

Strengthening Social Skills for Special Days

Holidays and special events are wonderful times for a child with hearing loss to delight in different experiences and discover new language. Anticipation begins as he helps with preparations and then his awareness grows as he participates. When parents guide a child to be involved in a parade, festival, party, feast, performance, or family event, this naturally strengthens social skills for special days.

Preparation:

Assisting with preparations offers many opportunities for interaction. These experiences build a child's understanding and encourage conversation!

Reading – Explore books and discuss pictures of a past or similar event. Look at short descriptions that connect the upcoming event with a child's curiosity or current interests. An example would be reading a picture book about a celebration and sharing excitement about its arrival.

Talking – Use words and demonstrate actions that will be part of an upcoming celebration. Enjoy discussing what is planned or why you are celebrating. An example would be reviewing words or phrases commonly used during the event so the child can join in or be able to answer.

Remembering – Look at photos of the child himself or other family members in a prior special day. Have fun recalling experiences or identifying who will be part of a future event. An example would be viewing videos of the child and family sharing a recent, special time.

Decorating – Design together or arrange decorations for traditional or family special days. Display some items where a child can enjoy looking at them or show others what he made. An example would be creating simple items that might be kept and used again for future celebrations.



Participation:

Encouraging participating can provide many natural communication experiences. Being involved directly expands a child's knowledge and social skills.

Cooking – Choose one quick recipe that the child can help make. Involve the child in buying some items at the store and then following directions to prepare the ingredients. An example would be helping to cook, decorate or serve food to be shared during a special day.

Singing – Enjoy specific songs associated with an event or invent a short melody. Teach the child actions that go with one tune or the words to a repetitive verse. An example might be singing a birthday song or joining in clapping in rhythm to certain segments of a celebration song.

Communicating -Explain to extended family how to interact simply and often. Show how to use methods that support the child in listening easily and responding comfortably. An example would be guiding visitors to directly talk to the child and pause to give him time to reply.

Playing – Plan games and activities that are usually part a special day. Introduce the typical language and behaviors so the child can be ready to join. An example could be a practicing a game so the child knows what to do when it is his turn and can be part of the group fun.

Children can be guided to explore multiple actions, concepts and words associated with special days. Some examples may fit for many families but other events could vary by cultures and regions. By identifying events expected in coming months, parents can start to familiarize a child with customary activities and typical language that fit with a family’s personal style and traditional celebrations.

General Examples to be Modified by Individual Families

Event	Action	Concept	Sound/word	Phrases
Birthdays	Blowing candles	Make a wish	Part of birthday song	I am ____ years old.
Ceremonies	Imitating movements	Watch quietly	Shhhh	Congratulations!
Feasts	Eating at table	Try a taste	Yummmm	Please?
Games	Playing in a small group	Take turns	Hurrah	Can I play?
Gifts	Scribbling a mark/letter to “sign” a card	Give/receive	Oh Wow	This is for you.
Parades	Waving	Applaud	Look, look	It’s too loud.
Parties	Shaking hands	Meet new friends	Hello	What’s your name?

Parents can plan ahead to help a young child with hearing loss learn from preparing and participating in everything from a casual play date to a formal holiday observance . As his understanding and interactions increase a child can delight in family festivities and community occasions. Everyone can celebrate his strengthened social skills.