Independent Living Skills and the Holidays: 5 Ways to get your Child with VI Involved in the Prepping and Planning

By: Evangeline Worsley

The holiday season is upon us! For many families, this time of year calls for cleaning, cooking, and lots of time spent with loved ones. Here are some tips for helping children with visual impairments of all ages play an active role in prepping and planning.
Menu Planning and Shopping

Most family gatherings begin with developing a menu and making a list of the food, drinks, and other items needed from the grocery store. There are plenty of ways for your family to make this a great learning experience for a young person with a visual impairment.

● Make grocery lists in braille or audio recordings on a smartphone to help keep track of what’s needed
● Help your child plan the budget, and even let them handle transactions with cashiers (under your supervision)
● Teach your child about traditional family meals that are a must-have during the holiday season and the ingredients you’ll need to pull it off
● Sample new foods they’ve never tried before
● A hectic trip to the store can transform into an engaging scavenger hunt as you and your child seek out new ingredients that aren’t on your typical week’s grocery list

PRO TIP:
Shop off-hours to lessen the stress as you explore the grocery store together!
Decorating and Crafting

Decorating for the holidays is a great time for family bonding and it goes beyond hanging ornaments on the tree and stringing up lights. Make decorating an inclusive experience by getting creative and incorporating all of the senses.

- Create gratitude jars for the Thanksgiving table. Have your child print or braille the things your guests are grateful for at the start of the festivities. Store them on the table as a reminder of all that’s good!
- Collect leaves, place them underneath construction paper with the veins facing upwards and use a crayon to color over the bumpy surface for beautiful, handmade creations.
- For Christmas, make a centerpiece together in a vase or bowl using scented pinecones. The textured cones and the fresh smell of cinnamon will make decorating a multi-sensory experience for all.
- Create unique name tags for the dinner table using braille and large print. Your guests will love this personal touch and your child will have a chance to practice their literacy skills by learning how to spell the names of loved ones.
- Arrange fresh flowers into small vases to brighten up the dinner table.

PRO TIP: Multi-colored holiday string lights will be a huge hit if your child has CVI!
Helping in the Kitchen

Cooking for a holiday can seem like an undertaking, but your child with VI is here to help! As a family, identify some of the tasks that you’d like to see your child participate in when it comes to the kitchen. Help them get started by breaking a larger task into smaller, more manageable pieces.

- Dishwashing can be broken down into many parts that your child can take part in: scraping food from a dirty plate, rinsing dishes, loading a dishwasher, drying, and putting things away.
- Prepare the food! Start off small by rinsing fruits and vegetables, measuring and mixing ingredients, and setting timers. Move on to more advanced skills like chopping, using an oven, and following the steps of a recipe.
- Create an accessible workspace by labeling cabinets, kitchen gadgets, and ingredients in braille or large print.
- Tackle a simple recipe that your child can create with you from start to finish.

See students using braille recipes and their braille shopping lists to create frozen strawberry yogurt fruit cups.

PRO TIP: Reach out to your child’s teacher of the visually impaired or occupational therapist to learn more about tools that can be useful for your child to be independent in the kitchen.
Gift Shopping and Wrapping
One of the biggest joys of the holiday season is giving gifts to loved ones and friends. Encourage your child to share the spirit of giving with these tips!

- Create gift-ideas for siblings, family, and friends
- Give your child a small budget for gift giving and challenge them to stick to it
- Build a gift-wrapping assembly line and task your child with one of the jobs. From cutting the tape to using scissors and assembling gift bags, there’s plenty to do!
- Create homemade cards using textured paper and include a personal, heartfelt note

**PRO TIP:** Assign each family member a tactile identifier such as a piece of pasta or beads and glue them to the presents to help your child know which gifts belong to who!

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Hosting
The work isn’t over when the guests arrive! Your child can help make any family gathering a hit by entertaining guests.

- Make sure the house is ready for guests! Have your child complete their regular chore list in addition to other tasks around the house to make your space party-ready
- Have your child greet your guests, help them carry gifts and food, and collect coats and winter gear
- Play accessible games like the new braille Uno
- Your child can help serve appetizers and set the table in preparation for the big meal

**PRO TIP:** Make sure you maintain a clear path from the kitchen to the rest of the party so that your child can navigate the space with ease.

Inviting your child with a visual impairment to play a key role in planning for the holidays will help them learn new skills, participate meaningfully in the fun, and they’ll develop a sense of pride in what they’ve accomplished. We can’t wait to hear from you about all the fun our students will have this season. Happy holidays from Overbrook School for the Blind!