

PFA Tips

Surviving 4th of July Fireworks

They're the symbol of our independence and bring joy to the faces of many. But, for people that experience intense sensory input, they can be thunderous and blinding. And each year so many of us stop and ask ourselves, "Do we go?" "What about our other children who really enjoy fireworks?" "Do we think our child can tolerate getting through this?" Maybe there are some things we can do to help make this traditional festivity an enjoyable experience for the whole family.

Invest in a set of headphones or earplugs

Earplugs to block noise – not the ones we use for swimming. Think construction worker grade or Etymotic earplugs. Or use a set of headphones. You can even play soothing or patriotic music through them.

"I wear my sunglasses at night"

Remember that classic 80s hit? It might be prudent to pack a pair of sunglasses in case the fireworks are too bright for your child.

Turn up the TV

Sometimes we live near a venue that hosts a fireworks display or our neighbors decide to create their own spectacular show. So what do we do when our homes are invaded by the noise? Try playing predictable music or a favorite TV show that will cover sound. It might even be a good time to whip out that Playstation.

Preview the show

By their nature, fireworks are unpredictable. But we can try to prepare our kids to better help them know what they can expect. Sparklers may not have much sound, but they look like mini fireworks. You can also watch videos of fireworks displays. Preview a video of the fireworks show at Disney, accompanied by Disney music at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6pZnrh9Vw>. The short animated video How Do Fireworks Work? Science for Kids – Kids Education by Mocomi Kids helps explain the

components and workings of fireworks and sparklers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1ajCMxMrG4>.

Prepare with a social story

Social stories describe a situation that can help prepare someone for an upcoming event. You can find several social stories online simply by Googling "social story fireworks". Anytime you are able to create a social story using your own personal photos is a plus.

Watch from far away

A grocery store or other nearby parking lot, or the side of the road with the windows rolled up may provide a comfortable distance.

Take comfort items

Pack items that help soothe your child, such as a weighted vest, favorite toy, snacks, or handheld game.

Create an 'escape' place

Even with headphones or watching from a distance away from the crowd, your child may still become overwhelmed or frightened. Identify somewhere indoors where you can seek refuge if needed.

Be mindful of the entire day's schedule

Before the fireworks show, is there a party or a picnic? Are there breaks for downtime in the day? If it's an overloaded day, fireworks may just put your child over the edge. If fireworks are your priority activity for the day, consider limiting some of your other planned activities.



Give that safety speech

Don't miss this perfect opportunity to talk with your kids about fire safety and the dangers associated with explosive devices. Be cognizant too that some of our dislike of fireworks may come from anxiety or fear of being hurt. Reassure them that you are obeying the rules of safety.

Focus on the fun!

If you are feeling stressed, your child will pick up on that. Likewise, if you are smiling and laughing and having fun yourself, it will help ease your child and invite them to have fun with you.

And of course, be prepared that what worked last year, may or may not work this year. But isn't that what makes our lives such an adventurous journey?

Written by Shelly McLaughlin,
Program Director, Pathfinders for
Autism

© 2024 Pathfinders for Autism