

Tips for Christmas

While Christmas is lovely it is easy for us to feel pressure to create the Christmas we see advertised! It can bring unique challenges for us, our children and young people as routines, social demands and sensory input ramps up.

At this time of year shops are busier, there are different activities in school, unfamiliar decorations appear, it is noisier, flashing lights are everywhere and the combination of these can lead to anxious feelings, overwhelm and dysregulation.

Here is a list of tips that might help over the Christmas period.

- Time

At the end of a long term with lots of exciting events scheduling in some recovery days after school has finished may help. Plan in time to relax for yourself and your child. Try leaving a few gaps in your calendar so that you can have enough time to rest at home. As we know, the home environment provides somewhere familiar where they can recharge and reset after busier days. Think about things that may cause anxiety – for example eating out lots, unfamiliar food or places. Looking through menus beforehand and talking through what might be on offer may help.

- Preparation

Talk through at the start of the day or the night before what they will be doing. You can put it on a whiteboard and then rub off when completed, make a visual timetable, visit websites with photographs of the places you might visit. Make sure that you don't prepare too far in advance as this will either result in the 'Is it time yet' or may be anxiety inducing.

- Routine

Routines over Christmas inevitably will change but if you can keep some routines, like bedtimes, the same this may be of benefit. Make sure anyone staying with you understands your way of parenting your child.

- Presents

You may find that opening all the presents at the same time, or even walking into a room filled with presents can be overwhelming. Ideas that may help could be to split gift opening across the day (potentially hiding a few if leaving them under the tree is going to be too tempting for your child!) If how you opened them last year worked well keep this going from one year to another.

You may find that asking your child to sort the presents into piles gives time to regulate (as this provides movement and is an organising activity).

Unwrapping presents in front of extended family or friends can also be overwhelming especially if there is an expectation of a positive reaction!

- Food

We know that our children are impulsive and with lots of chocolate and sweets around may not be able to limit their intake. If this is the case for your child decant some of the sweets/chocolates into a smaller dish so you know what they are consuming.

Try to have one comforting go-to food option on the menu.

- Reflection

Thinking about what worked well last time can help plan for this year. If you recognise some of your child's triggers you might be able to plan around these and plan your response should they happen again.

It is worth remembering that you might have to be flexible and plans might have to change – if you have more than one child in your family it is worth having that conversation beforehand.

- Remember

You can still use the strategies that work through the rest of the year – bath time with bubbles for mine when they were little always helped them and me to feel calmer, timers to signal the start or end of activities, explain expectations and give options (if you find it too noisy you can wear your loops, if you need to feel calm you can go to ...).

If visiting other peoples houses explain their rules (ie. At Aunty Angela's remember we sit on the sofa – using the language of 'we' rather than 'I'.)

Take snacks / drink/ something to relieve boredom/ fidgets/ give them a job and remember to praise!

Overall do what works for your family and have a lovely Christmas and New Year!