Our top tips at Christmas

Gifts, decorations and food are quite literally part and parcel of Christmas festivities, bringing joy - but also stress - for families and young people. Here are our top tips to keep Christmas healthy and happy.



This year Christmas may look a little different for us all, and you may be finding new traditions to replace the old ones you can no longer do. Consider the effect this may have on your child or young person. Can you prepare them for these changes?



Consider setting budgets for presents. Your child may be expecting every gift they asked for on their Christmas list. Setting budgets and making the person aware of the budget can avoid additional stress. Managing your own expectations is also important; some expectations may be unrealistic.



Christmas dinner might be the best meal of the year for some, but for somebody that finds new food difficult, or a sit-down meal overwhelming, Christmas dinner could cause a lot of anxiety. Ensure you consider the person's needs.



One of the best parts of Christmas - but is it? We spend a lot of time teaching our children and young people about stranger danger, so for some visiting Santa Claus and sitting on his knee could be a scary experience.

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Anticipation

For someone who struggles with time concepts, understanding how far away Christmas Day is can be difficult. Can you use a visual countdown? Similarly, the anticipation of when Christmas ends can be distressing. Can you set a date when you take all Christmas decorations down and festivities end?

Consider decorations

A real Christmas tree may be that perfect festive addition for you. However, it can be a sensory nightmare to someone else - the smell of pine needles, for example, or the bright flashing lights. Can decorations be added gradually to help the person get used to them? Can they be given control over the decorations - choosing baubles or decorating the tree themselves? Think about where you place decorations - try to keep safe and quiet spaces as familiar as possible.

Resist social pressure

If putting up no decorations works for your family, that is fine. Do what works best for you all.

Opening gifts

Opening gifts in front of a crowd of people can be overwhelming, with everyone watching to see what your reaction is or knowing what manners you are expected to use. Some autistic people do not understand social expectations so could find this extremely difficult.

Changes to familiar places

Places you usually visit may look different at this time of year. Can you prepare the person for this? You may find using visual stories a useful way to do this.

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