

Hints and tips for an inclusive Christmas



This time of year can be really exciting for many people, but can also be a time filled with new sensory and social experiences that are not part of your usual routine. Here are a few top tips to help you prepare for Christmas:

- Plan when and how you are putting Christmas decorations in your house. You could try putting decorations up gradually (involving the autistic person) or have a clear timetable of when they will be put up and when they will be removed. Avoid certain decorations if they are difficult for an autistic person to manage (e.g. Christmas crackers, noisy singing decorations).
- Create a schedule and/or social stories for the Christmas period, showing the key activities on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.
- If the 'busyness' of Christmas becomes overwhelming, have a safe, unchanged place in your house that can be used for a break. Don't place any decorations in here and allow the person to use this space as needed to regulate.
- Plan Christmas events and shopping at quieter times to avoid crowds. Many Santa Experiences either have relaxed sessions where sensory stimuli is reduced, or they may be able to advise of their naturally quieter times to visit.
- If family are visiting, think about the greetings that may be easiest for the autistic person to engage in. Don't insist on hugs/kisses if this is difficult for the person – they could wave or 'high five' instead. Planning and communicating this can help manage everyone's expectations.
- Have sensory fidgets and de-stressors available for the person to help them cope with the added demands of the Christmas period. This might include ear defenders, tangle toys etc.
- Make it a Christmas that works for you! Remember, Christmas is a day for celebrating and feeling comfortable, so if that means having your favourite foods (even if they aren't traditionally Christmas foods) this is ok! If surprise presents are too overwhelming, it is okay to tell the person what they will be receiving or open presents over the space of a week rather than all at one time.