

# CONNECTIONS



*A Quarterly Newsletter  
From the Parent Network of the Capital Region*



*The mission of the Parent Network of the Capital Region is to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to facilitate productive relationships with their school districts ensuring an appropriate education for their child. These services are offered free-of-charge.*

## HOLIDAY EDITION 2013

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## **NYSED Offers New Web Page on Graduation Requirements for Students with Disabilities**

The New York State Education Department has created a new page on its website that contains information and various resources related to graduation requirements and options for students with disabilities. According to NYSED, This page provides information on both high school diploma and non-diploma exiting credential options available to New York State students with disabilities. Information is provided on the course work, credit and assessment requirements students must successfully complete to earn a Regents or local high school diploma, including the various safety net options available to assist students with disabilities to earn a local diploma.

Requirements, model forms, guidance, and questions and answers for the Skills and

Achievement Commencement Credential and the New York State Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential are also provided. There is also a series of six webinars on the New York State Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential.

Check this site often for additional resources and updated questions and answers on both of these high school exiting credentials. The webpage can be found here: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/gradrequirements/home.html>

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# Tips for Surviving and *ENJOYING* the Holidays!

*Reprinted from the NCLD Editorial Team*

Have a second helping of stuffing, stay up past bedtime, shop 'til you drop and eat cookie dough right out of the bowl—it's the holiday season! For many of us, this is a time to focus on fun, friends, and family, flipping our schedules upside-down and filling our days with excitement. But for some children, including those with learning disabilities (LD), who depend upon daily routines and careful planning of activities, times of fun and excitement can dissolve into moments of anxiety and stress before the holiday decorations are even out of the box.

Sometimes we all think about throwing in the towel and just avoiding the things that make life harder. However,



with careful planning and a little creativity, it can be “easy as pie” to help children with LD make the most of holiday traditions and cherished family events.

We all know that the holidays are as much about baking the cookies as they are about eating them. For the family of a child with learning disabilities, preparation for holiday celebrations (from defrosting turkeys to greasing pie pans, shopping for special ingredients and preparing favorite holiday dishes to creating decorations and setting a festive table) offers wonderful opportunities for everyone to share in the holiday spirit. The special challenge for parents is to imagine the holiday experience through their child's eyes, and find ways to help them stay engaged and have fun while anticipating and avoiding potential obstacles along the way.

For some young children, large gatherings can be overwhelming and intimidating (think: Aunt Mabel's crushing hugs or Uncle Joe's loud, outrageous and very scary stories).

The child with a learning disability may find it hard to adjust to the rush of activity, new faces and unfamiliar voices, and might become fearful or over-stimulated and respond by withdrawing or acting out. And for children who have difficulty regulating attention or who have trouble with sensory integration (and, let's face it, for everybody else as well), the exaggerated embraces and loud noises can oftentimes be very disconcerting.

So light up the fireplace, dust off the piano, and get your child in gear for the best holiday season yet! Keep your child learning and feeling great with these “Holiday Survival Tips.”

## 1. **A picture is worth 1,000 words**

Get that art off the fridge and into the mail! Rather than sending store-bought cards this year, let your child draw pictures or create thank you notes on the computer (instead of handwriting each one, a task which can often be difficult for a child with LD).

## 2. **Give gift certificates**

Does somebody special in the life of your child need a haircut? Instead of trimming their tree, trim their hair! Gift certificates for books, restaurants, or personal services (like haircuts or nail grooming) are terrific options for teachers and special friends. These practical and easy-to-use gifts might be a welcome change from the “stuff” that often ends up as clutter or on tables at garage sales in the spring.

## 3. **Read, read, read!**

Leave the Christmas Carols to Dean Martin—help your child read your Christmas Carol this year. *Colorín Colorado* ([www.colorincolorado.org](http://www.colorincolorado.org)) has developed a list of fun literacy activities for children of all ages and at different levels of skills development for this holiday season.

## 4. **Arrange a check-in signal**

Yikes! Aunt Mabel is coming in for another kiss-attack and your child is stuck on the sofa with no way out. How do you know if your child is in distress? During social gatherings, check in with your child from time to time and arrange a special signal that will help you get each others' attention, if needed. Good luck next time, Aunt Mabel...

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## NAMI Family to Family Program Set to Begin

NAMI Rensselaer County is very excited to be able to announce we are getting ready to present the NAMI Family to Family course as of Monday, January 13th at the SUNY School of Public Health, 1 University Place, Rensselaer. The classes will be taught over 12 weeks on Monday evenings at 6 pm to 8:30 pm. NAMI Family-to-Family Program, a dynamic 12-week family psycho-education course offered to and taught by individuals who have a loved one living with a serious mental illness (Major Depression, Anxiety Disorders, Bipolar, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, PTSD, etc.)

The Family-to-Family curriculum provides participants with clear, accurate, and practical information on topics such as the categories and biology of mental illness; medications and research; crisis management; communication skills; problem solving; self-care; advocacy, and recovery. A recent study conducted by the University of Maryland School of Medicine showed that course participants gained a greater understanding of mental illness, coped much better, worried less, and felt newly empowered to advocate for better treatment and services for their relative.

This course, taken by over 115,000 individuals nationwide to date, is offered free of charge and yet the knowledge is priceless. The only requirements are that you are a family member or friend of someone living with mental illness and you must pre-register to be a participant so that we can order your manual and supplies. This course is not intended to be taught to individuals with mental illness as NAMI Peer to Peer is more appropriate.

If you are interested in registering, please contact our NAMI trained Family to Family teachers: Pam Slotsky @ 428-0975 or Bonnie Nasca 669-0456. If your call goes to voice mail, please feel free to leave a message and they will be sure to call you back.

## UPCOMING PNCR EVENTS

### **Understanding Bullying Risks for Children with Disabilities**

Thursday, December 19, 2013  
10:30am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

### **Understanding the Learning Needs of Children with ADHD**

Thursday, January 9, 2014  
9:30am-11:30am  
Clifton Park, NY

### **Preparing for Your CSE Annual Review Meeting**

Wednesday, January 15, 2014  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY  
OR  
Wednesday, February 26, 2014 (Parents As Advocates Meeting)  
6:30pm-8:30pm  
Saratoga Springs, NY

### **Graduation Options and Transition for Students with Disabilities**

Tuesday, January 21, 2014  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

### **Transition from CPSE to CSE**

Wednesday, January 22, 2014  
6:30pm-8:30pm  
Latham, NY

### **Overview of the Special Education Process**

Thursday, January 30, 2014  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

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*Please visit "Upcoming Events" on our homepage at [www.pncrny.org](http://www.pncrny.org) for complete program descriptions and to register for these events.*

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## Want to Become a NYS Partner in Policymaking?

The NYS Partners in Policymaking program is an innovative leadership training opportunity for individuals with developmental disabilities and family members. During an eight-month course, participants gain knowledge, skills, and confidence to make changes in policy, perception, and treatment of individuals with disabilities. Upon completion of the program, participants join a graduate network. The 2014 NYS Partners program is offered as a series of interactive modules and webinars, with one statewide and one regional meeting. The program focuses on including self-advocates and individuals from diverse backgrounds, and on developing participant's familiarity with technology and online communication tools for advocacy.

Go to [www.nyspip.org/](http://www.nyspip.org/) and fill out the on-line application. Deadline for the 2014 class is Dec. 31st, 2013. For more information, email Jackie Yingling, Training Coordinator, at [Yingling@advocacycenter.com](mailto:Yingling@advocacycenter.com)

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## *Holiday Tips-continued*

### **5. Make time for yourself**

As if your schedule isn't busy enough during the rest of the year, the holidays add another layer of stuff to jam into your calendar—shopping for presents, holiday parties...it's easy to neglect one of the most important people in your life—you! Don't forget or neglect your own needs as you care for others during the holiday season.

### **6. Practice makes perfect!**

Prepare your young child for making visits (or hosting company) by "role playing" through social events. Practice saying "hello!", answering questions like "What's new?" and responding to uncomfortable situations like having to sit through Uncle Joe's never ending and sometimes embarrassing stories, or breaking the ice when those awkward moments of silence occur. (Remember—sharing social times should be fun! Help your child locate their inner Hollywood Star and run with it!)

### **7. Slip some books into those stockings!**

All right, so you caved in and bought your child that expensive, mind-numbing video game system. (At least you set some limit about how many hours they can sit in front of the screen, thumbs-a-wiggling, wiping out aliens or fighting off warriors, right?) Don't forget to add some fun reading material that you can read together into their stockings! Books are great, and comic books and magazines are fine too! Some great ideas can be found at Reading Rockets and Colorín Colorado.

### **8. Bring along an activity bag**

Have you ever pulled away from a crowd to send a text message in a social situation where you felt uncomfortable? Picked up a book or magazine and started flipping through pages to avoid feeling awkward? Quiet, private activities can help your child feel at ease during social gatherings that might be intimidating or overstimulating. Put together an activity bag with quiet activities that your child enjoys, like coloring books and crayons, puzzles, books, non-messy crafts (leave the finger-paints at home!) and electronic games. And if you can include some items that might encourage cooperative play with others (like "tic-tac-toe" and "pick-up sticks"), so much the better.

### **9. Keep your kids fueled**

If you're hitting the malls, bring along snack packs. Having snacks on hand saves money and makes it easy to keep shopping without having to stop. Kids (and grown ups) can become irritable when they're tired, hungry and thirsty, so plan for snacks and short breaks along the way.

### **10. It's OK to peel away!**

If you are hosting people at your home, help your child know when and how it is OK to peel away and have some down time without offending your guests. When you are visiting friends and family, talk with the hosts and identify a quiet space where your child can "escape" when he or she is feeling overwhelmed or in need of some time alone. Also be sure to ask about any house rules (like no food in the bedrooms and no chasing the cats) that will make the visit fun for all.

### **11. Don't overdo it**

We all know that holiday celebrations can be tiring and stressful for children and adults alike. Don't be reluctant to be the last ones to show up (just call ahead if you are running really late), choose something other than fruit cake to bring along (a game or puzzle is often a great substitute for food) and it's fine to be the first ones to say thanks for the eggnog and goodbye if that will help make your visit more enjoyable. Also, remember that no one likes a cranky houseguest! So don't feel obligated to accept each and every social invitation. Keep a calendar on hand and plan for both outside events and quiet times with your child and family.

### **12. Special holiday times begin at home**

Make time for private, special interactions with your child during the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Building a gingerbread house, making decorations for your home (and to give as gifts to others) or finger-painting place mats for Grandma can become a tradition that will stay with your family for years to come.

### **13. One-two-three, say cheese!**

I'm ready for my close-up! Want to get one with me and grandpa? Let your child be the event photographer. This could be a great ice-breaker for children who need to maintain some distance from the action and still feel engaged. It is also a

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## Holiday Tips-continued

wonderful way for children to build fond memories and interact with family and friends. Keep the fun going by helping your child share the photo memories after the event.

### 14. Don't forget your routine

Cookies and milk will always be a part of the holiday season, but eating well and getting enough rest are important all year round. Don't let these routines get away from you completely, as they will be harder to re-establish once the holiday season is done.

### 15. Buy universal toys

So you want to buy your children something to stimulate their brains this holiday season, but with all the "educational" toys out there, it's tough to find the right ones that are teaching the right things. This article from *News for Parents.org*—"Play it Safe: Choose the Right Toy for Your Child"—offers some ideas on how to select the most appropriate toys for your child.

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## 2014 Toy Guide for Differently-Abled Kids Now Available

*Toys"R"Us* has once again published its annual *Toys"R"Us Toy Guide for Differently-Abled Kids*, an easy-to-use resource featuring specially selected toys that encourage play for children with physical, cognitive or developmental disabilities. This complimentary, resource speaks to a child's individual needs and offers qualified toy recommendations based on research from the National Lekotek Center, a nonprofit organization that evaluates all of the toys featured in the *Guide*.

Copies of the *Guide* are available at all Toys"R"Us® and Babies"R"Us® locations nationwide. If you represent a special needs organization or are a special needs educator or therapist, you may e-mail [DifferentlyAbled@toysrus.com](mailto:DifferentlyAbled@toysrus.com) to receive copies in bulk free of charge for redistribution. A downloadable version is available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). A "flippable" digital version can be found on the Toys"R"Us website.

Toys"R"Us works with the National Lekotek Center, a nonprofit organization that evaluates hundreds of toys based on specific criteria during therapeutic play sessions to identify those items that best contribute to the development of children with physical, cognitive or developmental disabilities. The National Lekotek Center carefully reviews hundreds of products, selects those with exceptional qualities and writes descriptive copy highlighting the features that make the items suitable for children with special needs. Toys featured in the *Guide* are everyday playthings suitable for children of varying skills and abilities.

For nearly 30 years, the National Lekotek Center has provided therapeutic play services to thousands of children in dozens of centers across the United States. As a result of this expertise, the organization has become the leader in determining appropriate toys for children with unique abilities. You can learn more about the National Lekotek Center by visiting [www.Lekotek.org](http://www.Lekotek.org).

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## Toy Buying Tips

Selecting a toy for a child who has a disability? Here are the questions the play experts at the National Lekotek Center ask when choosing developmentally appropriate toys for kids with special needs. Use these questions to guide you in making the right match between the child for whom you're buying and the toys you are considering.

### **MULTI-SENSORY APPEAL**

Does the toy respond with lights, sounds or movement to engage the child? Are there contrasting colors? Does it have a scent? Is there texture?

### **METHOD OF ACTIVATION**

Will the toy provide a challenge without frustration? What is the force required to activate? What are the number and complexity of steps required to activate?

### **PLACES THE TOY WILL BE USED**

Will the toy be easy to store? Is there space in the home? Can the toy be used in a variety of positions such as side-lying or on a wheelchair tray?

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS**

Can play be open-ended with no definite right or wrong way? Is it adaptable to the child's individual style, ability and pace?

### **CURRENT POPULARITY**

Is it a toy that will help the child with special needs feel like "any other kid?" Does it tie in with other activities, like books and art sets that promote other forms of play?

### **SELF-EXPRESSION**

Does the toy allow for creativity, uniqueness and making choices? Will it give the child experience with a variety of media?

### **ADJUSTABILITY**

Does it have adjustable height, sound volume, speed and level of difficulty?

### **CHILD'S INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES**

Does the toy provide activities that reflect both developmental and chronological ages? Does it reflect the child's interests and age?

### **SAFETY AND DURABILITY**

Does the toy fit with the child's size and strength? Does it have moisture resistance? Are the toy and its parts sized appropriately? Can it be washed and cleaned?

### **POTENTIAL FOR INTERACTION**

Will the child be an active participant during use? Will the toy encourage social engagement with others?

