



## Supporting your child at Christmas

The bright lights, crowds, unfamiliar noises, routine changes and extra visits to family and friends can make Christmas an overwhelming experience for children with sensory sensitivities. As we approach the festive period here are some things to consider to support your child during the holiday season:

- **Plan your outings in advance:** Choose quieter times and check if there are sensory friendly options for visiting Santa or other attractions. When out in public identify a quiet space you can use if your child gets overwhelmed.
- **Manage the expectations of visitors:** If you're having visitors over chat to them before they arrive to manage their expectations. Talk with them to confirm when they will be coming and if possible show your child a picture of them before they are due to visit. This will help prepare your child as they will know what to expect. Make sure your child can retire to their bedroom or another quiet space if they need to.
- **Talk to family and friends before visiting:** Explain that your child may not eat the food that's offered or that you may need to leave early. Ask them if there is a quiet space your child can use if things get overwhelming.
- **Prepare your child:** Social stories are a great way to prepare your child for outings or visits to other people's homes.
- **Christmas food:** Consider the food options that will be available when you leave home. If necessary, bring foods that you know your child likes. Many children with sensory needs will be more comfortable eating the everyday foods they are familiar with rather than trying new and unfamiliar Christmas foods.
- **Clothing:** If you're buying new clothes make sure to try them well in advance of Christmas Day to make sure they are comfortable. Some children with sensory needs will be more comfortable in the regular clothes that they wear every day, rather than new outfits.
- **Schedules and routines:** If your child has a bedtime, bathtime or mealtime routine try to maintain these over the Christmas holidays.

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- **Use sensory strategies:** Sensory strategies like movement breaks and rest breaks can help your child stay calm and regulated. If your child has strategies or routines to stay calm or regulated continue to use these over the holidays.
- **Sensory toolkit:** Consider packing a 'sensory backpack' containing ear defenders, fidget toys, snacks and your child's favourite toys and bring it wherever you go. Allow your child to have access to it whenever they need it.
- **Know your child's limits:** Watch for signs of sensory overload. If you can see that things are getting too much for your child then don't be afraid to take a break in a quiet place or go home early. Remember, you know your child best.

#### Presents:

- Christmas gift giving can be overwhelming for children with sensory needs. Consider giving one present at a time to reduce the chance of your child getting overwhelmed.
- If family or friends would like to buy your child a gift consider talking to them in advance to ensure the gift is suitable for your child.
- Pre warn family and friends that it can take your child longer to process the presents they receive, in case their reaction is not what the gift giver is expecting.
- Support your child to play with toys in the way they find enjoyable, even if this is not the way the toy was designed to be played with.

**Take it easy:** Remember to schedule time for you and your family to rest over the busy Christmas period.

**Most importantly of all, make Christmas work for you! If traditional Christmas customs are not working for your family then create your own new traditions. Forget about everyone else's expectations and do what works for you.**



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