



Festive Tips for an Autism-Friendly Christmas 2023

Taken from the National Autistic Society Webpage

Although these tips are from the National Autism Society Website, the advice can help children and adults with many different needs, through the festive period.

There is no doubt that December can be an exciting time, filled with celebration, festive fun, and gift-giving. But for some autistic people, this celebration can be quite stressful.

In fact, Christmas can be a difficult time to manage for all children regardless of any diagnosis as their routines are disrupted, bedtimes later and the excitement gets to much to control,

The Christmas period, with lots of change, social interaction, expectations and demands to negotiate, can be a very exciting but often stressful time of the year for many autistic people. We (NAS) have put together a brief list of useful resources that we hope may prove helpful in making this festive period as special and as stress free as possible for those you work with.

Here are a variety of resources that give guidance, advice and ideas for the festive season

Preparing

Many autistic people can find any kind of change difficult. Planning and preparation is key in making Christmas as enjoyable as possible.

- ❖ Think about ways you can enjoy the festive season that work for you - don't feel pressured into doing things just because that's what other people do. If you know your child has difficulties then let friends and family know how best to support them.
- ❖ Wherever possible, plan your Christmas in advance with your family, friends and any support services. This is all the more important because of the Christmas coronavirus rules.
- ❖ Ensure all plans are shared and you know what you will be doing and when, and who else will be there.

- ❖ If it is helpful, use visual aids such as calendars, lists and schedules to help plan your Christmas. For younger children use visual timetables and social stories to help them process what will be happening that day/week. Try not to change plan at short notice and stick to timings.
- ❖ Think about and plan around sensory differences that could cause you distress or discomfort, consider ear defenders, sun glasses into bright areas etc., for times of potential sensory overload.
- ❖ Create or find a quiet space where you can take a break if you get overwhelmed. You may want this to be a completely Christmas-free area, particularly around the main days of Christmas or at key times that there may be additional stress. Let your friends and family know that your child is not being rude, they just do not like too much noise or sensory stimuli.
- ❖ Don't just plan for Christmas Day, plan for the whole festive break and give yourself quiet days to recoup if needed. Remember not to burn yourself out or your child.
- ❖ Especially this year, don't spend money you don't have on Christmas gifts you can't afford. Make sure you budget for buying Christmas gifts. If you buy toys that need batteries, make sure you have these available on the day so the toy works, that will avoid unnecessary anxiety.
- ❖ If you're visiting family and friends, tell them about anything that could help make your visit be as stress-free as possible. For instance, turning off Christmas lights, letting you know in advance what the food will be, sharing plans for activities and having a quiet space to escape to. let them know if your child would rather eat a packed lunch form home and if they prefer to sit quietly alone.
- ❖ "Christmas scents and candles can be super overwhelming sensory-wise so could be avoided when decorating. Flashing fairy lights can be overwhelming."

Please do look at the National Autistic Society Webpage as there is a lot of useful information on it.

Merry Christmas from us all

