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July 4th Survival Tips for Kids With Special Needs

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If you're headed out to any of these Independence Day celebrations around the Triangle, you might be concerned about how your little ones will react to the explosions of fireworks and crush of crowds, especially if you have children with special needs. Fireworks, while spectacular, can be terrifying to some children, but as a parent, you

can help ease their fears, prepare them for what to expect, and make them as comfortable as possible while they're outdoors. Aviva Weiss, a pediatric therapist and mother, offers 5 survival tips for kids of all ages, especially those with special needs, such as sensory processing integration and autism. Some of the products mentioned are made by Fun and Function, a company she founded that designs toys and therapy equipment for special needs.

Pyrotechnics 101 - Prepare and practice. Life is more manageable when you know what to expect. Take time now to prepare and practice. For example, set aside a few minutes to make loud noises with pots and pans, or watch a fireworks video on YouTube. Then ask your child: What can we do when it feels too noisy? Experiment with helpful accessories like earmuffs to muffle the noise, chewies to bite away the stress, fidget balls to squeeze, and weighted lap pads with animal designs to calm.

Create a comfortable environment. Standing for long periods can increase stress, so pack some comfortable seating and reclining options. Wiggle cushions or gel seating cushions can take the edge off. Or spread out a weighted blanket, which can also be used to wrap a child, burrito-style, with deep calming compression. A light pop-up tent is portable and gives a feeling of distance and control over the environment.

Channel energy with a “job.” Create a fun job that gives your child a sense of control and a clear focus to channel energy. For example, ask your child to take photos of the festivities or draw the shapes and patterns in the firework display.

Get away from the maddening crowd. Try watching the fireworks from a distance so you can enjoy the stunning visual effects without the intense noise and crowds. Park nearby so you can take a break in the car or have a quick get-away if needed.

Remember it’s OK to be different. Fireworks can be frightening or a mesmerizing multi-sensory experience -- or both. It’s OK to feel the range of emotions and helpful to label the feelings too. Try playing a game like Guess How I Feel? to develop self-expression and empathy. Knowing your strengths and limitations, and being able to express your needs, can be the best blast of all.

Protect Your Hearing

When you’re out watching firework display, The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, recommends these measures for protecting your hearing:

- * Sit at least 500 feet from where the fireworks are launched. Fireworks noise for spectators 800 feet away ranges from 88 to 126 dB. But from 10 feet away, it’s 155 dB—louder than a military jet takeoff!
- * If you notice ringing or buzzing in your ears, move farther away.
- * Bring earplugs for every family member. You can find them at many drug stores or sporting goods stores for just for a few dollars or less. (For children under ages 7 or 8, these earplugs may be too big, so consider using child-size earmuffs. Ear protection must fit properly in order to provide protection.)

For more information, browse these [July Fourth Fireworks Tips to Protect Your Kids](#)

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