Helping Kids Prepare for Large Family Gatherings

Simple steps to help children feel more confident, comfortable, and ready to join in.

1 Talk About What to Expect

Go over the basics before the big day.

- Who will be there?
- When are we eating?
- Are we taking family pictures?
- What are we wearing?
- How long are we expected to stay in those clothes?
- Will there be other children?



2 Make a Break Plan

It's okay to take a break when things feel overwhelming.

- Tell a trusted adult where you're going.
- Take the time you need to regroup.
- Plan to return for the meal or main event.



Plan B Ideas:

- Take a short walk with a trusted adult.
- Find a quieter corner.
- Use earplugs if it's noisy.
- Even a few quiet minutes in the bathroom can help.

3 Use a Calming Strategy

A short break can help children regroup and feel ready to rejoin the fun.

- Move your body (stretch, shake it out, or pretend to soar like an eagle).
- Take a few slow breaths.
- Play a short game.
- Have some quiet time.
- Notice: What does my body need right now?



4 Practice Awkward Social Moments Ahead of Time

Having a few words ready can make it easier to join in, meet new people, and set boundaries.

Ways to Join a Game:



If Your Child Doesn't Want a Hug:

"No thank you, but I'm happy to see you!"



Other options:

- Wave
- High five
- Fist bump
- A cheerful "it's good to see you!"

5 Talk About the "What Ifs"

Ask your child if there is anything they are worried about. Then listen to the what ifs.



Instead of saying, "You'll be fine..."

...make a plan together.

- Eat a snack before you go.
- Decide what to do if it feels too loud.
- Plan a signal to ask for help.
- Talk about how to handle tricky questions.
- Let them know it's okay to eat what works for them.

6 Remember: Confidence Doesn't Always Look Confident

Courage can look different for every child.

- Joining a game.
- Answering a relative's question.
- Saying no to a hug.
- Taking a break before feeling overwhelmed.
- Trying one unfamiliar food.
- Coming back after some quiet time.

A successful gathering doesn't require a child to handle every moment perfectly.

Sometimes success looks like knowing:
I can take a break. I can ask for help. I can go again.

That's plenty of courage to bring to the table.

Great addition to your calm down corner!

What do you need to let go of?
“Leaf” it here!

Write or draw on a leaf. Take a deep breath in. As you breathe out, drop your leaf in the basket, and let your worries fall away.

🤔 Something on your mind?

😠 Something didn’t go your way?

😒 A mistake you’re ready to move on from?

😧 Are you worried about something?







