Seasonal Changes

Autistic people can have difficulty with seasons for many reasons. The unpredictability of what to expect with the environment, the change in clothing and the changeable behaviour of people can all produce feelings of overwhelm, stress and variable feelings.

We asked autistic adults to give us feedback on what was problematic about seasonal changes, and they told us:

- Having to make changes in what you wear can cause worry, changing to summer wardrobe can make me feel overwhelmed and uneasy. This is because my heightened sensory system does not cope well with clothes that don't cover all my body.
- Executive functioning difficulties mean that I find it difficult to get moving and initiate putting on extra layers when I need them.
- Too much input through more than one type of weather at any one time can make me feel overwhelmed, for example being able to cope with wind or rain alone but when it is combined it all becomes too much
- The noise of certain weathers can be problematic, the noise of wind can fluctuate depending on where it is. The speed and movement of it is also unpredictable can also increase anxiety. One person described this as making them feel edgy.
- Changes in daylight saving time can send routines all over the place

Difficulty with seasonal changes can take many forms but some examples how it may manifest is:

- Anxiety
- Low mood
- Nervousness
- Heightened
- Change in sleep patterns
- Appetite changes
- Loss of energy

Some things for you to consider to support with seasonal changes include:

- **Try using** summertime blackout blinds which can allow natural melatonin to be produced. If there is a rise in temperature keep windows shut and curtains closed to keep rooms cooler during the day but at night open windows slightly as there is more chance of a breeze. Try to avoid the person sleeping during the day and keep bed and wake times consistent. If bedtime during school holidays is significantly later than during term time, spend the last week of the holidays slowly bringing this forward by approx. 15 minutes a night.

- **Prepare for the change-** if the person would cope better with being prepared for the season change use visual countdowns such as marking the season change on a calendar and talking about it with the person. Or use social stories.

- **Utilize natural light -** spend some more time outdoors with the person or make their environment brighter. Open blinds and identify anything blocking sunlight. You could also encourage the person to sit closer to bright windows whilst at home.

- **Maintain a regular routine-** where possible keep the routine for the person the same as possible throughout the year

- **Rule out season affective disorder (SAD) -** it can be common to be affected by changing seasons but if a person's feelings and mood is affecting and interfering with day-to-day life it could be a sign of SAD. Medical help in the form of therapies or medication is available for this