



# AKEELA NEWS

## DECEMBER '23

**Summer 2024 is filling up fast!**

**Session 1: June 22 - July 15**

**Session 2: July 18- August 10**

**ENROLL TODAY**

### Happy Holidays!

While we haven't gotten any "real" snow here in Philadelphia, up at camp, it's a winter wonderland! It's hard to believe that 2023 is almost over and that camp is just six months away! We've been very busy talking to new families about Akeela and we find so much joy in sharing stories about our community and the amazing development of friendships we've witnessed since 2008! We're excited to welcome our new campers this summer and can't wait to see them fall in love with Akeela as much as all of our returning campers have. We're also meeting a lot of incredibly talented and passionate staff members who will be joining us from all over the US and the world, with the amazing international counselors! Our community has always been one of acceptance and that makes us feel extremely proud!

As we prepare for some time off with our families, we want to tell you how grateful we are to you - our Akeela community. We feel so lucky to have an extended camp family with whom we can share the gifts of friendship, community, growth, pride and fun! In the gifts below, you can check out our 2023 picture slideshows and remember the fun of camp!

Happy holidays and Happy New Year! We can't wait to see you up at camp in 2024!

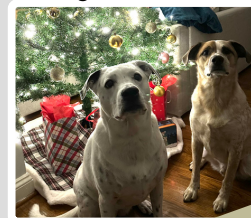
Love,  
Eric, Debbie & Erin



Eric & Debbie with daughters Margo and Julia lighting the menorah on the last night of Chanukah



Erin and Amy visiting the Philadelphia Christmas markets, and Koda & Archie patiently waiting to open presents



VERY excited that our new swag has arrived - who knows what mailboxes it may arrive in soon!


To: Session 2 Campers  
[Click Me for 2023 memories!](#)


To: Session 1 Campers  
[Click Me for 2023 memories!](#)


## HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS – SOME UNSOLICITED ADVICE


Holiday gatherings with family and friends are something many of us look forward to for months. We anticipate all of the joy we'll feel when we are together, the food we'll eat, the fun we'll have....but often, our imagination of what MIGHT be is very different from what actually IS! For many of our campers, when experiences don't match expectations, it can feel extremely disappointing and upsetting. As a parent, I often feel the same way! When I am busy baking treats, cleaning up the house, putting up decorations, I feel like everything will be perfect. As soon as one of our kids rolls her eyes or slams a door, or my cookies taste like sawdust or a friend cancels 2 hours before he's supposed to arrive, I feel like a deflated balloon. Every holiday, I'm determined to "relax" and "enjoy it" without stress....but, I have yet to make that happen. Here are a few suggestions for helping your Neurodivergent child(ren) - and the whole family - experience the holidays with a little less stress!


-Debbie


 Remember that everyone feels better when they know what to expect. **Review the plans for the week and then preview each day the night before.** A written schedule (age appropriate) is often helpful. Your child can look at it when they are feeling unsure (and this will save you from having to review the same thing many, many times).


 **Make sure your child knows that it's ok to say no to a hug.** Rather than saying, "Hug your grandma" or "Give Aunt Susan a kiss", please ask your child how they'd like to greet family and friends. Let them know they have options - they can say hello, shake hands, fist bump or hug. When family members ask for a hug, if you know your child prefers a handshake, you can simply say, "She'd prefer a handshake".

 **Bring some "safe" foods.** If you have a child who's a particular eater, a big holiday gathering is not a great time to work on trying new foods. Instead, bring a few of your child's favorites to have on hand. If they are unhappy with the choices, you can be prepared - everyone does better when they are not "hangry"!

 **Bring a few activities.** At a big family gathering, it's important to me to be able to have some quality time with people I only get to see once a year. While we are normally pretty rigid about screen time, this is one of those times when we're ok with our kids "zoning" out with an iPad. It's a lot of work to be at a large social gathering when you have ASD or ADHD/ADD so this time is often a much needed break.

 Make sure your child knows where they can go to get some **quiet/alone** time if they are feeling overwhelmed.

 **Be as flexible as you can with schedules and routines.** I get really anxious when my younger daughter has to stay up later than usual - I know that she'll be really cranky and that it will take 2 days to get back on track. However, when something special comes up, I try to cut myself some slack. We all deserve to have this fun evening and we can get through the tough days that will follow. Neurodivergent children and teens do best when they have a regular schedule, but a planned "break" in the schedule is also ok and can teach flexibility.

 Pick one event, one friend/family member you really want to spend time with, one movie you want to watch - **whatever it is that will make YOU feel happy and recharged** and commit to doing it. As your partner or a friend to help you make that happen.

We hope you and your loved ones have a wonderful holiday period, and we're sending good wishes for 2024!