

Our top tips for an autism-friendly Christmas



For many, Christmas is a time of festive joy. But the bright lights, loud sounds, and busyness can be a real struggle for autistic people.

Thankfully, there are plenty of ways that parents and carers can make celebrations more autism-friendly. We've put together our top tips, so everyone can enjoy themselves this festive season.

1. Explain everything in advance

The sheer amount of change that happens over Christmas can be disorientating, so it's important to explain what will happen well in advance. By telling an autistic person why we celebrate Christmas, how it's celebrated, and why we do strange things like bring a tree inside the house, you can help them feel included and prepared, so they'll be more accepting of what's going on around them.

2. Create a Christmas-free zone somewhere at home

The combination of shiny decorations, loud chatter and Christmas music is a recipe for overstimulation, so make sure to create a Christmas-free area somewhere in the home. This could be their

bedroom, or just another quiet and calming space where they can escape to for breaks if they start to feel overwhelmed.

3. Keep surprises to a minimum

Autistic people can find surprises unsettling, so surprise gifts usually aren't a good idea. Make sure they're involved in choosing what they'll find under the tree, or attach a tag with a picture or a clue of what's inside each present. They may even dislike the idea of being watched as they open their gifts, so give them the option to do it in private.

4. Open gifts one by one

It can be tempting to let everyone rush to their gifts and open them all at once, but deciding which to open first can be too much pressure for an autistic person, and they'll easily become overstimulated by the chaos. By taking turns in opening your presents, it takes away the decision-making and creates a much calmer experience.



5. Don't completely let go of routine

Christmas usually means big changes to your daily routine, but do your best to keep the disruption to a minimum. For example, it's important to make sure autistic people have access to their favourite foods when they want them, as well as traditional Christmas treats. Unusual tastes and textures can be discomfoting and may cause sensory issues.

6. Keep comforting items nearby

Everyone has something that makes them feel more at ease, and these special items are especially important for people with autism. Whether it's a toy, a blanket, or something else entirely, make sure they have it close-by - their anxiety will be reduced, and they'll find it much easier to cope with unusual situations.

