



Make a schedule - Buy or make a timetable which highlights how many days to Christmas. Show on your calendar when you plan to go shopping, put the tree up/ decorations, family visiting , school holiday dates etc. Keeping a schedule can also help reassure those children who become obsessive about Christmas.

Maintaining Structure and Routine – Try and keep your daily routine the same as much as possible, such as bedtimes, getting up in the morning. Let them know on their Christmas Advert/Timetable when things will be happening.

Allow them the choice of opting out of social gatherings - Christmas is often a time for family gatherings, meals out and other social events. All of these can be a source of stress and anxiety for the individual with autism. Levels of stress can often be managed by providing a safe place for them to retreat to when it all becomes too much. Let them know they have your support to leave the room if they need to . A favourite object can also be a life saver at such events. Fiddle toys and gadgets can help with distractions and relaxation.

Awareness and Acceptance – Try and keep family members up to date and informed about Autism and how they can support your young person. It helps with preventing misunderstandings. If possible share photos to the autistic person of who is planning to visit and when, especially if they haven't seen them for a while.

Sensory Stimulators - If your autistic young person has sensory difficulties then try to keep flashing lights, sparkly items, Christmas crackers and music to a minimum in areas that are used by everyone. There may also be particularly unfamiliar smells associated with the festive season such as scented candles, cooking or even 'smelly' presents such as soaps, perfumes etc. If possible, try and warn your child in advance so that they are aware or keep these to a minimum. You may like to keep one room free with no decorations or keep it to just one room.

Surprises - Whilst some individuals with autism love surprises, others find them difficult to cope with and prefer to know exactly what they are getting for Christmas. Think about involving them in buying the present the wrapping of it. Doing this reassures them that they will receive the gift they are expecting. If your child prefers to know what's inside a present, use plain wrapping paper and stick a picture of the present on the outside, or use a see-through material such as cellophane. Or do you need to wrap it at all.

Presents - Make sure gifts are ready to play with to avoid frustration, e.g. build gifts prior to giving them, put the batteries in before the person opens/receives their present. Introduce presents one by one, or a few at a time, instead of all at once. The person may prefer to open presents gradually over the course of a few days. Your child may not want to open presents in front of others,. Some young people may also find it difficult to say thank you. Prepare and warn family members and support your young person in how to respond in receiving a gift.

Father Christmas – He can cause anxiety. Please prepare your child by showing them pictures, or perhaps Father Christmas could drop off presents at another family or friends house instead

Christmas Dinner – You may like to stick with what you know is popular with your young person, it's ok not to have turkey. Give your child what they enjoy to eat. Sitting round a table with a larger number of people than usual can be difficult. Be aware of things that may cause sensory overload, e.g. raised noise levels, pulling of Christmas crackers/party poppers and smells from food. If you dress the table, it may help if you keep things the same as usual for the person you are supporting, e.g. they may prefer to sit in their usual place with their usual placemat, plate and cutlery.