



## A neurodiverse Christmas - top tips for the Festive Season from the Neurodiversity Team

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...

The festive season is rapidly descending upon us in all its glittery glory: the lights, the decorations, the presents, the clothes, the parties, and the music!

While this build up can be exciting to some people, others who are Neurodiverse can find the changes to their routine, the increased social demands, and the sensory overload all too much. This can create trauma and upset for both the Neurodiverse people and those around them.

Christmas can be a tricky time for Neurodiverse children and children with SEND, as its easy for their senses to become overwhelmed. They can find it hard to adjust to different light, colour, sound, smells, textures, and tastes.

Changes in routine can also affect how children feel and understand what is happening, especially if they don't receive the information they need in a way that they can comprehend. If there is one time of year that changes everything, it is the festive period.

The season does not have to spell disaster though, and the Neurodiversity Team have put together some tips and advice on how to prepare. With planning and support, we hope that everyone can enjoy the festive period how they want it to be, and however that looks!

If you would like any further information, contact the Neurodiversity Team via [neurodiversity0-19enquiries@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:neurodiversity0-19enquiries@portsmouthcc.gov.uk).

### Make a List

What does your child find difficult? This could be anything and everything from big crowds, loud noises, surprises, or bright lights and glittery reflective decorations.

Try to think about when they might experience these. How could you prepare them or help them manage if it is unavoidable? How could you avoid those situations when you feel guilty for cancelling?

Making a list and planning in advanced can help reduce and remove many of the impacts that effect Neurodiverse Children.

### Speak to your school or nursery

Speak with your child's school or nursery and find out what celebrations they are planning - these could include concerts, Nativities, parties, lunches, presents, cards, or Christmas Jumper days, which could become overwhelming for some children. If you feel your child may need extra support during these times, make sure the school is aware and plan together to provide alternatives, or ways that your child can be enabled to manage and still feel included.



## Involve your Child in Decisions

Help your child to have a say in the Christmas decorations around your home. Ask them to help you choose lights, colours, and textures that they feel comfortable with, and in what quantities - sometimes less is more.

Help them plan which events they feel they can deal with, and which ones will be 'too much'. Give them the answers to the questions they may have and ask them what they think may help.

## Prepare them for Presents

Neurodiverse Children or Children with SEND can find surprises overwhelming. They may not know how to manage their excitement or anxiety. They may not understand why they are being given presents, and they may not know how to respond to receiving them. You might want to let them know what type of gifts they will open on Christmas Day.

For example, you could tell them that you will give them a book, and the surprise will be which book you choose. It can also help to:

- Spread gift giving over a period during the day, or different days
- Give gifts without using wrapping paper
- Talk to friends and family to explain that your child's responses to gifts might not be what they expect, and why their response is that way

## Create a Safe Space

You can create a safe space for your child to go to if they feel overwhelmed by keeping at least one room in the house free of decorations or festive celebrations and trying to make sure it looks like it usually does.

Ask friends and family who you may be visiting to have a safe space or quiet area where your child can retreat to if they are becoming anxious, agitated, or overwhelmed.

Neurodiverse children can be very capable in being able to socialise in their own manner, and to be included they may need to do that in smaller or shorter periods of time.

## Consider for Changes in Routines

Try to prepare your child each day for what's coming tomorrow. Talk to them about who will be there, what they will do and what they'll eat. Some children may only need to know what they are doing now and next. Some children might like to have some control over some of these things, and you could give them a choice between two or three different activities.

Provide them with two or three 'oops' days for when things don't go to plan, to help remove pressure or guilt. Your child will likely be finding the whole Festive Period very draining so will require a little extra time or support to manage maintaining their routines.



Try to keep some of their routines the same. It can be helpful to start and end their day with something you would usually do. Think about morning routines, as well as bath time, bedtime, and playtime.

### **Plan for Visitors**

Plan for the possibility of unexpected visitors, and pre-plan for expected visitors. If your child struggles with visits at home or going out, think about how you can help. You could:

- See if your child wants to stay at home with another family member when you go out.
- Let them know when visitors are expected, who it is, and why they are visiting.
- Plan with your child when they would like visitors.
- They may want to 'drop in and out' of larger, louder, or busier groups.
- See if they want to play in a different room.
- Share pictures of visitors in advance, so they're familiar with their faces.

### **Be Conscious of Sounds and Smells**

Christmas is full of very strong and unusual scents and sounds; these can be intense and overwhelming for your child. Be aware when you know when there is going to be strong smells or sounds in the house.

If there are fireworks near you, talk to your child about what to expect with the noise. Make some firework pictures together to turn it into a positive experience. Ear protectors or Audio Dampers can help manage intrusive noises.

Let present buyers know that these types of gifts can be difficult or unwelcomed by your child. 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.

### **Further sources of information and tips:**

- [Christmas Tips for Neurodiverse Families - Social Living Solutions](#)
- [Solent Family Assist](#)
- [Top 10 Christmas Gifts for Autistic Children - YouTube](#)
- [AUTISM & PDA LIFE HACKS FOR AN AUSOME CHRISTMAS - Surviving Christmas with Autistic and PDA Kids - YouTube](#)
- [Preparing for Christmas: autism resources](#)
- [Top 8 Tips for Surviving Christmas with ADHD kids! - ADHD in Children Support](#)
- [32 Sure-fire Survival Tips to Reduce Sensory Overload During the Holidays](#)

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