



# Top 10 tips to making this Christmas autism-friendly

## 1 Be conscious of sensory needs

Minimise excessive bright decorations and flashing lights. Soft or non-flashing LED lights can be used as alternative decorations, and noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs can be offered to reduce noise impact.

## 2 Develop visual schedules

A visual schedule or calendar can help autistic individuals understand holiday plans and activities. This can reduce anxiety and provide a sense of predictability.

## 3 Provide a quiet space

Designate a quiet space where individuals can go if they become overwhelmed. This space should have sensory-friendly items like soft blankets, weighted blankets, fidget toys and dimmed lighting.

## 4 Understand food preferences

Offer varied food choices, including familiar and preferred options, to cater to dietary restrictions or sensory aversions. Strong or unfamiliar odours should be avoided if they cause discomfort.

## 5 Consider your approach to gift giving

Ask for gift preferences or provide wish lists in advance to ensure gifts are well-received. Consider gift bags with sensory friendly wrapping materials, such as soft tissue paper, or reusable gift bags.

## 6 Prepare for surprises

Where possible, let individuals know about any surprise or unexpected visitors in advance to reduce anxiety, and offer a visual or written schedule that includes any surprise elements.

## **7 Respect personal space**

Encourage family and guests to respect personal space boundaries and sensory needs, and let them know how best to approach and interact with those who may have different preferences.

## **8 Plan sensory friendly activities**

Plan activities that cater to sensory sensitivities. These could include calming crafts, sensory bins or interactive games that allow for self-regulation.

## **9 Be flexible**

Above all understand that routines may need to be adjusted during the holidays, be flexible in accommodating any individual needs or preferences. Be prepared to modify plans or take breaks if needed.

## **10 Provide support**

Offer support and understanding to parents and caregivers of autistic individuals and children, as they may need assistance during busy holiday gatherings.