

# FDLRS Record

Newsletter for the University of Florida FDLRS-MDC program in Jacksonville

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# Holiday Fun or Holiday Chaos?

By Chan l Baldwin-Stinson, M.Ed.

Anybody else feel like this year is flying by? Well believe it or not, it is that time of year where all the holiday related activities are coming up! As a family unit how do you manage your time, stress or holiday chaos? Has your child just adjusted to being back in a school routine just to go on a holiday break? Go ahead, raise your hand...no judgement.

Consider these ideas to gear up for all the holiday rush. Try to organize what is coming up if possible. Yes, life happens but plan it out as much as possible. Organization can eliminate a lot of frustrations. Have you considered the following: Are you travelling? Do want to see family and friends more? Do you want to do something new with your family? How about, just wanting some relaxation? A visible calendar everyone can see in your home, definitely goes a long way. For those times where you've scheduled appointments, your child may have asked or even was sent home with an event flyer. It can be a lot. Sometimes having a visual helps and some others may prefer an electronic version. Whatever helps but do include your family members; they can help pick meals for the week, help fill in a chore chart, and help plan a family activity. Be organized and intentional, do what feels right for your family.

## TIPS to lessen holiday chaos:

- ◆ Plan ahead
- ◆ Balance structure and free time
- ◆ Develop new traditions/rituals or maintain current ones
- ◆ Balance family and friends



## Florida Diagnostic & Learning — RESOURCES SYSTEM —

### OUR SERVICES

#### Who we Serve:

- Individuals between the ages of 3 & 22 who have not graduated high school.
- Who are struggling in school and have complicated medical, behavioral, developmental, &/or social histories
- And who reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, & St. Johns counties

#### Services for Families:

- Comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment, which may include psychoeducational, emotional-behavioral, &/or developmental pediatric evaluations
- Feedback sessions and a report detailing our findings
- Assistance in planning for your child's educational and psychological needs
- Trainings for parents covering a variety of topics

#### Services for the Community:

- Training/consultations for educators, students, & other professionals
- Educational consultation and support services: This can include collaboration with school personnel to facilitate school placement & provision of services

# Fall Nutritional Survival Tips & Short Cuts

By Bernardo Cuadra, B.A., CWCM

Fall is often associated with the start of the unhealthy eating season. With football picking up, Halloween candy around the corner, and the holidays about to roll in, I can just feel the cooler weather (sorry South FL), picture the family gatherings and smell the fresh baked sweets. We often focus on what our kids are learning at school, who their teachers are, how active they are, how much rest they receive and what medications they need, but we often overlook how their diets affect their performance. Countless studies demonstrate that a large percentage of children are overweight and the negative association with focus, motivation and engagement. Here are a few tips to reduce holiday season damage for kids:

**Drink plenty of water.** Dehydration can be misconstrued as hunger and lead to additional snacking and calories. Schedule water breaks to drink water to ensure proper hydration. Replace sugary drinks with water as well, to increase water consumption and decrease sugar intake.

**Eat seasonal and local.** Fresh foods have a significantly higher nutritional content. Out-of-season foods usually come from very far away and have lost a lot of that value. Eating local ensures that kids are eating fresher, getting the nutrition that they need.

**Eat whole grains.** Next time you're



preparing carbs like breads, rice and pastas, opt for whole & unrefined grains like wheat and seeded ones. They have a lower glycemic index and are a higher source of fiber, so our bodies will process them better and store less. This change reduces the calories your family takes in but gives the same boosts needed to function more efficiently.

**Reduce sugars where possible.** We've all heard of sugar crashes, but did you know that sugars are also linked to lack of focus, trouble sleeping, acne & wrinkles, loss of sleep & irritability? Sugars are also associated with increased insulin, which leads to increased fat storage, weight gain, resistance to leptin, the hormone which helps regulate hunger. Eliminate excess sugar (like whipped cream) or opt for better alternatives where you can. Start by reducing your intake one spoonful at a time and when you acclimate to it, reduce it again, until you're at an acceptable amount.

**Look for shorter ingredients list.** Look for items with a shorter ingredient list and names you can pronounce. Those

additional additives and preservatives are associated with slower digestion and other issues like bloating, and cramping. The more natural, the better for your family.

**Have smaller portions.** This is as easy as it sounds. Feel free to indulge, but try to split portions among a few people or over a few days.

**Look for healthier tolerable alternatives.** Try ground turkey instead of beef in spaghetti, sloppy joe, or chili; Grill chicken sausage in lieu of pork; Drink flavored carbonated water instead of soda; Try veggie crust pizzas and squash pastas. Make sweet flavored overnight oatmeal for those sweet tooth cravings. Not all of these will be great, but revel in the victories.

**Have proper snacks.** Eating nuts, fruits, yogurts, cereals, cheeses, whole grains, shakes and wholesome dips as snacks are a good way to maintain a healthy metabolism, eat some healthy fats, subdue hunger and avoid improper eating between meals.

**Plan ahead and shop for meals.** Planning meals in advance allows you to eliminate buying things that you don't need. This saves excess calories and also saves a few bucks.

**Homemade is usually better.** Buying out is easier, but it's also costlier. More importantly, by making family meals, you'll know exactly what is in what you're making. You can adjust the ingredients as you wish to incorporate healthy shortcuts. You can substitute healthier alternatives, or add additional nutrition to make it more filling with items that are good for your kids.

Remember, these are just a few tips for you and your family. You don't need to incorporate them all. Start small where you can. After all, we want to enjoy the upcoming seasons together. These are just general shortcuts and if you need specific wellness, medical or nutritional needs please contact a health or medical professional.

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UF-Jacksonville  
FDLRS-MDC serves  
Baker, Clay, Duval,  
Flagler, Nassau, &  
St. Johns County.



# Increasing Empathy and Prosocial Behavior in Your Children

*By Diego Castillo, M.S.*

Parents play a crucial role in nurturing empathy skills in their children. **Empathy** is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand what they are feeling. Empathy is part of prosocial behavior. **Prosocial behavior** is voluntarily cooperative, helpful, kind behavior towards others. Parents help build prosocial behavior in their children through **encouragement**, not material rewards. Material rewards can weaken a child's internal drive to be prosocial. Instead, researchers suggest nonmaterial reinforcement like verbal praise.



There are many factors that can affect a child's empathy development. One factor is closeness. **Parent-child closeness** can foster concern for others. Another factor is **parental warmth**. Parental warmth means responding to and interacting with your children in a supportive, comforting way. Parental warmth can increase prosocial behavior because you are modeling cooperative, nurturing relationships to your child. Additionally, **parental sensitivity and responsiveness** can increase your child's empathy and prosocial behavior. If you try to understand how your child feels, you teach your child to try to understand how others feel.

There are many strategies parents can use to increase their child's empathy and prosocial behavior. One effective strategy is to create an **open and non-judgmental** environment where kids feel comfortable expressing their emotions. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and thoughts, helping them develop emotional awareness. Model empathy in your interactions, showcasing understanding and kindness. When conflicts arise, guide them through effective communication and problem-solving, emphasizing the importance of considering others' perspectives.

Additionally, expose children to diverse experiences and perspectives. Engage in activities that promote empathy, such as volunteering as a family or discussing characters' emotions in books and movies. Teach the value of kindness through small acts and highlight the positive impact it has on others. **Consistent, positive reinforcement** will contribute to the development of strong empathy skills in your children.



# New Year's Resolutions and Goal Setting

*By Diego Castillo, M.S.*

As we anticipate the coming of a new year, individuals and their families are presented with a valuable opportunity to reflect on the past and envision a brighter future. While the concept of New Year's resolutions is often associated with personal development and improvement, it is equally relevant for families navigating the unique challenges and joys that come with raising children with special needs. Creating New Year's resolutions and setting goals for the upcoming year can be a fun bonding activity for the entire family. I hope this article will guide and inspire your family in setting meaningful goals that foster growth, self-confidence, and joy in the coming year.

## **1. Encourage Self-reflection:**

Before jumping into new resolutions, take some time to reflect on the progress made this past year. Celebrate the accomplishments, both big and small, and

Continued on next page.

acknowledge the resilience and strength displayed by your family. Reflecting on the challenges faced and overcome can provide valuable insights that inform your goals for the upcoming year.

## **2. Set Meaningful and Achievable Goals:**

When establishing New Year's resolutions, it is important to set goals that are realistic and designed around your family's unique circumstances. Consider the individual needs, strengths, and preferences of your child with special needs. Break down larger goals into smaller, achievable steps to provide a sense of progress and accomplishment. Whether it's improving communication skills, enhancing life skills and social interactions, or focusing on academic milestones, the key is to set goals that align with your child's developmental abilities.

## **3. Embrace Flexibility:**

Life with special needs children is often unpredictable, and flexibility is a valuable tool. While setting goals is important, be prepared to adapt and modify them as circumstances change. Flexibility allows families to navigate unexpected challenges with resilience and creativity.

## **4. Celebrate Every Success:**

Acknowledge and celebrate every success, no matter how small. Whether it's a breakthrough in communication, a newfound skill, or a moment of joy, these accomplishments contribute to the overall well-being and progress of your family. Celebrating even the smallest of achievements will foster a sense of pride, responsibility and purpose.

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### **FDLRS-MDC/CARD Satisfaction Survey**

Here at FDLRS-MDC we continue to look for creative ways to meet individual and family needs. Please consider taking a moment to complete a short survey. We hope to use the feedback to tailor our services, group offerings, and training opportunities to best meet our constituent's needs. We look forward to hearing from you.

**Use this QR Code to take our quick survey:**



# Welcoming the Cold with Warm Indoor Activities

*by Rina Park, M. Ed.*

As cold temperatures sweep Northeast Florida, it's natural to cozy up on the couch with fuzzy socks and blankets. However, staying cooped up doesn't mean sacrificing fun and excitement. Cold weather can be the perfect excuse to explore a variety of engaging indoor activities and practice different social skills. Whether you're into arts and crafts, relaxation, or physical fitness, there's something for everyone to enjoy while staying warm and toasty.

## **Culinary Creations:**

Cold weather is synonymous with comfort food. Take advantage of the season by experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen. From cookies, crock-pot soups to casseroles, the possibilities and life lessons are endless. Cooking allows for fun and incidental teaching skills like measuring and following a recipe. Turn your kitchen into a restaurant and make a menu, take orders and give your family members and friends a dining experience

they'll never forget!

**Board Games, Puzzles and Cards, Oh My!** Game night can become a family tradition allowing your competitive spirit, strategic thinking and friendly rivalry. Choose from classics like Uno, Connect Four and Candyland or explore newer options that cater to different interests. Puzzles, with their meditative qualities, can also provide a sense of accomplishment as you piece together a beautiful





image. These types of activities can encourage game skills (turn taking, good sportsmanship, following rules, etc.) as well as language skills!

**Arts and Crafts:** Get your creative juices flowing with arts and crafts projects. Whether you enjoy painting, beading or DIY home decor, these activities offer a calm, productive and entertaining way to spend your indoor time. Consider creating handmade gifts for loved ones or simply expressing yourself through artistic endeavors or go on to YouTube and find a draw-a-long based on your child's interests.

**Fitness Fun:** Stay active and beat the winter blues with indoor fitness routines. Many workout programs are designed for small spaces, requiring minimal equipment. Whether it's yoga, Pilates, or an obstacle course in your living room, there are countless online resources that offer guided workouts for all fitness levels.

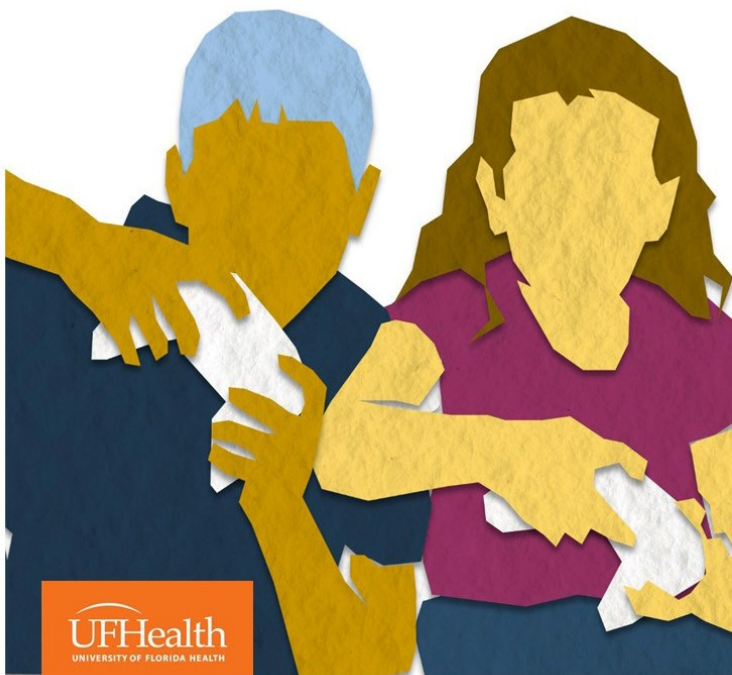
Whatever you decide to do to stay warm, make it structured, fun and memorable! Every experience is a teachable moment. Enjoy the cooler temps before it gets too hot!



## Kiddin' Around A Social Skills Group

A program which focuses on opportunities for social interaction with peers via social emotional activities and games. Skill areas include: sharing the conversation, waiting, turn taking, giving compliments, being empathetic, building community, accepting feedback, oversharing of information, and making friends.

For more information contact  
**Chanel.Baldwin@jax.ufl.edu**



# Unwind to Get Ready for the Grind

by Lotoya Odom, SSP, B.A.



Most students look forward to the end of the school year as they have often recently completed high-stakes testing which can be daunting and stressful. Luckily, most schools/school districts offer a break just before those testing periods begin—Spring Break! Individuals and families utilize Spring Break in a number of ways: to take family vacations, to begin spring cleaning, to regroup and reorganize schedules, etc. Sometimes we forget to simply unwind and take the ‘break’. For students, the timing of Spring Break allows for rest and relaxation before returning to school and gearing up for tests that measure what they’ve learned all year. Spring cleaning, vacations, and reorganizing all are certainly needed to serve their purpose. Afterward, however, breaks are usually welcomed by

all. Decompress and rejuvenate the body by allowing it to relax so that it has the stamina to continue thriving. One way to do this is to engage in mindfulness exercises. Simply put, that means to be in the moment and focus less on thinking—a cognitive task that takes mental effort and can make you tired. Mindfulness exercises can be structured or more free-flowing. Use the QR code provided below to read an article to better understand mindfulness and to get ideas for exercises that may work for you and your family!

Here is information on the Spring Break dates for several local counties to help you plan those vacations and break times!

St. Johns County Schools, you’re up first!

County/School District	Consecutive calendar days out for Spring Break (includes weekends & other student breaks)
Baker	Friday, March 15-Sunday, March 24
Clay	Friday, March 8- Sunday, March 17
Duval	Friday, March 15-Sunday, March 24
Flagler	Friday, March 15-Sunday, March 24
Nassau	Thursday, March 14-Sunday, March 24
St. Johns	Monday, March 11-Monday, March 18
Volusia	Friday, March 22-Sunday, March 31



# Spring Fling

for individuals with special needs

You and your family are invited to the  
UF Neurodevelopmental Pediatric Center  
for an evening of fun and games at our annual Spring  
Fling event!

**When: March 21, 2024**  
**5:30 to 8:00 pm**

Use the QR Code (at right)  
to register ahead of the event.



**Where: 6271 St. Augustine Rd, Suite 1**  
**Jacksonville, Florida 32217**

For more information email  
[Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu)  
or call 904.633.0760

- Hunt for eggs
- Game Rooms & Prizes
- Dancing
- Crafts & Activities
- Face Painting



SPRING FLING



**Bring your camera for a special photo  
with the Easter Bunny**

