

From Fall to Winter: Helping Kids Adjust to Seasonal Changes

There's something magical about that first crisp morning of fall – the smell of leaves, the cozy sweaters, the pumpkin spice everything. But let's be honest: the change of seasons isn't always smooth sailing...especially if you're parenting a child who thrives on routine or has [sensory sensitivities](#).

One morning it's 65 degrees and sunny, and the next, you're trying to get out the door while your child is standing in protest because the *coat feels weird* or the snow *makes crunchy noises*.

Seasonal transitions can be tough – colder weather, shorter days, and the inevitable sniffles don't make it any easier. Our Westside therapists have provided some tips to help ease your child (and yourself) into the new season.

Sensory Challenges of Colder Weather

One of the biggest reasons kids struggle with the change of seasons is sensory sensitivities. What feels like a cozy sweater or warm hat to us can feel itchy, tight, or just *too much* for a child who's sensitive to new sensations.

Layers like coats, hats, gloves, and boots bring all kinds of unfamiliar textures and weights. For some kids, this can be uncomfortable or overwhelming. It's easy to feel frustrated when your child refuses to put on their coat, but they're not being intentionally difficult. Sensory differences are very real, even if they're hard to understand from the outside. Imagine hearing a firetruck siren, but ten times louder. That's what certain sensations can feel like for kids with sensory sensitivities.

Some children are especially sensitive to the cold or may find indoor heating stuffy or irritating. These shifts in temperature can affect comfort levels and routines.

Fine Motor Challenges of Colder Weather

There are two main types of movement skills that kids use every day. **Gross motor movements** are the big, full-body actions such as running, jumping, and climbing that help build strength, balance, and coordination. **Fine motor movements** involve smaller, more precise actions that use the muscles in the hands and fingers, like writing, coloring, or fastening buttons.

For many children, fine motor tasks like zipping coats, buttoning shirts, or pulling on gloves can be especially challenging. These actions require finger strength, coordination, and sensory

awareness that may still be developing. [Occupational therapy \(OT\)](#) can make a big difference by helping children improve hand strength, motor control, and sensory tolerance through play-based activities. With practice and support, winter dressing can become smoother, less stressful, and more independent.

If winter clothing is a struggle, try to pinpoint the root cause. Is your child sensitive to the feel of new fabrics and layers? Do they have trouble with the fine motor skills needed to zip, button, or pull things on and off? Or could it be a combination of both?

Pro Tip: Try a method called backward chaining, commonly used in occupational therapy. For example, when helping your child zip their coat, start by doing most of it for them and let them finish the last inch. Once they've mastered that step, have them do a little more each time, such as zipping from halfway up. Gradually increase their involvement until they can do the whole task on their own.

Practical Tips:

- Let your child help choose clothing materials that feel good to them.
- Practice wearing winter gear indoors *before* it's needed.
- Look for sensory-friendly fabrics or tagless options.
- Gradually increase outdoor exposure to help them adapt to colder temps.

Managing Seasonal Illness and Health Changes

Cold and flu season can be tough for any family, but it can be especially challenging for children with sensory or communication differences. These kids may have trouble recognizing or expressing when they feel unwell, making it harder for parents to know what's wrong. A child might act out, resist certain routines, or seem "off" without being able to explain that they have a headache or sore throat.

Prevention and Support Tips:

- Keep handwashing routines consistent and easy to follow with visual steps or songs.
- Use visual reminders for healthy habits, such as "cover your cough" or "use a tissue."
- Find sensory-friendly ways to take medicine. Many medications come in liquid form, and pharmacists can often add flavoring to make them more palatable and easier for your child to tolerate.

- This may seem obvious, but it's worth including - build in plenty of rest and hydration. Kids thrive on structure, and these small routines can make a big difference in staying healthy.

Coping with Daylight Savings and Routine Changes

Changes in daylight and sleep patterns may seem minor, but they can have a big effect on a child's internal clock – and their behavior and mood. For children with sensory or communication differences, these disruptions can be even tougher.

[Research shows](#) that children diagnosed with autism often struggle more than neurotypical children with sleep regulation, including falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking at the appropriate time. Experts have observed that for children on the spectrum, changes to their usual light-dark schedule or daily routine can feel a lot like jet lag.

To help ease the transition, begin adjusting your child's bedtime and wake time gradually in the week leading up to the change – shifting by about 10 to 15 minutes each night helps your child's internal clock adapt rather than being jolted all at once. Pair this with consistent morning and bedtime routines: keep the same sequence of activities (for example, bath, pajamas, story, lights out) so the day retains its rhythm even if the clock has changed.

Use bright, natural light in the morning and dim lighting in the evening to help your child's body know when it's time to wake up or wind down. Blackout curtains or a sunrise-simulating lamp can also help when daylight changes are dramatic. Keeping these cues consistent helps your child's sleep and mood stay on track during the transition.

Navigating Winter Break and Routine Disruptions

Winter break often brings back memories of excitement and special traditions from our own childhoods. You may be looking forward to the break from early mornings and school schedules and want your child to experience the same sense of fun and magic.

However, you may find that your experience as a parent or caregiver is more challenging than expected, especially if you have a child who gets thrown off by changes in routine. Without the familiar structure of school days, some children may experience anxiety, restlessness, or behavioral challenges as they adjust to the more unpredictable pace of the break.

To help your child navigate this change, try keeping some structure in place even when school is out.

- Set consistent wake-up, meal, and bedtime routines to provide stability.
- Create a visual schedule for each day that includes fun activities, quiet time, and family traditions so your child knows what to expect.

- Aim for a balance between downtime and active play. Too much unstructured time can lead to frustration, while too much activity can be overstimulating.

If you are traveling or visiting relatives, talk about what the day will look like ahead of time. Explain who you will see, where you will go, and what kinds of activities might happen. Social stories are an excellent way to prepare your child for a new event - ask your child's therapist for help creating them!

How Westside Can Help

Change can be tough for any child. Whether it's adjusting to colder weather, managing sensory sensitivities, or finding new rhythms during winter break, you don't have to navigate these challenges alone.

At Westside, our therapy team partners with families to create individualized strategies that help children feel more comfortable and confident through every season. We offer [Applied Behavior Analysis \(ABA\) therapy](#), [occupational therapy](#), [speech therapy](#), [physical therapy](#), [feeding therapy](#), and [child counseling](#) to support a wide range of needs.

We are also excited to offer our new individual caregiver counseling sessions, which provide parents with support and practical strategies to balance the challenges of raising a child with special needs while managing their own work, life, and personal well-being.

To get started or for more information, click the link below or call us at (815) 469-1500.