



# Allergic Diseases SIG

Winter Newsletter 2023

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## A Message from our Co-Chairs

We are very happy to present the latest SIG updates and are grateful for your interest and work within pediatric allergic diseases. Our leadership team is working on a number of exciting initiatives.



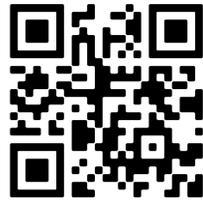
A continued goal for our SIG is to provide opportunities for mentorship and professional development to students and trainees. We are very excited about our upcoming student data blitz that we will be hosting in Spring 2024 in collaboration with the Caregiver Wellbeing SIG. Interested trainees should send Dr. Tackett ([Alayna.Tackett@osumc.edu](mailto:Alayna.Tackett@osumc.edu)) a *300-word abstract* by **December 31, 2023**. We hope to provide continued opportunities to elevate student and trainee voices in the future!

Dr. Tenenbaum has joined our leadership team this year as the clinical chair. Our SIG remains committed to mobilizing our knowledge to improve management of allergic diseases, health equity, access to care, and health outcomes for minoritized groups. If you are interested in any clinical initiatives, especially efforts to compile clinical resources, please contact Dr. Tenenbaum ([rachelbtenenbaum@gmail.com](mailto:rachelbtenenbaum@gmail.com)).

Our social media chair, Melissa Engel, MA, has continued to work to expand our SIG's social media presence. Efforts to date have focused on X ([@AllergyPedsPsyc](https://twitter.com/AllergyPedsPsyc)); however, we are continuing to explore strategies to expand our SIG's reach. Please contact Melissa ([mlengel@emory.edu](mailto:mlengel@emory.edu)) or tag her on X with any relevant content.

We are hoping to gather information about social media platforms that our members use.

Please scan this QR code and take a minute to complete our survey to help inform our future directions with social media!



SCAN ME

The aim of this newsletter (coordinated by Dr. Voorhees) is to provide practical ideas for patients and families engaging in social gatherings. We include patient voices, with tips from Melissa's network of children and adolescents with food allergy. Tamara Hubbard, MA, LCPC, a licensed therapist and founder of The Food Allergy Counselor, also graciously participated in a Q&A with additional recommendations. Finally, our student trainee representatives, Natalie Koskela-Staples, MS, and Frances Cooke, BA, have compiled recommendations from recognized allergic diseases organizations.

Please do not hesitate to contact us ([mnetz@cmh.edu](mailto:mnetz@cmh.edu) and [kaitlin.proctor@choa.org](mailto:kaitlin.proctor@choa.org)) with information you would like to share with our membership or if you are interested in supporting any of our SIG initiatives.

Best,

Mallory Netz, PhD and Kaitlin Proctor, PhD, ABPP

## Leadership Committee

Mallory Netz, PhD	<i>Co-Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:mnetz@cmh.edu">mnetz@cmh.edu</a>
Kaitlin Proctor, PhD, ABPP	<i>Co-Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:Kaitlin.Proctor@choa.org">Kaitlin.Proctor@choa.org</a>
Alayna Tackett, PhD	<i>Research Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:alayna.tackett@gmail.com">alayna.tackett@gmail.com</a>
Rachel Tenenbaum, PhD	<i>Clinical Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:racheltenenbaum@gmail.com">racheltenenbaum@gmail.com</a>
Sara Voorhees, PhD	<i>Communications Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:saravoor1215@gmail.com">saravoor1215@gmail.com</a>
Melissa Engel	<i>Social Media Chair</i>	<a href="mailto:melissa.lauren.engel@emory.edu">melissa.lauren.engel@emory.edu</a>
Frances Cooke	<i>Student Representative</i>	<a href="mailto:cookef@cua.edu">cookef@cua.edu</a>
Natalie Koskela-Staples	<i>Student Representative</i>	<a href="mailto:natalie.koskela-staples@nemours.org">natalie.koskela-staples@nemours.org</a>

Contact the SIG: [allergicdiseasesSIG@gmail.com](mailto:allergicdiseasesSIG@gmail.com)

# Ask the Expert: Q&A on Navigating Social Gatherings

Dr. Voorhees chatted with Tamara Hubbard, MA, LCPC about navigating social gatherings, especially around holidays.



Tamara is a marriage & family therapist with 20 years of clinical experience.

In her private practice, she helps allergic and non-allergic clients, especially parents and caregivers, find their “just right” balance between overwhelm and quality of life.

Passionate about helping the allergy mental health niche expand, Tamara is the founder and CEO of [The Food Allergy Counselor, Inc.](#), an internationally-utilized allergy mental health education hub. The FAC houses the Food Allergy Counselor Directory of allergy-informed therapists, evidence-based allergy mental health and mindset content, and a growing professional network for mental health providers supporting those with allergic diseases.

An international speaker at conferences and events for both patient and provider groups, Tamara is an Allied Health member of both the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) and the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI). She regularly contributes content to [Healio Allergy & Asthma](#), holds advisory roles for multiple organizations, including [CFAAR](#) and [FARE](#), and is currently working on her first book, *Navigating the Overwhelm of Allergy Parenting*, which will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

## Q: What are some of your best tips for children/teens as they navigate social gatherings?

I like to encourage children and teens to see themselves as a whole person and not just someone with a food allergy, and to also think about the social experiences they'd like to have even with a food allergy. That perspective shift helps them start to think about how they can meet both their safety and social needs at the same time rather than only focusing on one or the other.

For tangible tactics, I like to encourage children and teens to just be matter-of-fact about their food allergies, have at least one trusted friend around if possible, and be brave enough to self-advocate and respond to a reaction if needed, even if it feels uncomfortable to do so. They can also use humor as a strategy if that feels like a more comfortable way to talk about their food allergy.

## Q: What advice do you have for parents of children with food allergies around social gatherings?

As hard as it may feel for parents of children with food allergies, it's important for them to give their children opportunities to meet normal child growth and developmental milestones, including engaging in social experiences.

Therefore, the parental advice is to focus on employing practical safety strategies to allow the social experiences to happen. This might include having conversations with parents before playdates and birthday parties to assess the food options, and educating others on their child's food allergy and management protocols.

It should also include teaching their child age-appropriate food allergy management skills that the child can continue to build upon in each age/stage of their development, as well as opportunities to practice these skills so that over time, the parents and child can build confidence and trust in the child's self-efficacy.

Additionally, it's also important for parents to learn how to manage their own stress and anxiety during these experiences to allow these social experiences and skill-building opportunities to happen.

**Q: Sometimes it can be challenging for families to establish boundaries with family members or friends who may not know much about food allergies. How do you suggest families navigate these tricky situations?**

In these social situations, I encourage families to determine what boundaries are non-negotiable (for safety reasons) and which ones they might be willing to compromise on so they can figure out how they want to navigate the situation ahead of time.

If they know they'll be spending time with others who just don't (or don't want to) get it, my main suggestions include the following:

- Lead with food allergy facts, not emotions about food allergies
- Don't engage in debate with others who aren't open-minded and willing to learn
- Have kind, canned responses ready if you don't want to engage in discussions
- Be solution-focused, and willing to say "no" and leave if you feel unsafe

Here are two Food Allergy Counselor articles on these topics:

- [Navigating Tense Allergy Discussions During the Holidays](#)
- [When Family Members Don't Follow Food Allergy Rules](#)

**Q: As providers working with families with food allergies, how can we work to empower children, teens, and their parents around socialization?**

Two of the most empowering things we can do to help individuals and families managing food allergies is to help them learn to focus on influencing outcomes (rather than aiming to control everything in order to quiet anxiety) and learn how to self-advocate for their own safety needs in social situations.

Because the value of safety is the primary focus for these families, it easily gives way to avoidance behaviors in service of staying safe, which can lead to a values imbalance (i.e. avoiding connection with others at social gatherings in order to stay safe). Therefore, it's useful to help families shift their mindset from an "or" perspective to an "and" perspective in order to balance safety *and* other things that matter to them, such as seeing friends and family.

We can help them understand that while they can't control every aspect of social gatherings, they *can* ultimately stay safe *and* visit with people by aiming to influence their social experiences through planning, preparing, speaking up when needed, and accepting the discomforts that may be associated with doing all of the above.

## Q: How can we help children and their families maintain positivity around social gatherings?

Even though food is often a part of social gatherings, it doesn't have to be their only focus. I like to encourage people to think about *all* that is important to them about social gatherings - beyond just the safety of the food - including connections with others, having fun, engaging in new experiences, etc.

Therefore, we can encourage them to lean into a "can do" mindset (instead of a "can't do" one) and help them figure out workable plans that allow them to stay safe while also being able to enjoy these experiences, which for some families, will feel very hard to do because they may be avoiding any/all experiences that trigger increased anxiety and worry.

## Ask the Patient: Teen Advice on Navigating Social Gatherings

"Try and make food for everyone that is safe for you. That way you know it is safe and you feel included!"

"A lot of traditions involve food. Try suggesting activities that don't involve food (e.g., ice skating, window shopping, Christmas lights viewing, decorating, gift exchanging, movie night, etc)."

"Don't feel bad for asking lots of questions or not eating something if you don't feel comfortable."

"Try to make your own holiday foods - don't be afraid of substitutes for allergens! Just because we have allergies doesn't mean we have to skip out on holiday favorites :)"

“Always bring your medication, advocate for yourself, have plans for what you are going to eat, and inform others about your allergies.”

“Don’t be afraid to put your own allergy-friendly spin on classic holiday treats! Peppermint bark with vegan chocolate, gluten-free wacky cake, and non-dairy hot chocolate are all delicious allergy-friendly options for the holidays.”

## Ask the Internet: Strategies for Managing Asthma During Winter

The winter season can bring increased asthma triggers and symptoms. Cooler air, respiratory infections, fireplaces and smoke, and holiday decorations such as candles and live trees/wreaths can all contribute to increased asthma symptoms. The AAFA, AAAAI, and Asthma and Allergy Network provide some helpful tips and tricks for navigating asthma triggers and symptoms during the winter:

- Use asthma and allergy friendly air cleaners to help keep your home clean during the winter season.
- Wear a mask or wrap a scarf around your nose and mouth when spending time in colder air.
- If you are allergic to cat or dog hair, you may need to treat your asthma before visiting friends and family members with pets. It may also be helpful to ask your host if their pet can stay in another part of the house during your visit.
- Try to avoid heavily scented candles, oils, and decorations. If your favorite stores have scented displays, consider trying online shopping or curbside pick-up.
- Live trees and wreaths can bring mold and pollen into homes. It is helpful to hose these items down, let them dry, and shake them out before bringing them into your home. Alternatively, consider using artificial decorations. Be sure to wipe down any decorations that have been in storage. It may be helpful to wear a mask while dusting them off.
- Be aware of potential increases in stress during this season. Stress can trigger asthma attacks, so it is important to engage in coping activities that help you relax and reset.
- Remember to stay home if you’re sick, avoid others who are ill, wash your hands frequently, and stay up to date on your vaccinations.
- Interested in learning more about navigating winter holidays with asthma and allergies? Check out this podcast from the AAAAI: [https://www.ivoox.com/navigating-the-holiday-season-with-asthma-and-allergies-audios-mp3\\_rf\\_30688012\\_1.html](https://www.ivoox.com/navigating-the-holiday-season-with-asthma-and-allergies-audios-mp3_rf_30688012_1.html)

\*AAFA = Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, AAAAI = American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Sources and more information:

- <https://community.aafa.org/blog/reduce-your-holiday-stress-with-these-asthma-control-tips>
- <https://community.aafa.org/blog/5-asthma-and-allergy-tips-for-a-healthier-home-for-the-holidays>
- <https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/conditions-library/asthma/allergies,-asthma-and-winter-holidays>
- <https://allergyasthmanetwork.org/news/home-for-the-holidays/>

# Ask the Internet: Avoiding Allergic Reactions during Winter Social Gatherings

For many families, the winter season is filled with family gatherings and social events. While these gatherings can bring joy and cheer, they can also bring increased stress for families of children with food allergies. Food is often at the center of social gatherings, and many families worry about accidental allergic reactions. The AAFA, AAAAI, and Asthma and Allergy Network provide some tips to help everyone have fun and stay safe:

- Educate others about the importance of preventing cross-contamination. Teach everyone who prepares and serves the food the importance of reading food labels, washing hands with soap and water, and preparing safe foods with separate utensils and clean surfaces.
- Talk to the host before the event to learn what is being served and how it will be prepared. Ask what ingredients are used to make each dish and see if people can provide labels for their dishes. Consider offering to bring dishes that are safe for your child and/or help the host prepare safe foods.
- If you are worried about the safety of food at an event, consider packing a special meal for your child.
- If there is a buffet, encourage those with food allergies to go first in line.
- Consider hosting the event yourself and asking others to bring non-food items such as paper plates, utensils, and decor.
- Suggest non-food activities that everyone can enjoy, such as crafts and games.
- Even if you take all precautions, there is always still a slight risk of allergic reactions. Be sure to bring your child's auto-injectable epinephrine just in case.
- Interested in finding new recipes that avoid common allergens? Check out these recipes from AAAAI and FARE!
  - <https://www.aaaai.org/conditions-treatments/allergies/food-allergy/food-allergy-free-recipes/holiday-allergy-free-recipes>
  - <https://www.foodallergy.org/our-initiatives/awareness-campaigns/living-teal/feasting-fare>
  - <https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/feasting-fare-sprinkle-cookies>

\*AAFA = Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, AAAAI = American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Sources and more information:

- <https://community.aafa.org/blog/avoid-food-allergy-reactions-during-the-holidays>
- <https://www.aaaai.org/tools-for-the-public/conditions-library/asthma/allergies,-asthma-and-winter-holidays>
- <https://allergyasthmanetwork.org/news/home-for-the-holidays/>

