep climbing on high furniture or doorways, find places they are allowed to climb e.g. parks, climbing frame in the garden, rope ladder from a tree, climbing walls; if they keep eating inedible items, have a box of nibbles readily available with interesting food textures, e.g. dry pasta, crackers, beef jerky, fruit (skin on), thick milkshake with a straw etc.
- **Keep an eye on the temperature** – many children with learning disabilities and/or autism struggle to regulate (or even recognise) their temperature. If they become too hot they may feel grumpy or unwell, and will need your help to cool down with a cold drink, fresh air, fan or cooler clothing.
- **Try to get enough sleep** – For both you and your child, sleep will be really important. Many children with learning disabilities and/or autism have difficulties with sleep, and holidays can often exacerbate this, but it is always worth trying to develop a better sleep routine:
  - Have a clear bedtime routine with the same calming activities in the run up to bed,
  - try to avoid screens for at least half an hour before bed,
  - try to put your child to bed when they're tired;
  - help them settle, but make sure they fall asleep in the environment they will be in if they wake in the night (e.g. night light only, in their own bed, on their own, background noise the same etc.);
  - if they wake in the night, calmly and quietly resettle them (don't let them get in bed with you);
  - wake them at the same time each morning (similar to the time they wake for school). It may be tempting to let them sleep in in the mornings, get into bed with you in the night, or stay up late some nights when you have plans, but these will all disturb their sleep routine and could establish patterns that are unhelpful and hard to change in the long term.



## Staying at home:

- **Have an idea of some kind of activity for each day** – this could simply be making mud-pies in the garden, plastic cups and squirty toys in a bucket or the bath, paints/ crayons/ play doh, clearing out old toys, or a trip to the park, zoo, beach etc. Only tell your child about the activity when you're confident you're going to be doing it. Get involved with your child (at least at first) to show them what to do and how to have fun. You may be able to withdraw after a while if it's something your child is able to do independently.
- **Allow plenty of time for transitions** (between places and activities) – try not to rush your child, and don't put too much time pressure on yourself. Give them a warning or countdown to the end of an activity they enjoy, and try to help them focus on what you're doing next. Have the next activity ready e.g. TV on, garden toys out, paints and paper ready, blow some bubbles etc.
- **Give your child movement breaks** – even favourite activities can get boring or over-stimulating for children after a while, and can trigger challenging behaviours. Help your child to take short breaks to prevent this. If you do it regularly, and supportively, hopefully they will quickly realise it is a short break doing something fun, and then they can return to their other activity if they wish. Incorporating movement into this break can be really helpful e.g. action songs, a few minutes bouncing on a trampoline/ gym ball, going up and downstairs (invent a reason), blowing bubbles etc.
- **Monitor how your child responds to different activities** – try to notice which activities your child enjoys (or dislikes), but also which activities calm them down or energise them. Use these activities at appropriate times of the day e.g. an energising activity in the morning to help them feel awake, a calming activity in the evening, or follow energising activities with calming ones, to prevent you child becoming overstimulated.
- **Physical activity is great for burning off excess energy** – especially during the longer school holidays. Try to find new and inventive ways of getting your child active e.g. going on a treasure hunt round the house/ garden (place the items as obviously as necessary for your child to be able to find them), making mini obstacle courses at home, chasing bubbles to pop.

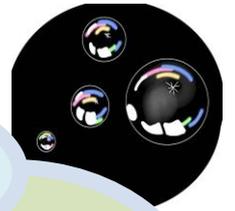


## Going out:

- **Give your child as much warning/preparation as you think they need** - some children need to know the night before, some children can only cope with being told a short while before you leave, as they expect the activity to happen right away. Try not to 'spring' outings on your child, and allow them time to end whatever activity they're doing before you ask them to leave the house.
- **Support your child's anxiety if you're planning something new or big** – prepare them for what you will do, who will be there, what it will look like (use photos if possible), how long it will be e.g. 'we'll have our lunch there' etc. Include rewards and incentives to help your child manage difficult times e.g. a favourite toy/fidget item during the transition, a preferred drink/ snack once you're settled, lots of praise and encouragement.
- **Try to identify a quiet space** – somewhere you can take your child to if they need a break from busy environments e.g. a separate room, an outdoor area, back to the car etc. This may also help you to feel more confident about outings if you have a plan for where to go if your child isn't coping or their behaviour becomes challenging.
- **Ask friends and relatives to help** – the summer holidays are often one of the most difficult times of the year for families with children who have learning disabilities and/ or autism, so don't be afraid to ask others to help with outings. Even if a friend or relative can join you for moral support, or to keep an eye on your other children, it will often make an outing more successful if you feel supported and well prepared.
- **Again, allow plenty of time** - If you are meeting others, try and agree flexibility in timings, so you can respond to your child's needs and anxieties at every step. Everyone feels stressed and grumpy when they're rushed.
- **Recognise your child's communication** –keep alert for signs your child is becoming anxious, overstimulated or bored. Your child may need your undivided attention for a while to help them regulate their emotions, or they may need a break or to end the activity completely. While this may be disappointing or frustrating for you and others, it is better to recognise your child's attempts to communicate this and end the activity while it is successful, than have a major meltdown moments later, causing more distress to everyone.



**Ideas for activities** (choose those appropriate for your child)



Chalk on pavements/ paths

Painting/ drawing

Chasing bubbles

Trays of pasta, rice, cornflakes

Cleaning/ spraying windows

Baking (e.g. crispy cakes)

Water play

Dressing up

Splashing in the bath

Finger painting

Making (& watching) home videos

Playing shop/ house/ trains

Scooters/ balance bike

Water balloons

Sand play

Tug of war (rolled up towel)

Building blocks (and knocking down)

Foam soap/ squirty cream

Kicking, rolling, throwing balls

Making mud-pies

Gloop (cornflour & water)

Gym/ peanut ball

Watering plants

Play doh (edible)

Slime/ jelly

Looking through old toys

Ice

Treasure hunt

Painting/ spraying water on fences

Home-made drums (upturned pans, bucket, boxes)

Build a den, or use large cardboard box

Dancing/ singing

Remote control car

Surprise box with a sensory toy inside

Smelling spices, flowers or perfumed fabric

