



# Top Tips to help make your Christmas autism-friendly



For many of us, Christmas is a time for celebrating with friends and family; however, this can be a difficult time for some autistic people. We've put together this pack with top tips for an enjoyable Christmas. **Remember, there are no rules – Christmas can be whatever works for you and your family.**

Scroll through this pack to find out more about...

1. PLANNING & PREPARATION

2. ROUTINES & CHANGE

3. SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

4. FAMILY & FRIENDS



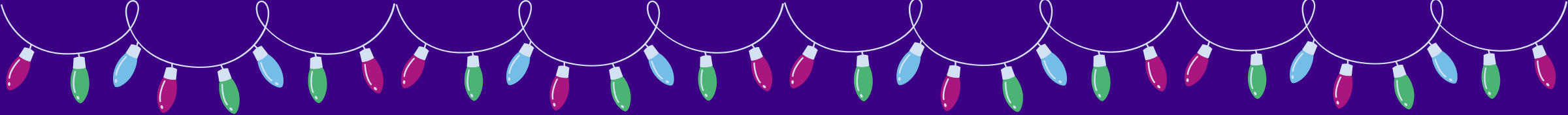
## PLAN & PREPARE

- It can be helpful to **plan your Christmas in advance**, wherever possible, with family, friends and support services.
- Sometimes unpredictability can create anxiety for many autistic people. **Creating and sharing a plan** can help to know **what** you / they will be doing, **when**, and **who** else will be there.
- **Practicing** for special events, such as Christmas day and other family gatherings or parties, can help reduce anxiety around **what to expect**.
- **Visual aids**, such as pictures, calendars, lists and social stories can be useful for some autistic people.



## ROUTINES & CHANGE

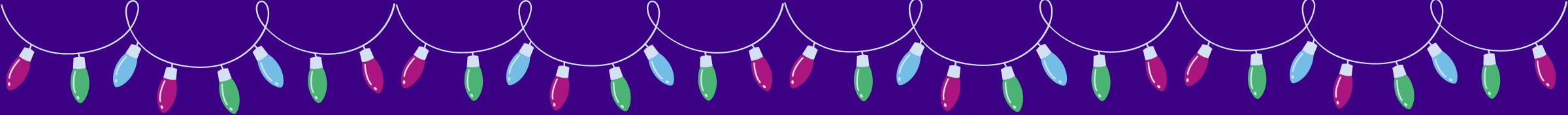
- **Routines** can be important to many autistic people. If this is important to you or your child, it may be a good idea to consider creating a **Christmas day schedule**.
- **Change** can be difficult for many autistic people. If you can, try finding ways to **incorporate your / their typical routine** into Christmas celebrations. For instance, by maintaining bedtime, bath time and meals.
- If change creates particular anxieties for you or your child, try **introducing festive items in your home gradually**. For example, by putting up a few decorations on one day, then more the next, and so on.



## DECORATIONS, PRESENTS, AND OTHER SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

Many autistic people have differing sensory needs.

- Think about ways you can decorate your house that are most suitable for you / your child, including where best to have them, how many, and what.
- It may be helpful to take into consideration: Christmas scents / fragrances, candles, music, flashing or sparkling lights
- Consider creating / finding quiet spaces to take breaks in if you or your child are feeling overwhelmed – these could be a Christmas-free zone. Allocating quiet time when there may be moments of additional stress, such as during Christmas day,
- When it comes to Christmas dinner, don't feel pressured into doing things just because it's 'traditional' or what other people do – remember to respect special / restricted diets.



## DECORATIONS, PRESENTS, AND OTHER SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

- Opening **presents** can be overwhelming for some autistic people. For example, if the anticipation and/or surprise of not knowing what's inside can create anxieties, it can be helpful to put a picture of what's inside on the wrapping paper / box. Alternatively, you could leave presents **unwrapped**, give **fewer presents at a time**, or offer your child the opportunity to **take them to their room** to unwrap / look at.
- If the tearing of **wrapping paper** can create sensory overload, consider opting for gift bags with tissue paper. This can also be helpful for people with fine motor issues.
- If you're out-and-about, it's not always possible to maintain a **sensory-friendly environment** for you and/or your child. If you can, try **planning for sensory-challenging and overstimulating moments** by bringing along things like noise-cancelling headphones / ear defenders, fidget toys, a weighted blanket or vest, and tablets / devices to watch their favourite show.
- It can be a good idea to have a plan on how to remove yourself / your child from situations that are over or under-stimulating if needed.



## FAMILY & FRIENDS

Visits to and from family & friends can be overwhelming for some autistic people. Tell them your plans, set expectations, and share tips on how they can help make the festive season autism-friendly.

- If unannounced / surprise visits can be overwhelming for you or your child, ask potential visitors to call ahead and come at times that work for you and your family. It can also be helpful to plan how long visitors stay for – try fitting this into your schedule in a way that allows you to maintain your routine.
- If you are comfortable to do so, try talking to family and friends about your / your child's needs – it may be helpful to discuss sensory considerations or you could share this pack.



Remember, there are no rules - Christmas can be whatever works for you and your family.





## SOURCES

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/leisure/christmas/tips>

<https://autismawarenesscentre.com/ten-tips-for-an-autism-friendly-christmas/>

<https://spectrumdisorder.com/article/tips-having-autism-friendly-christmas>

<https://atgtogether.com/autism-and-the-holidays-8-tips-for-an-autism-friendly-christmas/>

