

Top Tips for Christmas (source: NAS website 2015)

www.autism.org.uk/Christmas

Christmas can be an exciting and fun time, but Autistic people may be confused or distressed by all the new activity.

Preparing

An autistic person can find any kind of change difficult. You could:

- Use a calendar or visual timetable to prepare for Christmas, for specific events, the school Christmas show, the trip or when 'Nana' is coming to sleep. Also for school days and home days
- Talk about Christmas time and what this means for your family
- Make a booklet about Christmas with pictures of Christmas trees, decorations and Christmas food
- Liaise with parents and families so that the same strategies and visual supports are used as at home and school, and so that Christmas preparation is started at the same time
- Prepare the child or young person for specific events, e.g. by showing them a symbol or photo of a man dressed as Father Christmas - remember if the child or young person is very literal they may expect the real thing to be exactly the same as the photo

Schedules

Many autistic children and young people have a strong need for routine. You could:

- Keep the daily routine the same as far as possible, including on Christmas Day
- Incorporate a Christmas activity that they enjoy into their daily timetable, e.g. opening the advent calendar, or switching on the tree lights
- Give them some Christmas-free time on their daily timetable - this could help you to observe anxiety levels and make any adaptations for the rest of the day



- Offer them quiet time with a favourite activity in a Christmas-free zone at key moments that may be stressful, such Christmas parties at school or when other people are opening their presents at home.

Decorations

Coming into school or returning home to find a tree with flashing lights could be a bit of a shock. You could:

- Involve the child or young person in changes to the setting or house, eg take them shopping for decorations, let them handle decorations, let them see decorations being hung up, or let them help putting them up
- Consider decorating gradually, eg you could put the Christmas tree in position, decorate it the next day, then put up other decorations even later
- Keep things that might overload them away from communal areas, e.g. flashing Christmas lights could go in areas that they do not regularly access.

Presents

Having a large number of presents could be overwhelming. You could:

- Set a limit on the number of presents, e.g. one from mum and dad and one from grandparents - other family members could perhaps give money
- Introduce presents one by one, instead of all at once
- Put out a present next to a favourite item (e.g. a new toy next to a favourite toy)
- Leave their presents unwrapped unless they like the sensation of unwrapping.

Family gatherings

Having a large number of people in the house could be overwhelming. You could:

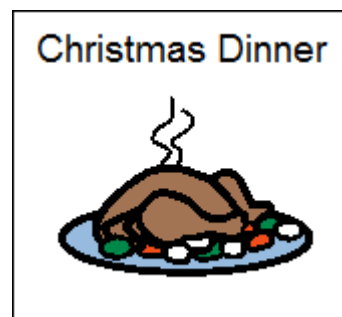
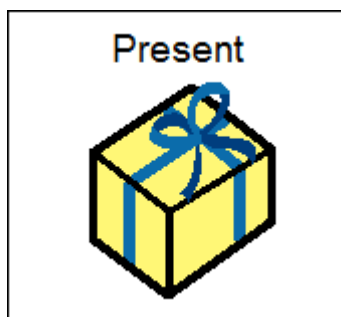
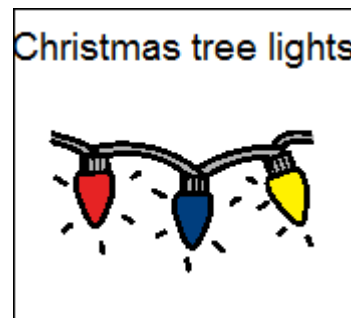
- Prepare your child by talking about or showing pictures of the family members that will be joining you.
- Set aside some quiet time for your child to access in their bedroom
- Provide your child with a key word or symbol they can use to request time on their own (dependant on your child's level of communication)
- Provide a safe space or den for your child to access when they need some quiet time

- Talk to your family about your child's differences and preferences enabling them to make adjustments to their behaviour (eg. If your child does not like too much noise or being cuddled)

Getting support

- Get support from friends and family, e.g. A relative could support your child doing a favourite activity while you help your other children to decorate.
- Get ideas from other families, and share your tips with them, at www.autism.org.uk/community
- Prepare family members who may not understand how your child or young person may react - they may not get the response to gifts that they expect.

Useful Boardmaker symbols



decorations



bauble



star



Fr. Christmas



Santa's sack



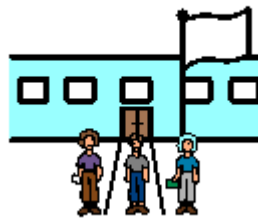
reindeer



no school



school



home

