



Christmas tips for grandparents and family members

Christmas can be an exciting and fun time for many of us, but new activity can be overwhelming for some.

However, with good planning and communication Christmas can be enjoyed by all. With your help we have compiled a list of tips for the festive period.

This information has been compiled for grandparents and other family members of autistic people. The tips are intended to provide general guidance and will not be suitable for everyone.

Key to preparing for a successful Christmas is to make sure the autistic person is central to all planning.



01. Preparing



Autistic people can find any kind of change difficult. Planning and preparation is key to everyone enjoying Christmas.



- Some autistic people may prefer to have things communicated in different ways, including the use of visual supports. Talk with the person, parents or carers so you can try to understand what they may prefer.
- Your family member may need to know what is happening and when - make sure you share your plans with them or their parents/carers well in advance.
- Routine and structure may be important to some autistic people, this may mean certain things have to remain the same, such as meal times or the types of food they choose to eat. Be flexible and understanding.
- If you would like to do certain activities with your relative over Christmas, a meal out, shopping trip etc... check with the person, parents or carer as to how suitable it is and when is best to do it.
- Some autistic people may not want to get involved in social gatherings at Christmas and/or they might want to be on their own. It is important that your expectations of Christmas take account of the needs of the autistic person. Think about the best way for you all to communicate over the Christmas period if you are not meeting in person - maybe a phone call, text or a Christmas card.
- Some autistic people will find Christmas activities overwhelming, including sensory differences - talk with the person, parents or carers as to what these might be so you are aware of them.
- Think creatively about how you can bring the magic of Christmas in a way that works for everyone.
- If the person does get overwhelmed find out in advance what is the best way to help.

"If you or your child enjoy the Christmas lights and window displays, sit on the top deck of the bus and you'll get a birds' eye view without getting stuck in the crowds. We do it every year and involve all my children so everybody's happy."

- Parent



"It can be helpful to wear earplugs when attending family or Christmas parties or social events."

- Autistic person



02. Decorations



Many autistic people will have differing **sensory** needs, decorations for some are great whereas others will struggle. If your relative is coming to visit you over Christmas consider:



- Have a quiet space (bedroom, spare room etc..) for your loved one to go to when they get overwhelmed, preferably in a Christmas-free area, and particularly around the main days of Christmas or at key times that there may be stress.
- Where appropriate introduce Christmas activities into the daily schedule, eg. Christmas shopping, opening the advent calendar, putting up decorations or switching on the tree lights.
- Keep the daily schedule the same as far as possible, including on Christmas Day.
- Spend Christmas day at home to avoid visiting less familiar family or friends homes.

“Christmas is and always will be overwhelming. But being able to have your say is really important. For example: Christmas scents and candles can be super overwhelming sensory-wise so could be avoided when decorating. Flashing fairy lights can be overwhelming visually, etc”

- Autistic person

03. Presents



Presents can be overwhelming; from the wrapping, the amount and expectation on responding to receiving presents. Where appropriate, you could:

- Discuss with the person, parents or carer whether a limit on presents may be appropriate. For example, one from grandparents, and other family members give money.
- Introduce presents one by one instead of all at once, or stagger them throughout the festive period.
- Discuss whether presents should be wrapped or not and consider alternatives, for example leave unwrapped but in a gift bag or try wrapping in cling film for less of a sensory overload.

“Andy needs to know his present(s) in advance - he hates surprises, and also struggles with wanting more than one thing at a time.”

- Parent





Getting Support

Chat with family and friends to ensure smooth planning across the Christmas period and identify any potential help they can offer. Get ideas from other families, and share your tips with them, in our [online Community](#).

Further help from our charity:

- [gift ideas](#)
- [preparing for change](#)
- [routines](#)
- [preparing for Christmas: autism resources](#)
- [visual supports](#)
- [communication](#)
- [anxiety in autistic adults](#)
- [organising, sequencing and prioritising](#)
- [obsessions, repetitive behaviour and routines](#)

Useful resources

- [I know what to expect at Christmas & birthdays](#)
- [3 tips for an autism friendly Christmas](#)