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Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

8 Tips for Planning for a Successful Holiday for Your Autistic Child

The holidays are an exciting time as we share traditions, spend time with family, and navigate the different gatherings and celebrations. Holiday spirit can also bring holiday stress. We want to help you and your family have the most successful (and least stressful) season by offering our best practices and tips.

BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS

Start with Expectations

Having a positive and realistic mindset about what you want to create can make a big difference. What could go right this season? Keep an optimistic view of the possibilities for special moments you want to share. A winning holiday doesn't have to mean extravagant plans. Consider what would be ideal, be prepared to accept when flexibility is needed, and look for the wins along the way.



Consider Comfort and Safety Needs

When visiting events or other homes, bring items you know will bring comfort for your child—things like earplugs (or headphones), fidgets, and soft clothes. When traveling, ask for needed accommodations from your airline and hotel. Make sure you are aware of possible water nearby and review crisis plans with loved ones.

Continued on page 2.

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8 TIPS FOR PLANNING CONTINUED....

Practice Before Events

Now is a great time to discuss upcoming changes to schedules and routines. Involve your child in the process whenever possible. Playing memory games with photos of those you will see this holiday season allows your child to identify matching names and faces. Establish a phrase or code word with your child to practice using when they need to take a break from events to calm down and relax.

DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Maintain Routines

During the holidays, change is inevitable but find ways to create or maintain routines for your child. What are things you can build into every day? Perhaps it's something you do together each morning, afternoon, and evening (regardless of location). Utilizing visual supports like calendars and independent activity schedules can be helpful too.



Build in Fun!

Whether days are filled with errands or time at home, consider letting your child choose a couple of activities each morning for the day ahead. Here are some suggestions that might work for your family:

- Bake something together
- Do holiday arts and crafts
- Take a drive to see holiday lights in your neighborhood, zoo, or garden
- Help with decorations or gift wrapping
- Sing along with holiday music

Consider Sensory Needs

Holiday meals can be tricky for some. Plan ahead for alternative foods that you know your child will eat. As we mentioned earlier, being mindful of dressing in (or packing extra) comfortable clothing can be helpful. Preferred items, such as toys or other objects that help promote calm for your child, are a good idea too. Consider making a sensory box that includes things to stimulate your child's touch/sight/sound/taste/smell. Finally, establish a quiet "break space" that your child can utilize when needed.

Continued on page 3.

8 TIPS FOR PLANNING CONTINUED....

WRAPPING UP THE HOLIDAYS

Plan for Rest and Recovery

After each scheduled big event or outing, try to allow time for a quiet evening that follows. Start a list or document on your computer of things that went well that you want to repeat and ideas about what would make it easier next time.

Transition Back to School

Packing holiday decorations and unpacking clothes can be helpful signals to your child that things are moving back to the normal routine. Other visual cues like a countdown calendar for back to school can help prepare them. Show them when school starts and have them mark off the days. Leave extra time the first morning back to school so you can have a nice breakfast and move with ease into the day. If possible, organize a nice, calm activity after school and focus on what went well at the end of the day.



<https://learnbehavioral.com/blog/8-tips-for-planning-for-a-successful-holiday-for-your-autistic-child>

TRAVELING SUPPORTS

My Child Has Autism Cards: free

<https://store.tacanow.org/products/my-child-has-autism-cards>

Wings for Autism/Wings For All

<https://thearc.org/our-initiatives/travel/>

Autism Travel:

<https://autismtravel.com/>



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HOLIDAY SOCIAL NARRATIVES

Visiting Friends and Family for the Holidays

I like to see my friends and family during the holidays. We might go to someone else's house to have snacks or dinner. We might bring someone a present. I can say "Happy Holidays" to greet people.



We may have snacks or a meal with my friends and family. If there is food that I do not like, it is polite to say, "No Thank you." We might eat at a table. Sometimes people eat in the living room. I may sit on the couch, in a chair, or on the floor.



I can ask my parents if I can bring a favorite toy, book, or my iPad to play with. Before I play, I should first talk to my friends and family. I can tell them about my school or something I did on the weekend. People like to talk to me. It is nice for me to listen to the stories they want to tell me. Sometimes people play games together. When I want some time by myself, I can ask my parents if it is okay to use my iPad, read my book, or play with my toy.



I can have a nice visit with my friends and family during the holidays!

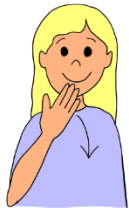
HOLIDAY SOCIAL NARATIVES CONTINUED...

Holiday Gifts

When we celebrate the holiday, I will be giving and getting gifts. Another word for a gift is a present. It is important to wait to open my presents. My parents will tell me when it is okay to open a present. I may need to take turns opening presents.



I can check the label or card to see who the present is from. It is good to say “thank you” to the person who gave me the present. If I already have the present or do not like the present, it is polite to just smile and say, “thank you.” Saying that I do not like the present may hurt the feelings of the person who gave me the present.



After I have opened my presents, I can ask mom or dad if I can play with or use my new present. I may need to wait until later or I may be able to play right away. It is fun to get and give presents. Other people feel happy when they get presents too.



16 TIPS FOR AN AUTISTIC- FRIENDLY HOLIDAY SEASON

16 Tips for an Autistic-Friendly Holiday Season

Smart ways for everyone to have a happy holiday

Holidays can be tough for autistic people. They may also be tough for their parents, guardians, and loved ones. But the good news is that for every likely problem you might encounter, there are real-world solutions you can put in place to make the season bright!



SENSORY ISSUES

Many autistic people have **strong negative reactions** to bright lights, loud noises, strong flavors and smells.¹ The holidays can sometimes feel like a sensory assault! When you're facing the probability of a sensory meltdown, here are some strategies to try:

1. **Avoid the sensory challenges.** Do you really need to take your child shopping with you, or could you possibly shop online, find a sitter, or ask someone else to pick up some items for you? These days, internet options are just as good as in-person shopping; you can even get the grocery store to deliver.
2. **Choose sensory-friendly options.** While flashing lights on a Christmas tree might overwhelm an autistic child, gently changing lights might charm or soothe them. Luckily, modern LED Christmas lights offer multiple ways to enjoy the twinkling. You can also, in many cities, find "sensory friendly" Santas, shops, and other holidays offerings. If these aren't available in your hometown, consider having a small, low-key "visit from Santa" in your own home.

Continued on page 7.

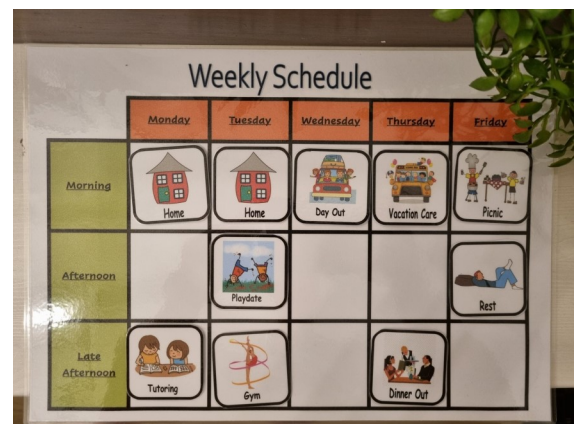
16 TIPS FOR AN AUTISTIC- FRIENDLY HOLIDAY SEASON CONTINUED...

3. Have a plan B in case of sensory overload. Some children can handle crowds and noise, but only for a limited amount of time. Make sure to pack noise-cancelling earmuffs or headphones, sunglasses or an eye mask, and stim toys. If you decide to go a big holiday event, be sure to have a "plan B" in case it turns out to be too much for them. If it's just the two or three of you, you can simply leave. If other siblings or friends are coming along, know in advance which adult will take the autistic child out of the difficult situation while others can stay and enjoy the experience. To avoid this, it is best to plan events in ways that limit the chances of sensory overload occurring. If the holiday celebration is held in your home, allow your child to retreat to their room or a playspace when they need a break. To make it more festive, ask if they want to decorate that space in advance. It's important to remember that their sensory capacity is simply lower than yours; they aren't trying to "ruin" the family celebration.

NEED FOR ROUTINE AND PREDICTABILITY

Most autistic kids thrive in situations that are consistent and predictable.² The holidays, of course, are precisely the opposite. Many families welcome new people, new sounds, new smells, new things in the house, and major changes to routines of eating, sleeping, and playing. How can you help an autistic child enjoy these special annual experiences?

1. **Pick and choose.** Most autistic people can handle some change to their routines, but very few can flexibly handle complete disruption. Knowing the child in your care as you do, you can pick and choose the kinds of changes they can handle most easily. For example, you may decide to put up a tree but stay at home at Christmas, or travel for Christmas but pack along a child's favorite toys and videos and stick to their usual schedule.
2. **Practice.** If you're heading for a special event or experience, plan and practice behaviors ahead of time so the child in your care is ready to handle something new. For example, if you're going to a religious space, take the child in your care to the decorated space at a quiet time. Talk with the religious leader or staff about songs or prayers to expect. How will the service be the same as or different from other services? If there's an order of service, share it and walk through it with your child. And, as always, have a Plan B just in case they can't make it through the entire service.
3. **Say "no thanks" when necessary.** You're invited to a holiday party and the "whole family" is asked to come. It'll be crowded and loud, and it will keep your child up past bedtime. In cases like this, the best option is usually to just say no (or to hire a sitter if that's a practical option).



Continued on page 8.

COPING WITH EXTENDED FAMILY

Holidays are especially [tough with extended family](#). That's because every family has traditions and expectations, and families may struggle to understand the needs of an autistic child. A family member may feel hurt that the child in your care doesn't like their cranberry sauce, while another can't figure out why they don't want to watch the football game. A different family member may be angry because the child in your care won't play with their cousins, while another is sure the child in your care just needs a little "tough love." How can you cope with so many challenges and expectations, all at the same time?



1. **Pre-plan and stick to your guns.** You already know which traditions are going to create problems, and you probably have a good idea about how your autistic kid will react to each one. Knowing all this, you can make a plan ahead of time and share it with family. The key, of course, is that you'll have to stick to your plan even when family members would rather you didn't. For example, you may need to say "we'll be delighted to open Christmas presents with you in the morning, but then we need downtime until dinner." You may even need to firmly tell family members that you will stay in a hotel rather than joining cousins at a family member's house for the weekend.
2. **Bring your own necessities.** If you're leaving home for the holidays, don't assume that anyone else will have what the child in your care needs to maintain their equilibrium. Bring along a DVD player and videos. Pack their favorite foods, blankets, pillow, stim toys, and other paraphernalia.
3. **Explain their needs.** Before any family members have a chance to get hurt feelings, be sure they understand that, for example, the child in your care is dairy-intolerant, or won't eat new foods, or will [love a Christmas present](#) provided it's exactly the toy they're expecting and nothing else. Help extended family by giving them some hints and tips about how best to reach out to and include the child in your care (and you) by modifying expectations, choosing specific foods, or turning on particular TV shows. Explain that your child doesn't mean to be rude or disrespectful, and that their bluntness or silence is their attempt at taking care of themselves.
4. **Help your family to help you.** Most families want to do all they can to make you all feel welcome, but they need to know what's helpful. Help them to help you! Let family members know which Christmas presents would be most welcome, which kinds of games and activities the child in your care enjoys, and the favorite foods of the child in your care. If it's appropriate in your family, you can also ask to share caretaking responsibilities so that you, too, can enjoy time with relatives.
5. **Have an escape route.** Both you and your child need to know what will happen if you get too much of family fun. What will you tell your family, and where will you go to get away? Is there a quiet room available? If not, can you head home or to a hotel room?

Continued on page 9.

16 TIPS FOR AN AUTISTIC- FRIENDLY HOLIDAY SEASON CONTINUED...

MORE HOLIDAY TIPS

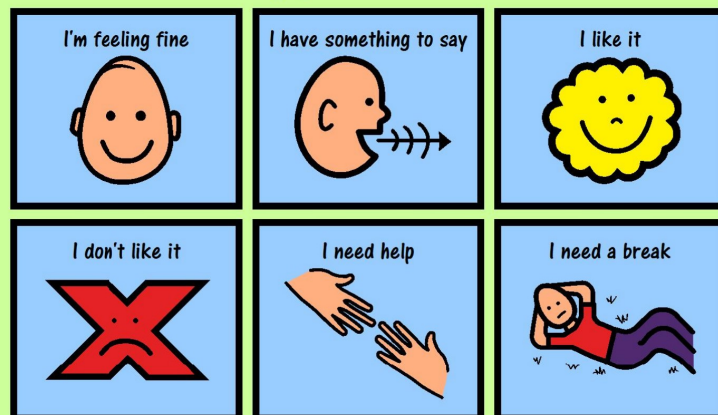
Here are a few more ideas for maintaining a calm, happy, and accessible holiday.

1. **Keep it simple.** You have enough on your plate without having to become Martha Stewart too! Put up a tree, wrap some presents, and stick a turkey in the oven. You're done!
2. **Establish your own traditions.** Autistic kids love traditions, and so does everyone else. Try creating your own family traditions that are easy and fun for everyone, including your autistic child.
3. **Change your expectations.** Sure, Christmas can be a time when family and friends get together for a loud celebration. But it can also be a time of quiet contemplation, or mellow family afternoons, or even an evening in front of the TV watching favorite movies.
4. **Take care of your other kids too.** If your autistic child has siblings, be sure they don't get pushed aside as you take care of your autistic child. If there are traditions or experiences they love, they should get the chance to enjoy them. That may mean a little juggling and hard work, but your children will thank you!
5. **Take care of yourself.** It's easy to get so busy with your child's needs that you forget your own. But, of course, their experience will depend a great deal on your own feelings of calm and seasonal joy. That means you, too, need a chance to experience your favorite holiday events, movies, and food. Call on the help of friends and family, if you need to, but be sure you get that special shot of holiday cheer that makes the season joyful!



<https://www.verywellhealth.com/holidays-with-an-autistic-child-4156462>

Holiday Pragmatic Communication Support Cards



The Picture Communication Symbols ©1981-2010 by Mayer-Johnson LLC. All Rights Reserved Worldwide. Used with permission. Boardmaker™ is a trademark of Mayer-Johnson LLC.

www.livespeaklove.com

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TRAVELING

Traveling with Your Child with Autism

Traveling can be an important part of creating a meaningful life for your child because it opens the door for them to experience the world, build relationships with extended family members and friends, or even receive necessary specialized medical care. Traveling with a child who has autism may come with some unique challenges, but that doesn't mean it's impossible.

Below, you will find tips for planning, packing, managing dietary needs, car travel, air travel, and safety considerations that will help you have an enjoyable trip. We've even included a few money saving tips for those who are traveling for medical care.



PLANNING

The key to successful travel with any family lies in preparation, but that is especially true when it comes to traveling with a child on the autism spectrum.

- Help your child develop travel skills by taking short trips before you embark on the “big” trip.
- Troubleshoot to avoid potential problems:
- Visualize each setting on your travel itinerary.
- List potential challenges your child may encounter in each of those settings.
- Figure out ways to overcome those challenges and prevent meltdowns from happening.
- Involve people on your child's team (therapists, teachers, aides, etc.) for ideas and help.
- In the months and weeks leading up to your trip, use social stories, pictures, and video-modeling to familiarize your child with your destination as well as the mode of transportation you are using to get there.
- Reduce stress on everyone by scheduling ample time to reach your destination or catch your plane.
- As much as possible, try to maintain your child's normal routine (especially meal and bed times).
- Develop a travel itinerary or portable picture schedule for your child to help them know what to expect.
- Make sure your child has a way to communicate their needs to everyone they may come in contact with.
- Don't assume that a travel representative understands how to accommodate your child's needs even if they have some sort of autism certification or training. Just because they have experience working with other people on the spectrum, doesn't mean they know what your child's individual needs are.
- If possible, bring someone along to help with caretaking responsibilities.

Continued on page 11.

TRAVELING CONTINUED...

PACKING

- Let your child practice packing and unpacking so it is not a surprise for them to see their things packed up in suitcases/bags.
- Pack comfort items, toys, electronic devices, books, movies, food – whatever will keep your child happy and entertained for the entire duration of your transit time.
- Stash away a few favorites a couple of weeks before your trip. Pull them out, one at a time, throughout your flight, car, or train ride to help pass the time.
- Don't forget extra portable chargers and batteries!
- Bring some of TACA's "My Child Has Autism" cards to hand out to strangers that don't understand your child's behaviors.
- If flying, pack only the necessities in your carry-on and check the rest. It's a lot easier to maneuver through security and crowds when you aren't lugging around a ton of bags.



MANAGING DIETARY NEEDS

Bringing some or all of your own food may be necessary in order to ensure your child has something safe to eat.

- If you drive, you can take as much food as your car can hold in coolers or boxes.
- For bus or train travel, they don't limit liquids but they do limit space, so find out their restrictions BEFORE you pack.
- If you take a plane, you are limited by both space and the amount of liquid you can carry on board, so you will want to bring solid foods and snacks. After you pass through security, you can buy water or juice.
- Pack extra food just in case you experience a delay – you don't want to add "hanger" to an already difficult situation.

CAR TRAVEL

- Call ahead to restaurants along your route to verify they will be able to accommodate your child's dietary needs or pack all of your child's meals and snacks.
- Have your car serviced before you leave to avoid unexpected breakdowns.
- Some kids with sensory processing disorder are prone to motion sickness, so monitor your child for signs of distress.
- Pack cleaning supplies and an extra set of clothes (in an easily accessible location) just in case your child gets sick, has a toileting accident, or spills.
- Schedule sensory breaks along your route.
- Deep pressure activities can be calming for our kids, so have them jump up and down for a bit during breaks and pack a weighted blanket or lap pad.
- Research health food store locations so you know where to buy safe foods once you arrive.

Continued on page 12.

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TRAVELING CONTINUED...

AIR TRAVEL

Flying by air can be the fastest way for you to get to your destination, but it can also present the most challenges if you're traveling with a child who has autism. Some examples of challenges your child may encounter when traveling by air include:

- Navigating through a crowded, noisy airport (especially if your child elopes)
- Waiting in many different lines
- Security checkpoints
- Routine flight delays
- Behaviors that can be misinterpreted as “suspicious” or “disruptive” and may get your family removed from a flight
- The good news is that thousands of families successfully overcome these challenges and take to the skies every day. This means that your family can too!



Months and Weeks Before Your Flight

- Familiarize your child with air travel by letting them know what to expect:
 - Create [Social Stories](#) with pictures of the airports you will be traveling in and out of to visually walk your child through the process.
 - Search for videos of airport walk-throughs on YouTube like this [one](#).
- Purchase books and coloring books like [The Noisy Airplane Ride by Mike Downs](#) or [My Plane Trip](#).
- Contact your local airport to enquire about enrolling in a Flight Rehearsal Program, which gives your child an opportunity to practice nearly every aspect involved with air travel:
 - Checking-in, obtaining a boarding pass, checking luggage, passing through security, waiting in the boarding area, boarding, taxiing to the runway, returning to the gate, exiting the plane, gathering checked luggage –basically everything except taking off.
 - Take field trips to the airport and walk around the areas that are open to non-ticketed visitors.
 - When booking your flight, let the airline know you will be traveling with someone who has autism:
 - Look for a box to check when purchasing tickets online or call the airline's special assistance hotline.
 - It's always a good idea to call a few days before you travel to verify that the information you gave the airline when booking your flight is still attached to your reservation.
 - Book nonstop flights to avoid potential issues such as meltdowns during transitions and missed, delayed, or cancelled flights.
 - Opt for red eyes to avoid crowds or if you think your child will sleep on the plane.
 - Reserve a seat in a location on the plane that works for you:
 - Bulkhead seats are roomier and eliminate the possibility of seat-kicking.
 - A center seat if looking out the window causes anxiety or to prevent your child from bolting into the aisle.

Continued on page 13.

TRAVELING CONTINUED...

Getting Through Security

- Be prepared to provide proof of your child's diagnosis.
- Become acquainted with and utilize the services that [TSA Cares](#) provides:
- Contact them **72 hours before** your flight to discuss ways they can assist your party in overcoming potential challenges while going through the security screening process.
- Download and print out the [TSA Notification Card](#). The card does NOT exempt your child from the screening process. However, it will give TSA officials a "heads-up" that your child has autism, and open the door for a conversation about the best way to get them safely through security. If needed, they may even conduct the screening in a more private setting.
- In some circumstances, you can request for a TSA passenger support specialist to meet you upon arrival and assist you throughout the entire process all the way up to the gate.
- Medications: Make sure medications are clearly labeled. Pack medication in a way that will make it easy for you to separate it from other belongings during the screening process.
- Inform TSA agents if you have: Medications that are in liquid form. Medications that need special handling (i.e. they cannot go through the x-ray machine and need to be visually screened instead).
- Freezer packs, IV bags, pumps, syringes, etc. that are needed to administer medication or keep it at a certain temperature.



At the Gate and on the Plane

- Request to pre-board to avoid standing in line on the jet bridge and make it easier for everyone in your party to get to their seats.
- Make sure your child has access to their noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs – airports and airplanes are loud!
- Prepare a way for your child to cope with the sensation of taking off and landing. Have them drink from a straw, eat a snack, chew gum, suck on candy, or chew on a chew toy.
- Let the passengers seated around you know that your child has autism, how they can interact with them, and how to help if a problem arises.
- Have some of TACA's "My Child Has Autism" cards handy to give to anyone who appears disgruntled by your child's behavior.

To read the conclusion of the article go to: <https://tacanow.org/family-resources/traveling-with-your-child-with-autism/>

All contents of this resource were created for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician, therapist, or other qualified health providers with any questions or concerns you may have.

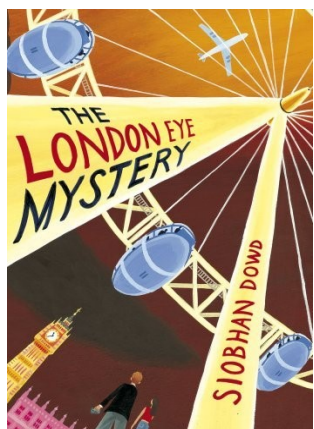
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BOOK REVIEWS

Need good gifts for book lovers this holiday season? Check out these genre fiction books with autistic characters.

There are lots of great books out there that feature autistic characters who struggle and triumph in real-life scenarios. However, many readers like to escape the real world through genre fiction (mysteries, science fiction, fantasy, etc). These days, more and more genre authors are featuring autistic characters (and many of these authors are autistic themselves). The following books are examples of this kind of genre fiction. You will need to read descriptions and reviews of these books to ensure that the content is appropriate for your child.

MYSTERIES



[The London Eye Mystery](#)

by Siobahn Dowd
(Grades 3-7)



[Me and Sam-Sam Handle the Apocalypse](#)

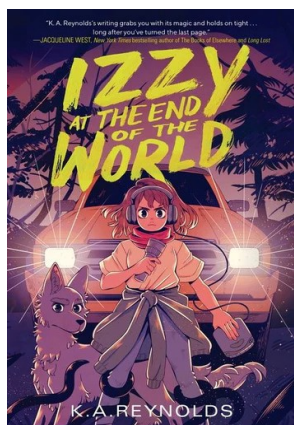
by Susan Vaught
(Grades 3-7)



[The Many Mysteries of the Finkel Family](#)

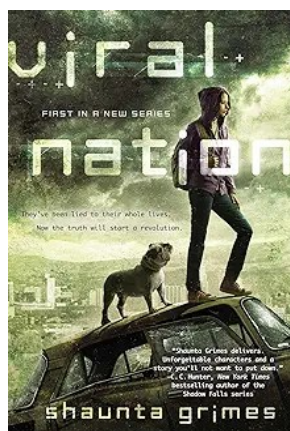
by Sarah Kapit
(Grades 3-7)

DYSTOPIAN/POST-APOCALYPTIC



[Izzy at the End of the World](#)

by K.A. Reynolds
(Grades 7+)



[Viral Nation](#)

by Shaunta Grimes
(Grades 7+)



[On the Edge of Gone](#)

by Corinne Duyvis
(Grades 9+) *also science fiction

Continued on page 12.

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BOOK REVIEWS CONTINUED...

FANTASY



[Kingdom of Pages: The Lost Prince](#)
by Michelle Nohrweis
(Grades 2-3)



[Like A Charm](#)
by Elle McNicoll
(Grades 3-7)

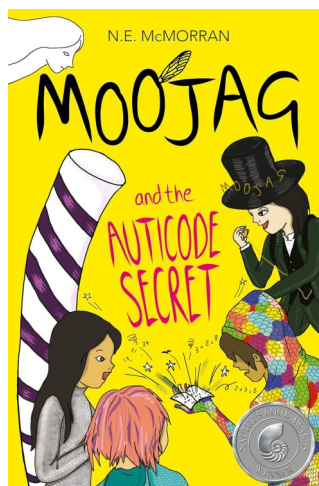


[Unseelie](#)
by Ivelisse Housman
(Grades 7+)

SCIENCE FICTION



[Show Us Who You Are](#)
by Elle McNicoll
(Grades 3-7)



[Moojag and the Auticode Secret](#)
by N.E. McMorran
(Grades 3-7)

The LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter is a compilation of national and regional resources designed to support families and school teams. Every effort is made to provide accurate and complete information in the LBL ESD Autism Agenda Newsletter; however, LBL ESD cannot guarantee that there will be no errors. For example, some of the content within curated resources from across the nation may not apply to Oregon. LBL ESD does not assume any legal liability for any direct, indirect or any other loss or damage of any kind for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information, product, or process disclosed herein, and do not represent that use of such information, product, or process would not infringe on privately owned rights.



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VISUALS

 holidays	 birthday	 Valentine's Day	 Martin Luther King Day
 President's Day	 Mardi gras	 St. Patrick's Day	 Easter
 Mother's Day	 Memorial Day	 Father's Day	 Fourth of July
 Labor Day	 Columbus Day	 Halloween	 Veteran's Day
 thanksgiving	 Christmas	 New Year's Eve	 Chinese New Year

Morning Routine							
							
Go potty	Wash face	Eat breakfast	Brush teeth	Put P.J.'s in laundry	Get dressed	Pick up toys	Put on shoes
							

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