As we prepare for Thanksgiving, it is important to minimize the holiday stressors, in order to maximize our ability to be thankful. To do this, we prepare individuals for the change in routine and schedule, for sensory challenges, and for communication needs.

Communication Needs

We have prepared for the change in routine and sensory challenges. It is also important to consider communication needs that exist surrounding Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving weekend.

Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder experience challenges related to speech and language. Providing options for communication allows the individual to make comments or requests, communicate needs, and interact socially with others during the holiday. Many individuals use a combination of evidence-based strategies, such as picture exchange, speech generating devices, visuals, and functional communication in structured environments, such as at school. Continuing these strategies at home and throughout the holidays is a good idea. This promotes a calm and consistent approach in addressing communication needs.

Visual supports and picture exchange communication can be used with individuals for familiar activities and foods. Remember to pack pictures and visuals that you are using, not only for the visual schedule for the day, but also to promote opportunities for individuals to interact with you and families and to make requests known. If an individual is using a speech generating device or program, those should be brought with you for the holiday events. Regardless if the individual uses low or high tech options, bring along whatever visuals and communication boards that they use regularly. If they are verbal and struggle with specific types of communication, use of narratives to prepare for conversations may also be helpful. Some individuals may also benefit from previewing abstract language related to Thanksgiving that they may encounter.
Here is an example of a 5-minute video clip about Thanksgiving related expressions on You Tube:

Thanksgiving: English Vocabulary [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD9ZtiX7d7g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD9ZtiX7d7g)

Visit our website for examples of holiday visual supports.

If an individual has been using a system successfully at school or at home, remember to share across environments and to use these systems consistently. Keeping a low tech back up system is a good idea, in case batteries run low or devices get lost in the rush. This could be achieved by printing some of the most frequently used pages from your communication device. Involve family and friends in opportunities to communicate and connect and encourage individuals to do the same.