

'Good Enough' Parenting at Christmas

- Be a Good-Enough parent (Bruno Bettelheim)
- Say 'No' (and mean it)
- Stop feeling guilty
- Don't try and please everyone
- Go out with grown ups
- Lower your expectations
- Remember your routines
- Photograph less, not more
- Ask for help/Delegate/Expect support
- Get outdoors
- Give your child (and you) 10 minutes connection a day
- Remember your stress is their stress
- Limit travel
- Limit visitors
- Limit visiting
- Make lists and start with something you've done
- Cut the gift list
- Choose easy food/Cereal for dinner
- Have a Christmas-free zone



Avoiding Christmas Chaos at Home

Christmas time can be a very challenging time for your child and, consequently, for you. Change, crowds and surprises aplenty can be overwhelming. Sensitivities to touch, taste, light and noise can lead to extreme responses. Gift giving can be a confusing idea, complicated by the fact that people with autism don't tend to be good at **faking** delight with unwanted gifts!

Every individual will respond differently. It is important to try to find out what your child expects and to be aware of any possible triggers. Support will make a difference to many but it is equally important to consider whether full participation in everything going on is suitable for your child.

Try to look at Christmas through your child's eyes. Which aspects of Christmas might they enjoy? Which aspects might overload them? Share these thoughts with school staff and other family members. Where possible, try to prepare together. Some of the ideas below might help with this. Remember to have lots of 'Christmas free' time too!

Counting down:

Create a calendar to show a count down of sleeps before:

- decorations go up
- decorations come down
- school holidays start/ end
- visitors come/ go
- Christmas Day



Parties:

Practising party games can be helpful, particularly preparing for the possibility that someone else might be the winner! A Social Story might help to support understanding in this area.

(www.autism.org.uk/socialstories)

Santa can be a bit loud and overwhelming for many children. Look at pictures in advance of meeting him. Visit him on a quiet day or have a quiet word to let him know you are coming.

Gifts:

Giving and receiving gifts can be confusing and overwhelming. Some children cope better with opening just one present a day. Some prefer to avoid surprises altogether by helping with the wrapping so that they know what is inside each parcel. Checking for battery operated toys and putting batteries in before wrapping them will enable your child to play with them straight away.

It may help to practise key skills and activities:

- Giving and receiving gifts
- Waiting for family to waken up before opening presents
- Opening presents



Food:

You might want to practise preparing and tasting Christmas food before the big day however for some this is a step too far. Foods that seem like a treat to us could just be too different for your child. Familiar foods can be reassuring and comforting when everything else is challenging.



Keep it simple:

Family traditions are great! Find a routine that works and stick to it! Overall, keep it small and comfortable; **small groups rather than big crowds**, **quieter shops rather than over-decorated ones**. Where possible, try to visit Christmas Markets, fairs and events at quieter times. Most importantly keep it simple, try not to over commit. Short visits followed by lots of down time can work well.

How to make Christmas Merrier



1. **Prepare ahead** (but not too soon)

2. **Prepare a social story**

OR

A calendar to cross off days

OR

A visual plan/Discussion

3. **Prep the grown ups**

4. **Talk about gifts...**

What to say if you don't like it?

Should they be given over time?

Should they be wrapped- if so, one end open/batteries in/wrap up familiar toys?

Limit number...Want/Need/Wear/Read

Take turns to open?

When the last present is open...distract!

5. **Decorations...**

Have a Christmas-free zone

Use static (not flashing) lights

Don't do Christmas decorations overnight- build up. More is less (stress)

Involve child in decorating (use child's craft items?)

6. **Parties**

Wear familiar clothes- new clothes can cause sensory discomfort

Clear boundaries around time + prep (Who'll be there/What might happen/When you'll go/When you'll leave- timing is crucial)

Parents going out? Definitely! Model being an adult to your child- being grown up is fun.

7. Huggy relatives and friends who might be ever so slightly judgemental?

Make it clear to adult and child that hugging isn't a given

Alert family about food issues and then go with the flow/pick your battles/Who cares what they eat as long as they're making happy memories?

Do things *your way*

Boundaries around interactions and timing

8. Get outdoors

See water

Hug a tree

Choose a favourite stone

Spot a blue door

Spot three dogs

Spot a red car

Spot a person wearing a hat

March across a road

Jump a puddle

9. Pay CLOSE attention to your child at least once a day...

Love bubble

Blanket time

Choose dream

Rub back

10. Always remember that you can say...

'Whoops'

'Shall we start the day again?'

'Silly me'

DECEMBER 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

