

# FDLRS Record

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

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# Preparing for the Holiday Blitz and Setting Boundaries

By Chanél Baldwin-Stinson, M.Ed.

Holidays are supposed to bring excitement and fun for all right? Maybe not so much for all. As for families with changing schedules and prepping for staple holiday traditions it can be a very stressful time. How might you handle the blitz of the holidays? It is better to plan ahead. Think about what you may want to accomplish whether it is a home project, trip or activity for your family. The possibilities are endless, but preparing is the way to go to reduce added stress with the rush of the holiday season. During the holidays others may feel the need to deal. Your family does not have to endure this at all no matter the relation. It is okay to have boundaries. Always be mindful of what works best for your family's comfortability. Holidays can be dreaded because we become uncomfortable with having to express the accommodations needed or the "disclaimer" of what their family experiences daily. Let's try to be mindful.



## Ideas to reduce stress and create boundaries respectfully:

- Decompress and be mindful of what is important about the holiday season for your family.
- Express topics that are not up for discussion in group gatherings prior to.
- If you feel the need to not stay awhile in gatherings, show courtesy by informing others prior to.
- It is okay to say "No".
- Plan what you all will be doing ahead of time and that will reduce stress.
- Remember you cannot control all or even others reactions, however you can control yours.
- Lastly, the holiday blitz it what you make it.



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

# Flu Season: How to Prevent and Prepare for Doctor Visits

By Rina Park, M.Ed., Education and Training Specialist



Flu season can bring added challenges for anyone, but for individuals with special needs, medical appointments during this time can be particularly stressful. Sensory sensitivities, changes in routine, and concerns about illness can heighten anxiety, making it difficult for people with autism to navigate doctor's visits. However, with proper prevention and preparation, these visits can be made more manageable.

## Talk About the Visit Ahead of Time

For many individuals with special needs, predictability and routine are essential. There is comfort in consistency. Sudden changes or surprises can cause stress or anxiety. A few days before the appointment, explain what will happen in a clear, simple way. Discuss the purpose of the visit and what the doctor might do. Use visual supports, social stories, or role model and practice what the doctor might do (measure weight, use a stethoscope to listen to heart, use an otoscope to look in the ear, etc.). This helps to reduce fear of the unknown and gives a sense of control.

## Prepare for the Sensory Experience

Doctor's offices can be overwhelming for individuals with sensory sensitivities. The sounds, lights, smells, and even the feeling of medical equipment can be distressing. To prepare, try visiting the doctor's office beforehand or going over the sensory details.

## Things to consider:

- **Sounds:** The beeping of machines, the voices of other patients, or the noise in the waiting area might be overwhelming. Bring noise-canceling headphones or calming music on a device.
- **Lights:** Bright fluorescent lights might cause discomfort. Sunglasses or a calming hat can help reduce sensory overload.

- **Smells:** Hospitals and clinics often have strong, unfamiliar smells due to cleaning products or medical supplies. A familiar scented item, like a favorite lotion or essential oils, may help.

**Textures:** Some people with special needs may find the feeling of a stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, or even the doctor's coat uncomfortable. Talk to the doctor beforehand about using a gentler approach or allowing the person to touch the equipment first to reduce anxiety.

## Maintain Health Precautions for Flu Season

During flu season, it is crucial to reduce the risk of exposure to illness, especially children in schools. Taking extra precautions can also provide a sense of security for everyone. Teach the importance of hand washing before and after the appointment. Consider bringing sanitizer or wipes if soap and water are unavailable. If your child is sick, keep them at home to prevent the spread of germs.

## Pack Comfort Items

Familiar items can provide comfort and help alleviate stress during doctor's visits. Bringing items from home that they enjoy or find soothing can help make the experience more tolerable. Consider packing items such as their favorite toys, fidget tools, or comfort objects like a blanket or stuffed animal. There is always a lot of waiting, which can be challenging for some. Consider packing a tablet with calming apps or games, and snacks or drinks to keep their minds occupied.

## Communicate Your Needs to the Medical Team

Office and medical staff may not always be familiar with your child with special needs, so it's important to communicate the individual's needs ahead of time. Be proactive in discussing any accommodations that might be needed during the visit to ensure your child feels comfortable and safe.

## Important information to share with the doctor/ provider/nurse/PA:

- Sensory Sensitivities:** If the person has specific sensitivities to light, sound, or touch, share these details so the doctor can take extra care.

- Communication Style:** Let the doctor know if the individual has trouble with verbal communication and consider using alternative communication methods like a tablet or communication board if necessary.

- Behavioral Needs:** If the individual engages in self-stimulatory behaviors (e.g., flapping, rocking), or if there's a risk of meltdowns, discuss strategies that have worked in the past to calm them.

- Routine and Preferences:** Inform the doctor if the individual prefers certain routines or has specific preferences when it comes to the order of activities during the visit.

## Stay Calm and Positive

Children and adults with special needs often pick up on their caregiver's emotions. Staying calm and positive during the doctor's visit can help reassure them that the appointment is not something to fear. Use positive reinforcement to celebrate small successes—such as waiting patiently or answering questions. Practice deep breathing or other relaxation techniques before and during the appointment. Offer praise and rewards immediately after the appointment to reinforce positive behavior.

<https://pediatrics.med.jax.ufl.edu/diagnostic-and-learning-resources/>

## FDLRS Staff

David O. Childers Jr., M.D.  
*Chief of Neurodevelopmental Pediatrics  
& Executive Director of FDLRS*

Jeannie M. Potthast, M.B.A.  
*Associate Director - CARD/FDLRS-MDC*

Karen Mullin  
*Office Manager II*

Brett Walden, MPH  
*Education/Training Specialist III*

Chanel Baldwin-Stinson, M.Ed.  
*Education/Training Specialist III*

Bernardo Cuadra, B.A., CWCM  
*Clinician*

Amy Lane  
*Education/Training Specialist III*

Rina Park, M.Ed.  
*Clinician*

Latoya Odom, SSP, B.A.  
*Administrative Support Assistant*

Jennifer O'Brien, M.A., CCC-SLP  
*Speech-Language Pathologist*

Sarah Falls, M.S., CCC-SLP  
*Speech-Language Pathologist*

Staci Routman  
*School Psychologist*

Elan Santiago, LMHC  
*Counselor*

María J. Robles, Ed.S.  
*School Psychologist*

Gwenivere Mauro, M.Ed.  
*Clinician*

Alana Leath, M.A.  
*Administrative Specialist*

Tyler Rounds, B.S.  
*Administrative Assistant*

Anthony R. Rhodes, M.S.  
*IT Expert*

Terry Lee  
*Project Manager*

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

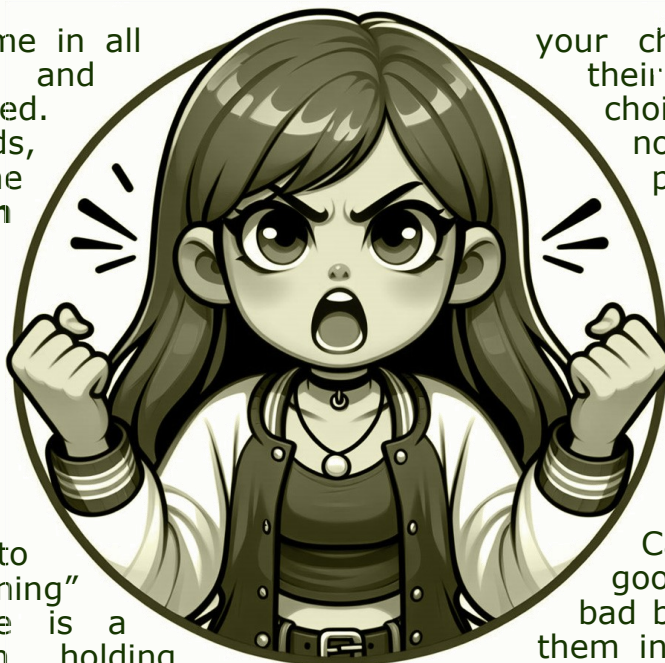
# Power Struggles and How to Avoid Them

By Diego Castillo, M.S., RMHCI

Power struggles come in all shapes and sizes, and they can be avoided. Use the words, behaviors, and tone that **you expect from your child**. Yelling at your child “don’t yell at me” is unhelpful. Snatching something back from your child and saying “we don’t grab from people” is unhelpful. Whining to your child “stop whining” is unhelpful. There is a difference between holding your child accountable and disrespecting them because you feel disrespected. In all three situations, you are modeling the opposite of what you are saying. It is a mixed message and can lead to power struggles.

Negative attention is easier and more predictable to get than positive attention from your child’s perspective (example: your child knows you will react if they bother you while you’re on the phone; they don’t know if you will react if they do something helpful like wash a dish). Teach your child what to do instead of just not what to do (example: “do this” instead of “stop”). Moreover, using the word “pause” instead of “stop” can be helpful because it is not as harsh of a demand or transition.

Praise your child for appropriate behaviors genuinely and immediately (example: “good job using your words”). Offer choices to reduce noncompliance and the possibility of a power struggle (example: you can take the trash out now or at 4pm—choose). The demand is still expected to be met; the difference is that you have given



your child some power of their own to make a choice. Your child does not want to take your power; they only want some of their own. This helps avoid power struggles and builds autonomy, responsibility, and accountability. **Discipline is teaching. Teach them.**

Catch your child doing good behavior instead of bad behavior. Don’t ignore them in the house until you hear something bad. You will find the behavior you focus on. Focus on positive behavior. If a child who cannot perform to a parent’s expectation is removed because of it (example: sent to their room), the child may learn that the world functions better without them in it. It does not teach. Build bridges instead of barriers—instead of assessing who is at fault. It’s not about winning. When you don’t want to be compassionate or kind to your child, that is when they need it most. It is easy to be kind when someone else is being kind.

Power struggles are inevitable, and they vary by your child’s age and temperament, as well as your own. Remember that you are both human beings. Remember that **being in the same situation does not mean you and your child are having the same experience. Both experiences are valid**. Anger tells us something is not right, but if you destroy when you are angry, then you also go down with that cause. Develop impulse and self-control. Whining is anger coming out of a very small hole.



## Audiobooks & Literacy

*By Sarah Falls, M.S., CCC-SLP*

Audiobooks offer an engaging, flexible, and unique way for children to enjoy stories, access information, and promote a love of reading. Hearing a book read aloud engages different cognitive processes compared to reading text alone. This can be beneficial for individuals with learning differences who have strengths in auditory learning. It is especially helpful for those with reading disabilities who struggle with decoding. The auditory input allows people to focus on understanding and interpreting the story, which can reinforce learning and memory. For those with attention deficits, audiobooks can also provide a less visually overwhelming way to engage with content, helping them to stay focused for longer periods of time.

Audiobooks can help listeners understand complex books by allowing them to process auditory input and information at their own pace. They can pause, rewind, and replay parts to support their comprehension of

the text. If you listen to an audiobook with your child, talk about it together! Share who your favorite character is and why, retell what has happened so far, and predict what will happen next. Engaging in these conversations can help reinforce comprehension and allow children to express their own opinions about the book.

When looking at audiobooks, consider your child's reading level and interests. Explore different authors and genres to find stories that will keep your child actively engaged. Regular exposure to audiobooks can help establish a love for stories and make reading an enjoyable part of your child's day.

Your family can access audiobooks and e-books at no cost on your phone, computer, or e-Reader through your local public library. All you need is a library card! To get a free library card, most public libraries require people to bring a government-issued photo ID and proof of Florida residency (e.g., valid Florida driver's license, voter registration card, utility bill, rent receipt, etc.). Children under 18 will need to be accompanied by an adult and also bring identification, such as a birth certificate, school ID, or government-issued photo ID. Contact or visit your local public library for more information.

Here are the links to access the digital libraries by county, but a library card is needed first!

- Jacksonville Public Library: <https://jaxpubliclibrary.org/digital-library>
- St. Johns County Public Library: <https://sjcpls.org/econtent/ebooks/>
- Clay County Public Library: <https://www.claycountygov.com/community/library/digital-library>
- Nassau County Public Library: <https://nassaureads.com/ebooks/>
- Flagler County Public Library: <https://flaglerlibrary.org/ebooks/>
- Emily Taber Public Library (Baker County): <https://neflin.overdrive.com/library/youth>

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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:**



# Helping Your Child Transition Back to School After Christmas Break: *Simple Strategies for Success*

by Brett A. Walden, MPH

The holiday season brings a much-needed break from the routine of school, filled with fun, family, and relaxation. However, as the Christmas break comes to an end, many children may struggle to get back into the swing of school life. Transitioning back doesn't have to be stressful, though. With a few simple strategies, parents can make the process smoother and more enjoyable for their kids.

## 1. Ease Back Into the School Routine

- **Adjust Sleep Schedules Gradually:** A few days before school starts, begin moving bedtime and wake-up times back to the regular school schedule. This helps children feel well-rested and prepared for their school day.
- **Reintroduce Structure:** Slowly reintroduce school-like routines, such as having set meal times and a regular homework or reading period. This gives children a sense of normalcy and structure.

## 2. Talk About School in a Positive Way

- **Highlight Exciting Aspects:** Remind your child of the fun parts of school, such as seeing friends, participating in favorite subjects, or upcoming events.
- **Validate Feelings:** If your child feels anxious about returning, listen and acknowledge their feelings. Reassure them that it's normal to feel this way and that they'll settle back in soon.

## 3. Prepare Together

- **Organize Supplies:** Spend time going through their backpack, organizing



Continued on next page.



school supplies, and ensuring they're ready for the first day back. This can help them feel more in control and excited.

- **Set Goals:** Discuss their goals for the new term, whether it's improving a skill, completing a project, or trying something new. Setting positive intentions can boost motivation.

#### **4. Reconnect with Learning**

- **Engage in Light Learning Activities:** Encourage your child to read, solve puzzles, or practice math games in the days leading up to school. This warms up their brain for learning.
- **Review Past Work:** Look through last term's assignments together to remind them of their progress and what they've achieved so far.

#### **5. Create a Smooth Morning Routine**

- **Plan Ahead:** Lay out clothes, pack lunches, and gather school materials the night before. A well-organized morning can reduce stress and set a positive tone for the day.
- **Add a Positive Start:** Incorporate something they enjoy in the morning, such as a favorite breakfast or a quick family game, to make the start of the day enjoyable.

#### **6. Be Patient and Flexible**

- **Expect an Adjustment Period:** It's normal for children to feel tired or a little resistant as they adjust. Be patient and offer extra encouragement during the first few days.
- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Acknowledge their effort in getting back into the routine, whether it's waking up on time or completing their homework. Positive reinforcement can boost their confidence.

#### **7. Stay Connected**

- **Communicate with Teachers:** Reach out to your child's teacher to get a sense of upcoming lessons or any challenges your child might face. Staying informed can help you provide better support at home.
- **Check In with Your Child:** Take time to ask about their day and listen to their experiences. Showing interest in their school life can help them feel supported and valued.

By implementing these strategies, parents can help their children transition back to school with confidence and ease. A little preparation, patience, and positivity can go a long way in making the post-holiday adjustment period a success for the whole family.



# Engaging Indoor Activities for Special Needs Children During Cold Weather Months

By Jennifer O'Brien M.A. CCC-SLP



When the temperatures drop and outdoor play becomes less feasible, finding meaningful and enjoyable indoor activities for children with special needs can be a rewarding challenge. These activities can provide opportunities for sensory stimulation, motor skill development, and emotional connection, all while keeping children entertained and engaged.

**Sensory Play for Exploration and Relaxation** Sensory activities can be incredibly beneficial for children with special needs, offering both stimulation and a calming effect. Create a sensory bin using rice, beans, or kinetic sand, and hide small objects for a fun treasure hunt. Alternatively, craft a DIY sensory bottle by filling a clear bottle with water, glitter, and small objects to shake and watch. These activities can help improve focus and provide a soothing sensory experience.

**Creative Arts and Crafts** Art projects are a wonderful way to boost creativity and fine motor skills. Try finger painting, making collages with textured materials, or creating simple crafts like paper snowflakes or puppets. For children who may be sensitive to mess, consider using mess-free alternatives like water drawing pads or adhesive foam stickers. The key is to allow freedom of expression while tailoring the activity to their preferences and abilities.

**Movement and Gross Motor Activities** Even indoors, it's important to incorporate movement to support physical development. Set up an obstacle course using pillows, blankets, and chairs to encourage climbing, crawling, and jumping. Dance parties with favorite songs or interactive movement games like "Simon Says" can also get children moving and laughing. For children with mobility challenges, seated yoga or adapted movement exercises can provide gentle, engaging activity.

**Interactive Storytime and Games** Storytime can be transformed into a multi-sensory adventure by using props, sound effects, or interactive storytelling techniques. Choose books with tactile elements or repetitive phrases that children can join in on. Board games, puzzles, or simple card games can also provide structured play while teaching important social skills such as turn-taking and communication.

With a little creativity and preparation, indoor activities can be a source of joy and growth for children with special needs. Tailoring activities to suit individual preferences and abilities ensures that cold-weather days are filled with connection, learning, and fun.

# Spring Fling

for individuals with special needs

UF Health Neurodevelopmental Pediatric Center  
An evening of fun and games at our annual Spring Fling event!

When: **April 10, 2025**

5:30 to 8:00 pm

Where:

6271 St. Augustine Rd, Suite 1  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217

Use the QR Code to register online  
Or visit our Facebook page at  
[facebook.com/AutismJacksonville](https://facebook.com/AutismJacksonville)

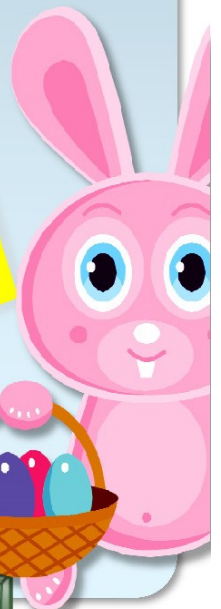


For more information email  
[Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu)  
or call 904.633.0760

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



SPRING FLING



Bring your camera for a photo  
with a hopping good special guest.

