



## TOP TIPS FOR A HAPPY 'SENSORY' CHRISTMAS

The Christmas season fills winter days with bright lights, seasonal music and the smells of Christmas baking. These sensory experiences can be overwhelming for many children and young people with autism. While some will enjoy the bright colours, the carols and the Christmas treats, others will feel overloaded by all the stimulation and dislike the changes to routines and places.

These tips will hopefully make the festivities more calming and enjoyable for all:

1. Introduce decorations gradually. Do not decorate the whole house in one evening, as all these visual changes may be visually overwhelming for the autistic child or young person. Put up a few decorations each day so that they have time to get used to the changes.
2. Allow the child or young person to see and feel the decorations before they go up and involve them in choosing decorations and where to place them.
3. If possible, offer a choice between coloured lights or white lights, and between static lights and twinkling lights. Many lights have a choice of settings, so the child or young person can then choose what type of lighting is most tolerable.
4. Be aware that some lights and other battery or mains powered decorations can produce a sound (e.g. humming noise), and may need to be switched off or moved if causing upset.
5. Consider where decorations are placed. It may be too distracting to have them near the place where homework is completed or meals are eaten.
6. Keep an area or areas of the home and school free from decorations. It is important to have places where there are no decorations as this will minimise sensory stimulation.
7. Keep rooms well ventilated when baking, cooking or engaging in Art and Craft activities, in order to neutralise odours.
8. Do not expect the child or young person to eat the traditional Christmas dinner. The unfamiliar tastes, texture and smells may be overwhelming so allow them to celebrate Christmas by eating their favourite dinner.
9. Consider leaving presents unwrapped. Some children and young people may not like the bright, patterned paper or may feel anxious when presented with something they do not recognise. They may find it easier to clearly see the item.
10. Check with the child or young person before purchasing a Christmas jumper or pyjamas for them. They may dislike the texture of the jumper, or the unfamiliarity of the new item of clothing, and they may prefer to wear familiar clothing instead.
11. If crackers are going to be opened during the festivities, the child or young person may need to be prepared for the noise. Open a cracker to show them what makes the noise or consider making your own crackers with the snap removed.
12. Continue to provide calm breaks as part of the daily routine. Taking a break from festivities and the sensory stimulation will help the child or young person to remain calm and to enjoy the Christmas season.