



SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS NEWSLETTER Autumn 2022

Children love Christmas, don't they? You'd think so, but for many children with Autism or other additional or Special Educational Needs, it's often edged with anxiety. Too many choices, too many Christmassy TV ads, bright lights and jangly music on the streets and even the festive Christmas tree at school are a constant reminder of the big day ahead. It's easy for them to become completely overwhelmed, distressed and anxious.

This newsletter will give you some top tips to reduce the stress and anxiety regarding the Christmas festivities.

Top 10 tips for an enjoyable Christmas with your child with SEN

1. Make a list of what your child finds difficult. This could be anything from big crowds, loud noises, surprises or bright lights. Try to think about when they might experience those. How could you avoid those situations? If that isn't an option, consider how you can help your child prepare.
2. Maintain routines as much as possible. Give your child lots of warning if there are changes in their routine. However, remember we have to adapt to sudden change so make sure your child is exposed to this too.
3. The use of a visual timetable or calendar is great for children to see upcoming events. They can take ownership and add events to their visual support and cross of dates/events.
4. Decorate gradually. *Don't put up the decorations when your child is sleeping – if possible, get them involved. Try to introduce changes into their environment gradually, starting with the Christmas lights for example.*

5. Prepare them for gifts. Some children with additional needs find surprises overwhelming. You might want to let them know what type of gifts they will open on Christmas Day. For example, you could tell them you will give them a book, and the surprise is which book you choose.
6. Create a safe space. Keep at least one room in the house free of decoration. Try to make sure it looks like it usually does. This can be a safe space for your child if they feel overwhelmed.
7. Be conscious of sound and smells. Let your child know when there is going to be strong smells in the house. It can help to protect their bedroom from any smells, or give them alternative scents. Try essential oil rollers or lip balm on their wrists.
8. Prep family. If you'll be spending time with family and friends who haven't been around your child much, consider giving them a little tutorial in advance. This will help avoid hurt feelings when Bob doesn't want Grandma's hugs or Bill refuses to touch Uncle Luis' casserole.
9. Give children responsibilities depending on their age and ability, if possible. It may feel easier to do it yourself but giving them a task means they have a focus, which will reduce their stress levels when visitors arrive, as they know what's expected of them.
10. Look after your own wellbeing. There is a lot going on over Christmas and given the additional challenges that many families have been experiencing this year, it is important to avoid putting too much pressure on yourself. We encourage parents and carers to connect with others in similar situations and to share their experiences

