



## FIVE 4TH OF JULY SURVIVAL TIPS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Written by: Aviva Weiss

Date: July 3, 2013



Ready for July 4th? If your family is divided about whether fireworks are spectacular or a noisy nightmare, read on. Pediatric therapist and mom Aviva Weiss shares 5 survival tips for kids of all ages, especially those with special needs such as sensory processing integration and autism.

### ***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 madding 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.

*Aviva Weiss is an occupational therapist, mom of six, and founder of Fun and Function, a Pennsylvania-based company that designs toys and therapy equipment for special needs.*

- See more at: <http://www.charlotteparent.com/articlemain.php?Five-4th-of-July-Survival-Tips-for-Children-with-Special-Needs-4742#sthash.KnfebzpF.dpuf>

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