

# Enriching the Parent

Information & Support  
for Families of Children with Special Needs  
Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, & Yancey

December 2008



## Special Occasions with Children with Special Needs

### Making family gatherings good, not ghastly

Family get-togethers are the worst. Too many people. Too much noise. Too much food. Too many opinions on the ways you're raising your children. Never mind the fact that kids with special needs often go crazy during big family events—they're often not exactly a shining hour for us as parents, either. How can you make it through the meal without chewing someone out, putting your foot in your mouth, or eating your words? If a quiet dinner at McDonald's is out of the question, here are some ways to get through these gatherings without going crazy.



### Make an escape plan.

Better to leave before things go bad than stick it out and live to regret it. If you're spending the holiday at a home other than your own, arrange a time limit or a signal ahead of time and if your child seems to be coping better than expected, you can always extend the deadline, but be ready to split at a moment's notice. If at all possible, when your holiday travels involve such a distance that you'll have to stay overnight, get a hotel room. Your child (and you) will need someplace quiet and chaos-free to decompress after so much family exposure. Then again, if everybody's coming over to your house for dinner, make your child's room off-limits to everybody but him or her, and encourage your child to use it as a refuge when things get overwhelming.

### Clothes don't make the kid.

If your child has sensitivities to certain types of clothes, or just stubbornly insists on wearing something you (or, you suspect your mother) will find inappropriate, don't pick a battle today. Eyebrows may raise if your kid's in sweats while ever other little cousin is dressed to the nines, but you want to start your child out with as low a stress level as possible. Fussing over clothes, or putting him or her in clothes that you know will cause anxiety, is a bad way to start. And this way, when the inevitable spills occur, you'll be the only parent at the table who's not worrying about ruined outfits.

### Augment the menu.

Whether you're bringing a little something to

somebody else's party or planning your own repast, make sure there's something your child will enjoy eating. And then don't comment if that's *all* he or she will eat. The goal of the day isn't cleaning your plate or trying new foods or pleasing the cook. It's getting through the meal with a minimum of trauma. And, more importantly, it's about giving thanks for the good things in our lives. If your child only wants to give thanks for macaroni and cheese, so be it.

### Be the one who watches the kids.

Keeping a close personal eye on your little one has a number of benefits. You can intervene in inter-child squabbles. You can assess your child's level of overstimulation and act accordingly. You can play with your child if no one else will, or lead the other children in a game your child can participate in. And, perhaps most importantly during these events when you feel every judgmental eye is on you and your family, you can avoid conversations with grownups. You'd sure like to discuss your child-rearing flaws with Aunt Gertrude, but — *oh honey, do you need some help with that? Why don't we sit down here on the floor and do it together.*

### Bring supplies.

Fill a backpack with things your child finds reliably comforting or fun to play with—toy cars, a stuffed animal, a tape player, a few books. Having them available, even if he or she doesn't actually play with them much, may give your child a sense of familiarity that will be relaxing. If he or she gets overstimulated, find a quiet corner or a back room in which to spend a little time with the toys. If nothing else, toting the toy bag around and making it available when necessary gives you something to do that does not involve long conversations with unpleasant relatives.

### Beware of bribes.

You may be tempted to offer some big reward for your child's good behavior at a family get-together, but that can backfire. The fear of losing that much-wanted thing may add to your child's stress overload and actually bring on even worse behavior. Some kids may talk themselves out of wanting the reward because they feel so incapable of providing the required self-discipline. And once you've lost that incentive, things can go downhill very quickly. Small spontaneous rewards during the course of the event are often more effective, because they reduce stress and improve mood. Then, if your child does pull it off, you can always



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**Family Support Network  
High Country  
2359 Hwy 105  
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give the big reward later with much praise and encouragement.

#### Remain calm.

Memorize this phrase, and repeat it over and over in your head whenever you feel yourself losing your cool: *I do not have to apologize for being a good parent to my child.* We may struggle under the weight of “advice” or disapproval from family members, but our kids don’t care about that: They need what they need. You know best what your child needs, and providing it is your most important responsibility, no arguments. Since most children with special needs react badly to stress in their environment, particularly stressed-out parents, staying relaxed and low-key is one of the best things you can do to keep your child’s behavior in line. You can always throw a tantrum when you get home.

#### Don’t overbook.

Hold the festivities down to one event per holiday.

By Terri Mauro,

[www.specialchildren.about.com](http://www.specialchildren.about.com)

## Area Support Groups

- **Alleghany County:** First & Third Thursday of each month at 6:00 pm at The Family Resource Center, Sparta. For more information or to RSVP contact Norma at: 336-246-3222 or 1-866-812-3122.
- **Ashe County:** There will be a different meeting schedule for November and December. Contact Norma for details. Last Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm at Midway Baptist Church Fellowship Hall, 1670 Mount Jefferson Rd, West Jefferson. For more information or to RSVP contact Norma at: 336-246-3222 or 1-866-812-3122. Meal provided with RSVP.
- **Mitchell & Yancey:** Call Teresa Emory 866-448-5781 for dates and times
- **Watauga County:** Second Friday of each month at 6:00 pm at Unitarian Fellowship “House” 381 E. King Street, Boone. (Beside the Playhouse) For more information or to RSVP contact Kaaren at: 828-262-6089 or 1-866-812-3122. Meal and childcare provided with RSVP.
- **Wilkes County:** There will be a different meeting schedule in November and December. Contact Norma for details. Last Thursday of each month at 6:15 pm at “Our House” 203 E. Main Street, Wilkesboro. For more information or to RSVP contact Norma at: 336-246-3222 or 1-866-812-3122. Snacks will be served.

## Family Fun for the Holidays

### Photo Ornament

For most families, ornaments are more than decorations; they're memories in miniature. Especially the homemade creations, whose cockeyed charm so perfectly captures the creativity of your child at a particular moment in time.



This year, why not take the idea a step further and let your kids put a little bit of themselves into the decorations--literally. Each child gets to choose a photo of himself or herself to incorporate into an ornament, which can be as simple as a Popsicle-stick frame or as sophisticated as a decoupage Styrofoam ball. The only requirement is that the finished product reflect the personality of its maker (and include the year in which it was made). Your kids will have fun comparing their faces over the years, and you'll love seeing your tree transformed into a virtual family album.

Source: <http://familyfun.go.com/arts-and-crafts/season/feature/famf109traditions/famf109traditions4.html>

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### Cranberry Ice Cream Pie

This fanciful treat adds a refreshing finale to the standard holiday spread. Plus, it's an ideal dessert to make a day or two ahead.



To be sure you're using the freshest berries, you'll want to choose fruit that has bounce in it. Or you can put it to the water test. Small pockets of air trapped in fresh cranberries make them bounce -- and float in water.

#### Recipe Ingredients:

- 9-inch chocolate crumb pie shell
- 2 cups vanilla ice cream, softened
- 1 cup canned whole-berry cranberry sauce
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- 2 cups whipped topping
- 2 tablespoons sliced almonds, toasted

#### Directions:

1. Chill the pie shell in the freezer while you prepare the filling.

2. Place the softened ice cream, cranberry sauce, and orange juice in a large bowl and stir with a wooden spoon until the ingredients are well blended.
3. Spoon the filling into the chilled shell and freeze the pie until firm (4 hours or more). Next, spread the whipped topping over the ice cream layer and sprinkle on the almonds. Cover the pie and return it to the freezer. Allow the pie to stand at room temperature for 20 minutes before slicing it. Serves 8.

Source: <http://jas.familyfun.go.com/recipefinder/display?id=50295>

## **Parent to Parent FSN-HC Presents: Pearls of Love and Logic**

### **Special Thoughts on Raising Kids**

#### **Don't Touch!**

I hate to go shopping. I've hated it for as long as I can remember. A number of people in the past have tried to help me with my problem but to no avail.

I had a flashback the other day. I was coping with yet another shopping excursion by watching parents deal with their kids, when I suddenly heard a slap followed by the sound of a screaming parent:

"How many times have I told you not to touch? Do you want to go into the restroom for another spanking? Don't you make me tell you one more time to keep your hands off the things! Don't touch! And I mean it!"

There was the flashback. I could see myself fifty years ago in Thrifty Drug Store in Los Angeles. There I was, going through the store, doing what little kids do, trying to be big by doing the same things the big people did.

The adults touched and examined the merchandises. I touched and examined the merchandise. Then I was reprimanded, and my hands were slapped.

Human beings, by nature, are copying animals. This means we learn best by watching others and imitating their behavior. That is one of the reasons we have so many habits, values, and mannerisms that are similar to those of our own parents.

This imitating happens on the subconscious level. We are never actually aware of it taking place. Psychologists call it learning through modeling.

Many of the battles I see in the shopping centers between

kids and parents can be traced back to this issue of modeling. Unfortunately, many parents are frustrated when their kids try to act like adults.

#### **There is a solution**

##### **Step One-**

Teach your children to act in independent, yet responsible, ways. For instance, many parents have found it helpful to spend a little time teaching their children how to be responsible shoppers. They teach their children how to touch the merchandise, when to touch and when not to touch.

##### **Step Two-**

Let your youngster know you only touch things you can afford to pay for in case of an accident. This gives you something to say instead of, "Don't touch." From this point on, it will be more effective to ask, "That costs twenty nine dollars. Can you afford to pay for it?" Most children will say, "But I won't break it." The adult's answer at this point should be, "That's not the point. We agreed that you can touch things you can afford to buy. Please put it back."

##### **Step Three-**

Some time is spent actually practicing in a store on items that are unbreakable. Tell your youngster the two of you are going into the store today to look at things and practice deciding which things should and should not be touched. Then spend a little time practicing the right way to touch, and how to put things back.

##### **Step Four-**

Now it is time to catch the child doing it right so you can provide some positive reinforcement. "Look how well you are doing. It makes me happy to see you acting so grown up." In the event things are not going well, you can ask, "What was our agreement about that?"

##### **Step Five-**

Once the lesson is taught, and there have been opportunities for practice, you can provide a short little review before you walk into a shopping area: "Tell me how you plan to handle your shopping. I'm anxious to hear how well you can do."





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**Information and Location for ALL Support  
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