



A Community Guide to a Happy Neurodivergent Christmas



**DITCH THE EXPECTATIONS
AND MEET YOUR NEEDS**



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**COUNSELLING AND THERAPY
ONLINE AND IN LAUNCESTON**



Taking off the pressure



Christmas may still be a few weeks away, but a neurodivergent-friendly version can take a bit of planning. Don't worry if you've left it until the last minute, there are still steps you can take to ensure it's as stress-free as possible.

Everyone is different. Some people love Christmas and everything about it. It might even be a special interest. Some feel the exact opposite. Most are somewhere in the middle and are happy to get involved if it's done in a way that isn't overwhelming. This is all about doing what feels right for you.

Thinking about and planning things in advance is likely to reduce the volume and intensity of meltdowns, shutdowns and misunderstandings.

The tips and ideas in this brief guide represent a few common things to consider, but you know yourself and your loved ones best. If you're able to ask, do. You might be surprised by the answers. Things are unlikely to go totally to plan, and that's ok. Each year builds on the last.

This guide has been written in the UK where Christmas is both a Christian and a secular holiday. It's widely celebrated by people of many religions and none. Aspects of this guide also apply to a variety of other cultural and religious celebrations and holidays.

Thank you to all the amazing neurodivergent people who've contributed their top tips and examples of how their Christmases are designed to meet their needs and those of their families. They encompass a variety of neurotypes so different parts are likely to resonate with different people. Please take what is useful and ignore what isn't. There's no single way to celebrate a Happy Neurodivergent Christmas!

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Spending Christmas alone

Much of this booklet is aimed at meeting a variety of people's needs simultaneously. A solo Christmas can look very different.

If you're happy or content to be spending Christmas on your own then lean into it and do exactly as you'd like! Maybe you enjoy making a roast dinner and watching Christmas TV. Perhaps you can't stand it and would much rather spend the day immersed in your hobbies free from distractions and demands, ignoring Christmas totally.

If you're sad to be alone then things can be very different. You're allowed to grieve for what you wish you had if that feels right for you. You're allowed to distract yourself and indulge in your favourite things if that's what is needed.

If you don't want to be alone, most areas host community Christmas lunches which are open to all and can be attended as a guest or a volunteer. These commonly have neurodivergent people in both roles, but attending something like this may feel too much as everyone's needs and capacities are different. Planning to contact friends or engage in online communities may be more accessible.



It isn't just one day

As a family with several neurodivergent members, the festive period can be 'interesting' here too. Here are my top three bits of advice for the festive period.

1) Being a family with neurodivergent members is an excellent justification for doing things differently. Think what genuinely brings you and your family joy, and do more of this. Skip the parts that are likely to be hard for your family or not bring you joy. I promise you the reindeers will be absolutely fine, if no reindeer food is sprinkled. Particularly, if this will lead to an argument over who got to sprinkle the bigger handful, just before bedtime on Christmas Eve!

2) Focus on the 'festive season', vs. focusing specifically on Christmas Day. The demands of Christmas Day and the anticipation make it a hard day for many, and the reality is that it leads to lots of dysregulation across many homes. So try to reduce the pressure, by seeing it as part of the festive season. Christmas Day may not go to plan (although it might!). Yet, the 29th of December may just happen to be awesome, and be the day to remember.

3) Try to focus on your own regulation too, by planning in rest, fun for you, and activities that calm your nervous system. This will help you co-regulate your children (allow them to borrow your calm, so that they can regulate) more effectively, during the festive season.

Happy Holidays!

Dr Joanne Riordan, Neurodivergent Educational Psychologist
www.drjoanne.co.uk



Removing demands

Christmas is a time of huge demands and expectations. Parents and carers may feel under pressure to produce a magical Christmas, including lots of trips and events, expensive food and gifts.

How realistic are these? Are they what your children want, or would they be content with something simpler or more affordable?

Traditional Christmas activities such as trips to see Santa and sitting on his knee can be distressing for some children, regardless of their neurotype, as can long queues. Some would be much happier to just skip it all.

As well as activities there are demands to see people, buy presents, and go to places. All of this can be overwhelming on its own before we even consider other aspects. Be careful not to plan too much. Ideas that may ordinarily be embraced may be overwhelming when combined with everything else.

If you or a loved one are PDA then this also needs to be factored in, with communication based around your or their preferred style.

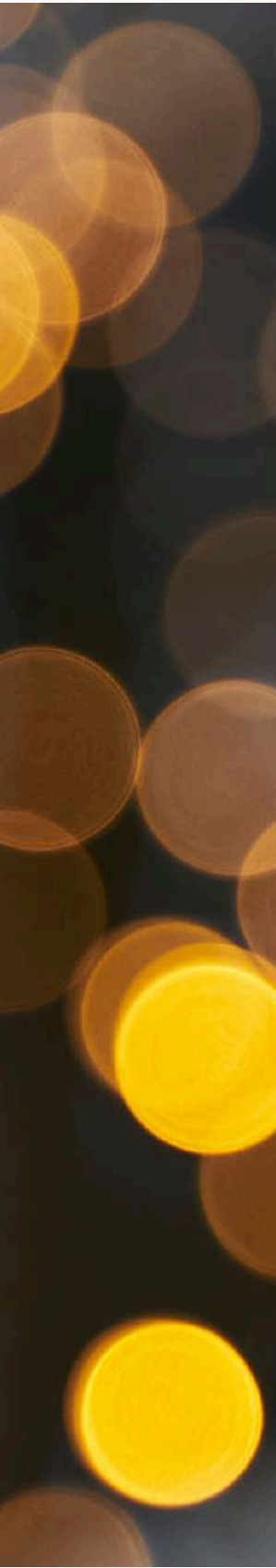
Allowing people to choose how they would like to celebrate, and if they want to celebrate at all, can save a lot of distress for everyone.



If you enjoy a sense of tradition but a typical Christmas isn't suitable for your family, you might enjoy coming up with your own.

Your traditions can be totally unique and as simple or quirky as you like!

Sensory considerations



Christmas brings an enormous wave of different sensory experiences. Some of these may be welcomed and enjoyed, and others may be completely overwhelming. Individuals all have different sensory profiles, and these can change and fluctuate based on other demands. It's likely that everything going on at Christmas time may heighten someone's sensory needs.

Don't forget that many neurodivergent people love particular sensory experiences, but these vary from person to person. Someone may enjoy going round looking at all the Christmas lights, while another person would find this unbearable. Some need to get outside in nature while others need time alone in their room.

Other key things to consider include clothes, noise, foods, smells, temperature and how busy somewhere is. A Christmas market with lots of competing noises and smells could easily be overwhelming. New or strange clothes may add to the intensity. The bang in crackers or the texture of paper hats could also be the final straw that tips someone into overwhelm and causes a shutdown or meltdown.

Ensuring everyone has their sensory tools, safe items and things such as ear plugs and comfortable clothes can help things to go as smoothly as possible. Scratchy Christmas jumpers and surprise gifts of clothing may cause upset, particularly if the giver expects them to be worn immediately.

Not requiring physical contact is a big one. While some people love touch, others find it extremely difficult or even traumatic. Love can be expressed in many different ways. Not wanting to hug or kiss someone doesn't mean they are being disrespected or aren't loved. Promoting consent and bodily autonomy is more important than hurt feelings.

Changing it up

Spread the cheer! A lot of pressure is put on just one day but you can open presents on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day. You can absolutely have the big family meal on Boxing Day so you can all enjoy each others company (and gifts!) on Christmas Day itself.

Having flexibility to go with the flow, and making your own traditions that work for your family can be incredibly fun and help ease the pressure.

Marion McLaughlin, Neurodivergent Advocate, Trainer and Consultant
www.auroraconsulting.scot



Some neurodivergent people can be heavily impacted by a change in routine, or by not knowing plans in sufficient detail.

If plans are known, discuss them and encourage questions. If you don't know the answer then find out wherever possible, and be clear about what can be planned and what can't.

Respecting people's boundaries and needs is really important at a time when there is so much disruption. Consider where your or your child's safe space is and try to avoid any incursion on this. For example, if it's their bedroom then having them share it with visitors is likely to be distressing and lead to a miserable time for everyone.

A social story or visual schedule may be helpful for some people, and advent calendars can help track time - so long as no one is going to get upset about chocolates potentially being eaten beforehand!

Top considerations

Just like any other day, there are no 'shoulds' when it comes to Christmas.

Here are my top five tips of how to let go of the expectations that do not meet your family's needs:

1. Know your limits and capacity.
2. Accommodate your sensory and nervous systems.
3. Plan and prioritise your well-being.
4. Create an environment that supports your needs.
5. Let go of any guilt or pressure.

Teodora Byrne, Neurodivergent Parent & Founder of SENDwise Hub
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61560394157107

Does everyone really want visitors, or is it just too much right now?

Is going to see relatives manageable, or will the demands, expectations and change of environment end in tears and arguments?

Would seeing each other at a calmer, less stressful time actually work better for you and your family?

Do you want to celebrate Christmas at all?

Food at Christmas time

Making preferred foods available and not insisting that everyone eat traditional Christmas meals can help neurodivergent people to feel safe and welcome, particularly if they have sensory considerations around food.

Nurse and Sleep Consultant Laura Hellfeld shares her tips:



The holiday season comes with so many expectations - Christmas jumpers, visiting family and friends, school nativities, decorations and holiday meals.

Speaking of holiday meals, so much of the holiday season revolves around food. Often this involves group meals, eating away from home and unfamiliar food that might only grace a decorated table once a year.

But wait a candy cane minute...

It's ok to put in boundaries. We can rethink and set priorities for ourselves and our young people. This also includes for food and eating. Everyone deserves to enjoy the holiday season.

Here are some ideas:

- 🎄 Use of fidget tools, screens and other comfort items while eating
- 🎄 Supporting someone's need to eat their own, separate food versus the group meal
- 🎄 Create options for eating alone if needed rather than in a group
- 🎄 Reassure your young person that there will be no pressure to eat any of the food served
- 🎄 Let your young person know that if they choose to try the food offered but change their mind, that's ok!
- 🎄 Bring preferred foods when eating out of the home
- 🎄 Arrive late or leave an event early to avoid the time when everyone is eating

Navigating Holiday Events



some helpful scripts for when there are comments about your child's eating...

"We would love to attend and will bring our own supper."

"Thanks for offering but they are happy with the food they already have."

"Our family rule is that no one has to eat a food that they don't want to."

"I'm happy with what they ate for supper. Can they have their pudding please?"

@Laura.nd.nurse.consulting



Last Christmas we had a large family gathering away from home. At least a month before we had an itinerary.

I was aghast at the idea, but it was honestly the best Christmas I have ever experienced. It had taken all the stress of not knowing and surprises away.

You can plan around what was inevitably going to be a loud activity and make accommodations.

It also meant we could plan what to take with us to support our sensory needs.

The most stress free and fantastic Christmas I've ever had!

Proof that breaking the traditional norms is ok and you can do Christmas your way! Try it, I'm sure it will be one of the best you experience.

**Adrian Darbyshire, Neurodivergent Parent & Creator of
Not So NT in a ND World
www.nt-in-a-nd-world.com**

Social batteries

We all have different social batteries and their capacity can change at Christmas. Some people absolutely love spending time with lots of people. The idea of a Christmas spent alone may be distressing. For others that sounds like a perfect relief.

Some may be happy spending lots of time with safe and familiar people, but overwhelmed by relatives they rarely see or the volume of people at parties or out shopping.

No one is right or wrong. Allowing people to leave or providing a place to take a break when needed can help. Someone is not being rude if they need to retreat.

Activities may need to be carefully chosen and include planned downtime. It's ok to leave early or cancel plans if you realise you're over-scheduled.

If managing energy levels and fluctuating capacity more generally is a challenge for you or a family member then you might like to spend some time working out what drains and recharges each person's battery. This may help you to plan the festive period with plenty of recharging time. Things that drain someone's may recharge another's.

Some considerations:

Missing pets or things from home

Alone time

Sensory kits

TV shows

Sleep

Time outdoors

Exercise

Time off work or school

Temperature

Noise

New clothes

Small talk

Lighting

New activities

Too much happening

Change in routine

Demands

Bodily needs

Travelling

Time alone

Unfamiliar people

Unfamiliar places

Friends

WiFi connection

Comfort items

New foods

Sitting still

*Not an exhaustive list





New environments

Everyone has different expectations, and neurodivergent people can find this change difficult.

Visiting relatives who have particular ways of doing things can be confusing if this is different from the norm.

Explaining these differences and people being accommodating with one another may be enough.

Alternatively, relatives may need to drop these expectations if you or your child are to feel safe going ahead with a visit.

Anyone you're visiting will need to accept differences too. Maybe you or your child need to move a lot or don't make eye contact in accordance with neuronormative expectations. People shouldn't be forced to hide who they are in order to feel welcome. Do visitors understand that clarifying questions or direct communication aren't cheekiness or rudeness?

Physical environments can be difficult too. Maybe you need to take bedding and towels with you to ensure they will be comfortable and suitable. Are the toilets and bathing facilities suitable? If you or your child only take baths but the place you intend to stay only has showers then it may not be possible to stay there and alternative accommodation may be needed.

Competing needs



Even if you're fully on board with ditching demands and doing things differently, competing needs can still arise.

Meeting all of these may be impossible, so it can be useful to consider the things each individual must have for their Christmas to be a happy one.

This is a much less daunting task than trying to make it into everything for everyone.

You may like to discuss this as a family, or each write down your key needs. These could be anything at all, but might look something like:

Parent A: An hour of alone time after the main Christmas meal. A Boxing Day with no cooking or washing up.

Parent B: To know what my presents will be in advance. To be able to watch the football on Boxing Day.

Child A: To not have any flashing lights in the house. To be able to go to my room at any point if it gets too much and not feel under pressure to return.

Child B: To be able to open my presents alone on Christmas Eve. To go to the park on Christmas Day.

Knowing and agreeing these things in advance can make the festive period much easier.

It won't be a shock when Parent B takes the children to the park after the Christmas meal while Parent A has time alone.

No one will put up flashing lights and cause distress to Child A.

There won't be any anger or resistance when Child B takes their presents to their room to open them on Christmas Eve.

Nativity plays

Neurodivergent Advocate, Trainer and Consultant Marion McLaughlin shares their experience of making them more accessible



Many schools are gearing up for nativities, and as a parent and ex teacher, I've seen a lot of these! I've got some thoughts I'd like to share which just might be useful to some of you too.

Here are some reasons why nativities and other festive shows can be super hard for many kids:

- 🎄 The disruption to the regular routine
- 🎄 The noise of many children singing together (not always in tune, sorry!)
- 🎄 The pressure to perform on a stage
- 🎄 Uncomfortable costumes (tinsel on your head is scratchy folks!)

🎄 Sitting in very close proximity to your classmates

🎄 All the waiting may test the limits of even the most patient child

🎄 Parents being encouraged to cheer deafeningly for their children

🎄 Highly emotional songs

That's just a snapshot of some of the difficulties

We also have to consider the number of children in your school who may not celebrate Christmas.

They may not talk about Santa, but might have other beautiful traditions.

Continued...



So how do we make them accessible?

✦ First up, consider if the school really needs a big whole school play with everyone on the stage at all times. Sometimes having smaller shows, or one or two classes on stage at a time can be easier to manage.

✦ Ensuring the children are involved in choosing

✦ Let kids opt out. If they really don't want to do it, that's fine. Not everyone wants to dress up or sing on stage.

✦ If they do want to participate, what would they be comfortable doing? Helping start the songs? Pulling curtains? Being a narrator? Work with what they are comfortable with.

✦ Try to keep rehearsals at predictable times to minimise disruptions to usual routines.

✦ Ensure there is a safe space to access if things get too much.

✦ Allow pupils to use support items such as fidget tools, plushies etc. This can be a reasonable adjustment that helps them feel safe.

✦ Do not encourage parents to whoop, yell, and shout as loudly as they can. I've seen a fair few Autistic children and adults have to leave a performance before it's even started because of this.

✦ Consider alternatives to the traditional nativity. A few years ago I was lucky enough to see a school where each class took it in turns to perform a festive themed song. Some were Christmas songs, but some were from Christmas movies, and it was brilliant! Each class took it in turns to take to the stage, and classes were able to wait in their class till it was their turn, so nobody got frustrated or fed up waiting around.

✦ Another school I know held a festive fun afternoon for families with different activities such as cookie decorating or a quiz in different rooms. It went down an absolute storm!

However your school marks the festive season, it's essential they recognise that Getting It Right For Every Child includes your child too.

www.auroraconsulting.scot

Difficult circumstances



It's sadly common for people to hold trauma around Christmas for a wide variety of reasons.

These may include an impoverished childhood; family arguments and violence; abuse; loneliness; being forced to eat certain foods; unpleasant school experiences; not having their neurodivergent needs met, and more.

In addition to everything else going on, memories of past traumas can be triggered too. Particular environments and people may need to be avoided, and a safe place provided. Leaving may be the best option.

Challenging all of the expectations around Christmas and moving away from those that don't serve you or your family can promote healing and avoid retraumatisation.

If current circumstances are difficult or traumatic, support is available.

Local organisations can be some of the most helpful. Your local town is likely to have a foodbank, community Christmas lunch, and a community food larder designed to reduce food waste. Most of these are open to everyone with no need to share your financial details. Some also provide presents for children.

If you are struggling, please don't suffer alone. Local charities support people who are experiencing homelessness; domestic abuse; financial difficulties; and mental health struggles.

If you can't find support locally, or you would prefer a national organisation, these are just a few:

www.shelter.org.uk

www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

www.papyrus-uk.org

www.samaritans.org

Pressure for perfection

Neurodivergent Parent and Advocate Viv Dawes discusses how to take care of yourself when Christmas is hard



This Christmas my son and I will be on our own. There have been multiple changes within my family over the last seven months, that mean the season to be jolly - will feel more like sitting on holly!

There is so much pressure for Christmas to be perfect and for everyone to be with family. But for many neurodivergent families the demands and expectations around Christmas means we might need to do it differently and that's absolutely ok.

All the family crammed together can be a sensory nightmare, the different food and altered routines can all be a recipe for exhaustion.

However, there are many who don't have any family and will be alone. There are many who may be grieving, and there are those families like my own who have lost what they've known for many years.

This often means that seeing people's happy Christmas memories on Facebook can be hard to stomach. The pain might be intense on Christmas Day. I am preparing myself as best I can and if tears come then I will cry, quietly in the shower or into my pillow.

Emotions can be confusing at times, but pain expressed in a safe way is better than pain suppressed.

Continued...

Alexithymia, which is common in people who are autistic or ADHD, means we might not know the name of emotions and struggle with identifying or expressing them. This can lead to increased dysregulation.

If this is something that you think you struggle with, then there are therapists who can help you with this and something called interoception, which is the sense of our internal signals. Improving our mind-body connection can be life changing for neurodivergent individuals.

So, I wanted to share my thoughts on what might be helpful, if this year's Christmas is going to be different:

1. If you have people who you can be honest with, then let them know that this year is going to be harder. Maybe they could reach out to you over the season, to check in with you (that can be any form of communication that is best for everyone).

2. Try to take a day at a time and keep things in the day - whether those things that happen are good or not so good. Each day has its own ups and downs and they won't ever be perfect.

3. Look for glimmers - those little moments of joy. These might be moments in nature or around the house. Glimmers can be many things and can help us feel safer and support regulation.

4. Do the day the way you want to: rest, stim, eat the food you enjoy (it doesn't need to be turkey and all the trimmings), watch the films you like. You don't have to buy into the pressure.

Leaving you with my love and thoughts during this season and see you in 2025.

www.autisticadvocate.co.uk



Embracing difference



I'm dreaming of a Christmas without expectations to:

- ✗ Socialise with people I haven't seen for a year that I wouldn't choose to be around.
- ✗ Be surrounded in my safe place (home) by flashing lights, colours and things making noise.
- ✗ Sit at a table and eat food that is different from my normal foods.
- ✗ Mask my awkwardness in reactions to gifts (even ones I am happy to receive) or risk the judgement of not reacting in the 'right' way.
- ✗ Being excited for the loss of normality and routine.

✗ Being happy to see people, hug people, greet people, eat with people, give gifts to people, kiss people goodbye.

✗ Having 'festive cheer' consistently when my world has been rocked, becoming full of demand and expectation.

Have an Autistically Ausome Christmas!

- ✦ Do screen time
- ✦ Do chicken nuggets
- ✦ Do jumpy and stimmy
- ✦ Do alone time
- ✦ Do PJ days
- ✦ Do kindness, love and acceptance to all

Jodie Clarke,
Autistic Autism Specialist
www.jodieclarke.co.uk

Challenging norms

I think the concept of neuroqueering really comes up for me when I think about Christmas and the typical expectations that fall on us all.

To question, whether it is really required to push yourself to see absolutely everyone - or whether you could space it out and save some spoons.

To break down the expectations of opening presents in front of others - or whether you can get some alone time and open them.

To push away the expectations of a typical Sunday roast for Christmas lunch - or whether it could be your favourite lunch, even if that's potato waffles and beans!

A Happy Neurodivergent Xmas should be whatever you need it to be. One that is the most caring to your nervous system, with the glimmers you need, and the connections you need.

**Bex Milgate, Neurodivergent
Psychotherapist & Psychoeducator
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Festive thoughts

Rowena Mahmud, Autistic Child Psychotherapist and Autism Assessment Team Lead shares her festive thoughts

In a time that seems consciously designed to bring out the rough edge for us. This year could we usher winter celebrations in, but only in a way that is right for us?

Can we merrily throw out any expectations, 'traditions' and pressures that have outgrown their use (if they had any to begin with). Perhaps investigating what we have internalised, and being curious about what we really need.

Stick our colours to the mast, proudly stand by them, and use this as our navigation. This is our celebration, done our way. Ask yourself what resonates for you, at this time. What can be negotiated. What can be let go of. A time of dancing to the beat of our own drum.

Is it possible to step away from apologies? Is there a way to let shame drift away? A journey of unearthing that is meaningful to your core.

Setting our own course, finding our own way, and connecting to ourselves and those we love. Holding the messiness in this, that there is no 'right' way, that collisions are perhaps inevitable, but finding our way back to balance is possible... even when it feels anything but.

Dwelling within the realms of what is/ might be/ could be possible. We play to expand the space between. This is time done our way, in whatever way is right for you. Finding our own true version of 'Happy Christmas'.

www.fledgepsychotherapy.co.uk



Authentic connection

Christmas can be an overwhelming time. To achieve authentic connection, people need to be accepted when communicating in whatever way they are able.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) opens up a world of communication for many including non-speakers and those who can't reliably speak; anyone who experiences forms of mutism; and anyone else who wants or needs an alternative to mouth words.

Using AAC is just as valid as speaking, even if someone is usually able to. Almost everyone uses some form of AAC, such as giving a thumbs up to show they're ok, or waving goodbye. Some people use picture boards, or apps, or type words, or sign language. AAC can be a great way to help people to communicate about different topics when overwhelmed.

Parents may find that their teenagers are far happier to share how they're feeling via WhatsApp, particularly if there are more people around.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with any of this. If someone wants to or needs to communicate in a particular way, try to welcome the fact they're communicating and support them in their endeavours.

A happy neurodivergent Christmas stems from recognising that our holidays do not have to be the same as everybody else.

- Finding authentic connection time with the people in our lives, such as through sharing our passionate interests
- Access to our same foods as these are vital for wellbeing
- Having time over the holidays to engage in flow states to reduce overwhelm and find joy in our favourite activities (e.g. reading, writing, music, etc)
- Taking care of our energy levels by allowing time to decompress after social events and gatherings
- Being allowed the autonomy to say no to activities or things that do not feel safe to us

**Scott Neilson,
Autistic Trainer,
Mentor & Consultant
www.autisticallyscott.uk**

Body and health

Many neurodivergent people have co-occurring medical conditions and allergies or physical disabilities that can make the festive period challenging. Christmas can be exhausting for anyone, and this is even more the case for those affected.

Spreads of unfamiliar foods may contain allergens. Other people's homes or businesses are frequently insufficiently adapted for disabilities. Navigating this can range from inconvenient to life-threatening.

Energy levels and health conditions can fluctuate, leaving people not knowing whether they'll be the life and soul of the party or collapsed in bed, unable to take part in anything. Too often, people are blamed instead of empathised with and helped.

Being realistic about your own and family members' health can avoid over-promising, stress and disappointment. No one is under any obligation to go anywhere or do anything that hurts them.

Here's a simple micro somatic check-in to tune into your body and your nervous system over the Christmas period (or any other time!)

1. Pause. Ask yourself 'How am I doing right now?'
2. Notice any sensations in your body... tension or holding, softness or expansion, energy, temperatures, OK-ness even, or maybe your body feels numb and disconnected - there are no rights or wrongs, just noticing whatever feels present for you in this particular moment, knowing it will be different another time.
3. Ask yourself 'What do I need in this moment?'. An invitation to see if you could honour your nervous system's and body's needs, even in some small way. Some things to try could be: a moment of quiet or fresh air; putting some music on; taking a longer, slower exhale; having a cold drink; moving your body; humming, swaying or rocking; deep pressure or self-touch. (Note: Our intuitive stims are great ways of understanding how our unique nervous system needs to regulate.)

**Courtney Freedman-Thompson, Trauma-Informed
Neurodivergent Somatic Coach & Facilitator
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Safe places

Autistic Autism Specialist Jodie Clarke discusses how to keep everyone feeling safe and secure this Christmas

We all need safe spaces, an escape from the world. For neurodivergent people this is particularly important as the outside world is such an unpredictable place full of sensory and social surprises and demands, many of which aren't pleasant!

For me my safe place is my bed, for some it's their whole home or their garden. For others it's their bedroom and this is common for ND children and young people who only have full control over this one space.

Christmas is a time of change. The outside world is darker, busier with people, and delivers an onslaught of flashing, multicoloured overwhelm in the form of the Christmas lights that cover houses and buildings.

In school there is change: Nativities, Christmas jumper days, special assemblies, giving teachers gifts and card exchanges, all of which are often stressful!

At home within our usual safe places, the changes to the environment can make us very unsafe. Lights, decorations, furniture moved to accommodate a tree which can carry about it an different smell. Changes to food, expectations around what we should eat. Changes to people.


Suddenly people turn up with gifts that you are expected to be grateful for and open in front of everyone (which is massively anxiety provoking and awkward for many of us). People invading your safe space! Or even worse, you have to leave your safe space to go to homes of family members you haven't seen since last Christmas!

And on top of all this everyone is expected to be 'full of Christmas cheer' and no one had better be grumpy, upset, not in the mood to socialise or play charades, because then you're deemed rude, boring, unsociable!

A low demand Christmas where we throw out the expectations and the 'shoulds' is what I aim for. Where we all have the autonomy to say I'm done at the Xmas table and go to our rooms or to eat chicken nuggets with our pigs in blankets! Where visitors know and accept our boundaries and where we all have means of escape!

So if anyone can't accept and respect yours or your child's safe place, maybe you could politely ask that they leave the presents on the doorstep and bugger off!


Navigating presents



Opening gifts in front of others can be hugely difficult for some neurodivergent people. Being watched can be too much, and there may be neuronormative expectations they should fake happiness even if they hate a gift. Sitting and watching others may be hard too.

When a present is genuinely wanted it can be confusing exactly how much gratitude to express without that itself appearing fake. Saving gifts to open in private may avoid this, and people can thank others in a way that feels appropriate to them. For example, some people find that taking a picture of themselves using an appreciated gift and sending it to the giver is a mutually approved way of thanking them.

Choosing and giving gifts is also fraught with unspoken expectations. How much should be spent? Are they still interested in a particular thing? What if they already have it? What if they don't like it?



Some people prefer to state exactly what they want, and don't like surprises. Others love purchasing and creating deeply thoughtful gifts. Others prefer not to get involved with gift giving at all. Having gifts on display that can't be touched may be too much in the run-up to Christmas. Conversations can help everyone understand how other family members feel and decide the best way to move forward.

Have a Different Kind of Christmas – One That Fits Your Family

This year, why not do Christmas your way? In our house, we've thrown out the rulebook and made it work for us.

I love surprises, but my son? Not so much. He hates the stress of not knowing what's inside a gift and then feeling pressure about how to react if he doesn't like it. So, we made a new plan.

He makes a list, chooses who gives him what, and while he's happy for us to wrap them, he needs to know what's inside. It's taken a huge weight off, and now we all get to relax and enjoy the day more.

So, if the 'usual' isn't working, give yourself permission to mix things up. Make Christmas fit your family, whatever that looks like!

Liz Evans, Neurodivergent Parent and Occupational Therapist
www.the-untypical-ot.co.uk

Helping neurodivergent children through Christmas transitions using the 'Be Wise and Thrive'® approach

Neurodivergent Parent and Practitioner Jo Gaunt shares her trademarked approach

The Christmas season brings joyful celebrations, but the changes in routine can feel overwhelming for neurodivergent children. By using a blend of the **WISE** (When, Individual, Sequence, Environment) and **THRIVE** (Time, Honouring needs, Restoring balance, Innovation, Validation, Environment) approaches, you can create a supportive, memorable holiday that respects your child's needs. Here's how each element can help guide you and your child through the season's transitions.

Be WISE in Managing Christmas Transitions

The **WISE** approach provides steps to structure events thoughtfully, helping to minimise Christmas stress:

When: Consider when each transition happens. If gift-giving or family



gatherings take place at different times than usual, provide reminders and visual cues. Countdown timers or family calendars help your child understand the day's events, adding predictability and comfort.

Individual: Every child has unique needs and responses. Some may want to watch from a distance before joining family activities, while others may need quiet breaks to feel comfortable. Tune into these cues and adjust the day to support your child's comfort.

Continued...

Sequence: Break each activity into clear steps. If dinner includes multiple courses or gift-opening happens in stages, go over the sequence in advance. Creating a sense of order helps reduce anxiety and gives your child control over what to expect.

Environment: Sensory sensitivities can heighten in festive settings. Think about ways to create a comfortable environment by adjusting lighting, offering headphones, or setting up a quiet corner where they can retreat as needed. Even small changes can make a big difference in helping them feel secure.

THRIVE During the Christmas Season

With the **THRIVE** approach, you can thoughtfully support your child's experience by acknowledging their sensory and emotional needs:

Time: Allow time for each transition. Moving from dinner to presents or saying goodbye to family can be easier with pauses between activities. Visual aids like a countdown can also ease transitions and help everyone feel grounded.

Honouring Needs: Your child may need space or a quieter way to participate in family gatherings. Respect these choices by sharing their preferences with family ahead of time. For example, they may prefer a wave instead of a hug, or a quiet hello from a distance.

Restoring Balance: Balance busy Christmas activities with calming routines. After a gathering, plan a quiet family evening with familiar activities, like watching a favourite movie or reading together. Restoring balance helps them regulate and recharge.

Innovation: Adapt traditions to suit your child's comfort level. If a big meal feels overwhelming, consider allowing them to step away with a favourite snack or gradually join when they feel ready. Let your child choose daily Christmas activities to give them a sense of control over the celebrations.

Validation: Acknowledge their feelings during each transition. Let them know it's okay to feel different or need breaks. Simple statements like "I see this is a lot for you" can go a long way in helping them feel understood and supported.

Environment: Sensory-friendly environments make gatherings more enjoyable. Softer lighting, quiet spaces, and familiar foods create a safer setting. Setting up cozy 'sanctuary' spots within Christmas spaces offers comfort when they need a moment to themselves.

By weaving the 'Be WISE and THRIVE'® principles into your Christmas plans, you'll provide a structure that respects your child's sensory needs and brings comfort and joy to the season. Making Christmas a meaningful, inclusive experience for the whole family.

Individual experiences

People's needs and preferences don't suddenly evaporate when they turn 18. It might be you as an adult who has the greatest needs, or you might be having to balance things for several people as best as possible.

The following pages feature real examples of how Christmas looks for different neurodivergent people.

Everything in this guide is an idea to think about, not rules to follow. There will undoubtedly be things not covered here that are important to you or your family. The beauty of neurodiversity means we're all different! It's all a learning process and things may not go perfectly. Experiences can be learned from and built on next time.

Home may be the only space that feels ok this year. Staying at home, eating preferred foods, engaging in interests, wearing comfortable clothing, watching favourite shows, and even ignoring Christmas altogether, are all perfectly valid options.

Social expectations are real, but there is no law about what Christmas has to look like. You are allowed to do what feels best for your family.



Tips from an ND parent

Reduce the acceptances to parties, festivities, etc. Say no to 90% of it all. It's ok to say no! December can be over the top with school things, parties, special outings, etc. It can be too much and stressful for all.

It means children are over-stimulated and so nobody enjoys the special outings. Pick wisely and be prepared to leave early or go at a quieter time - avoid weekends!

It's also very much ok not to visit the Father Christmas in shops! As a child I hated him and my kids followed suit. The oldest refused so we never bothered. The children do a list each and post it up the chimney - job done! No need to sit next a strange man with a tickler beard and a loud voice - that's just creepy and scary!

Do what works. Have a few family traditions you do every year and bin the rest. Just because everyone else does Elf on the Shelf or has fancy advent calendars or new PJs it doesn't mean you have to.

We have low-key crafts and things at home. We don't watch Christmas films as the kids get scared or find them weird.

We just do immediate family on the day and a predictable meal that is

agreed in advance to suit all. As it's just us, we fit in the cooking around other activities to suit.

We don't have family or friends over - it's just us. When we had lunch with family and older relatives who perhaps are less understanding, invariably the children didn't manage so well and it was stressful for us all and boring for the children.

When our children were age 2-8 or so we staggered presents throughout the day and allocated some to be opened over the next couple of days. Presents and surprises can be overwhelming and so less is more. Often the child may wish to play with or explore the present so we did that instead of opening more. We also get our children to write a list and usually get them some things from the list they would like so we know they will use the item and it won't be a complete surprise.

Go and pick decorations at the shop in early November as it's less busy.

We also don't go all out with Christmas lights and decorations all over the house and so forth. Not too much change. One tree and one set of fairy lights (mainly as our kitchen is dark). No flashing lights or bling.

Anonymous neurodivergent parent

Rethinking traditions

Nicola Reekie, Neurodivergent Parent and Founder of The PDA Space, reflects on her automatic thoughts

The run up to Christmas is a good time to consider some of those old traditions you follow each year. Do they meet your family's needs?

These traditions are linked to our beliefs and values surrounding Christmas and how it's 'meant' to be. They often become automatic responses.

Now is the perfect time to decide whether you are going to change them and create new ones. For example, I grew up with the tradition of a big Christmas dinner first and presents had to wait until later. This really wasn't supportive to my family.

I considered what I wanted from Christmas Day; did I want happy memories, a calm and peaceful day, or did I want to do something because that's what we have always done?

The year the boys chose what they really wanted to eat was a game changer. We were all much happier. As a family, we also changed our thoughts around presents. These included keeping to their lists; explaining if something was not financially possible; and giving some gifts early so they were spread out.

It was friends and other family who struggled with these changes to old traditions. If you have had a strong reaction to these ideas, I'd invite you to consider, would they be supportive of your family? What 'feels' so wrong?


It could be beneficial to write out the feelings that are coming up for you and then stop and ask yourself, do they serve and support you?

Can you choose to imagine that you have a blank canvas and similar to writing out a shopping list, write out how you would like to feel to be able to enjoy the day? From there, look at what changes and tweaks you can make.

I've always needed to include a big dollop of compassion when I create new challenges, as it can be dysregulating for us all. This also includes coping with others' opinions about doing it differently.

It can be useful to have a situation in mind that you've already done to support yourself or your family. You may wish to write down the benefits of the changes to support you with navigating them and letting go of old values and beliefs.

This is our Christmas



Christmas can equal massive overwhelm here. We now tend to do a spread of treats and presents starting before and going on after, so the day itself is very low key, and if wanted can be just a regular day.

Even Christmas last year, my daughter hung out in the same room as the big family dinner, but she had her own little table and sofa and her tablet and headphones.

Because of this safe place she actually came and sat and chatted with everyone for a bit, knowing she didn't have to, and could retreat when needed.

Jules, Neurodivergent Parent

Christmas is the same every year - a Christmas Eve breakfast at Beefeater. My partner and I set the Christmas table and lay a chocolate trail from the bedroom door down to the lounge. Christmas breakfast is croissants, pain au chocolate or anything else he chooses. Christmas lunch is the same every year (I have a list that I use every year).

Mr 10 writes a specific list for presents, and chooses an advent calendar.

If he is overwhelmed, he is likely to destroy everything in sight, and we are always on high alert to remove everything in case this happens.

Mel, Neurodivergent Parent

Adapting Christmas

Neurodivergent Counsellor Jill Holly explains how she meets her needs while catering to those around her

Accept I have to mask some of it

The needs of others matter on this special time so I manage Christmas as best I can with an acceptance that some masking will be done.

Simplify Christmas present buying

We have Secret Santa as we are mostly adults. This resolves my exhausting thought loops trying to get the 'right' present for the 'right' amount.

Give myself some time alone

Even if it is just having long wees so I can regulate in between too much peopling.

Find out timings and who is coming and going when

Knowing what my day/s look like really helps me cope with the day.

Don't send Christmas cards

I have lost the shame. I never understood why they are a thing. Christmas cards take so much executive function energy from me, so I just don't do them at all.

Make sure clothes are comfortable

Stretchy and my kind of fabric. No point being uncomfortable, I just can't do uncomfy.

Accept that my wrapping is shoddy

Some love the art of wrapping. I do not. So I have lost the shame of shoddy wrapping. I can get in a pickle about matching wrapping paper. Now I just use brown recycled plain paper but with fancy ribbon. I use this for ALL presents even birthday presents as I get 'choice fatigue'. Now I don't have to choose what paper to use. I just always have brown recycled paper. Still shoddy wrapping. But consistent shoddy wrapping.

Ask everyone ahead of time what they need on the day

Practicalities. How that goes depends on those around me. Some love being organised, some not.

Send lots of reminders to family members as they need help remembering things

I give specific instructions but also listen to whether my needs clash with their needs. So I'm negotiating rather than telling people what is happening. Clear communication and written down via text helps.

Book time after to decompress

A day or two on my own. I am able to do this, not everyone can.

Cultural considerations

For me, being a Hong Kong Chinese who's not religious, we don't celebrate Christmas the same way. Growing up, my family and I used to go out for a nice dinner at a restaurant (not necessarily for turkey). We got each other gifts and we would go out to look at the Christmas lights on the sides of buildings shopping Victoria Harbour or driving around in the car. That's the extent of our celebrations.

Looking back on it now, having celebrated Christmas for a number of years with my Scottish in-laws, it's

a big celebration with lots of family time and socialising. It's quite a lot for me and I often took myself away for some alone time to recharge (as a neurodivergent introvert) and was considered antisocial, even to my own family.

It's important to recognise that the upcoming holiday period isn't for everyone and social expectations and traditions can be harmful in making some autistic people feel excluded.

Anonymous

As a Catholic born and bred I do celebrate Christmas mostly from a cultural perspective. But the way it's celebrated here in Scotland is very different from my own cultural traditions, starting simply by the fact that in the southern hemisphere Christmas falls in the summer.

Having no other family to celebrate with other than my son makes it a lonely time for us, in the midst of winter. Another thing people might not be aware of is that depending on the tradition, Christmas is celebrated on different dates. For

Spanish and Americans Christmas is celebrated at 12am on Christmas Eve. The 25th December is Christmas Day but the main celebration is the night before. Boxing Day doesn't exist for us. And the celebration is a bit more religious and less of a big shopping event.

For other Catholics like the orthodox, Christmas falls in January. Perhaps for this reason I share with people from other religions the feeling of cultural imposition.

Anonymous

Tailoring the Xmas period

Sofia Farzana (Akbar), Neurodivergent Parent, Secondary Tutor, and Cofounder of Scottish Ethnic Minority Autistic CIC, discusses how the season can be tailored for different cultures and religions



The social aspect is huge.

First schools: Pupils are forced to learn social dancing at Christmas time. As a Muslim this is a no no. From experience, we have faced ignorance and inflexibility. One deputy said to my nephew that our prayers (salah) is also a form of dance so why was he fussing about taking part! We take rules seriously and that includes touching the opposite sex. So in social dancing there is no allowance for same sex dancing - at least school can let the young people have fun with their friends by allowing for this.

I personally love ceilidh but I would only dance with a woman in a social gathering. Some families will object for the additional reason of the music. Some schools are slowly becoming adaptive and provide other sports activities during social dance lessons.

School activities become irrelevant in December but we are made to take it as though this is our culture and belief. One good practice I saw at my children's primary was that when they made their own cards, they were allowed to make Eid cards instead of Christmas cards. We saved them and used them for the coming years.

I think the school curriculum becomes too heavily Christmas centric when in reality only a minority of people in the UK actually regularly attend church.

My youngest would have meltdowns about attending school in December because of the huge change - less structure, more visual sensory overload, the same music and activities that they found irrelevant to their learning.

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In the workplace: I worked in schools and didn't feel like I fit in any time of the year, however this was more so during the Christmas period.

There is always a heavy culture of drinking which I don't relate to as a Muslim. And the one and only staff night out resulted in one member of staff being drunk while I had no clue how to react to them. I had never been in the same social space of a drunk person before so I was lost while my colleagues didn't seem phased.

I liked the Secret Santa concept - in fact our family now does Secret Eid! However I always noticed that my gifter didn't have a clue what to get me because of my cultural difference.

Maybe if they had learned more about me as an individual I would receive a more meaningful gift like my colleagues.

I think when it comes to the Christmas season, white people forget that other cultures exist. And yes we are happy in your celebrations, but please don't enforce them on us like we don't enforce ours on you.

Some of us prefer to say Happy Holidays which can be seen as offensive (a family member experienced hate incidents because they suggested this in their workplace, as part of their role in equalities, and was accused of cancelling Christmas).

www.sema.scot



Doing it differently

Jess Garner, Neurodivergent Parent and Founder of Grove Neurodivergent Education & Mentoring, outlines her Christmas

We try to have very open conversations with our children about what they want their Christmas to be like. We spread these chats out over time, revisiting the same area occasionally to check if they have changed their mind or have new ideas. We are also honest with them about how other people's idea of the 'perfect' Christmas is just that - theirs - and that ours can look and feel however we want it to and that's just right for us.

I will be honest that letting go of some of the expectations and traditions has been hard but when we tried those in the early years they led to such misery that it was clear we just needed Christmas our way.

Some of the things we do differently:

Generally, surprises are not a happy experience in our household so presents are chosen and bought together.

If they want to, our children wrap their own presents (sometimes multiple times!) and place them where they want under the tree (or not as the case may be), then then choose how and when they are opened (again, sometimes multiple times!). This has actually been a lot of fun over the years!

There are a few people in our family who cannot be watched when opening presents (I am one of those) so we respect that need and allow it to be private or with others occupied with their own activity.

We keep meals the same - pizza or fish fingers for Christmas dinner - that's ok! No pressure to eat at the table or at different times when that isn't our normal.

We decline family invites that mean our children having to conform to other people's expectations of how Christmas 'should' be, instead choosing to dip in to gatherings for short periods and avoiding times such as dinner or present exchange. Yes, that's hard but the alternative is harder.

We never force 'thank you' in a particular way. We model gratitude and we accept our children's feelings and their communication in whatever form they come.

Despite these things (and various other differences) there are still a lot of big feelings, there is a lot of holding space and accepting that you cannot account for everything - big, overwhelming events like Christmas can just be hard.

Neurodiverse families

Over the years as our neurodiverse family have understood ourselves better, we have reframed and adapted the societal pressures and expectations of the festive period, to be accessible for all of our family.

To promote autistic joy and prevent overwhelm we:

🎄 Spread out seeing close family over many days, rather than squeeze social visits in to one or two days. We also take the pressure off of ourselves to attend any extended family gatherings.

🎄 Make sure presents are unboxed and batteries are already in the electronics, so our kiddos can access their gifts and use them instantly with ease.

🎄 Have identified when there is worry over whether they are getting what they have asked for, so we often confirm they are getting the gifts on their list. Even happy surprises can feel overwhelming.

🎄 Adapt the Christmas meal for our sensory and same food preferences.

🎄 Encourage eating where and how feels comfortable to the individual person. For example having screens at the table, getting down from the table whenever they are ready to or even sitting on the sofa in a separate room.

🎄 Most importantly we always allow plenty of rest time either side of Christmas.

This is how our low demand Christmas looks for our neurodiverse family with a variety of neurotypes.

**Alice McSweeney, Neurodivergent Advocate,
Coach, Author, Consultant and Speaker
www.neurodiversejourneys.com**

Autistic joy

Tigger Pritchard, Neuroaffirming Advocate, Consultant and Trainer, shares what he needs to embrace his love of Christmas

Hi, Tigger here, a white, cis, neurodivergent man, in my late 50s!

I love Christmas, I adore Christmas, so much I've even been an elf supporting Father Christmas at the Eden Project in Cornwall over several years. I love Christmas... if everyone around understands and respects Autistic Tigger.

Hopefully, what I need may resonate with you, as families, individuals, professionals, no matter what your age!

Being Neurodivergent Tigger, I'm in a position of privilege to have a neuroaffirming, up to date understanding of what it means to be me. I understand how my routines, my stims, my sensory needs/profile can be used to support and to reduce my anxiety. I call this using my neurokits.

I understand what masking is, people around me will understand my communication style and needs, and how some of my comments may be honest!

So the first bit of support that would help us at Christmas, (All the time!) is

to be neuroaffirming, listen and learn from the neurodivergent community, and know that person's (or your) particular awesome neurospicyness. (If that's a word!) Embrace my stims! So the people around me at Christmas know what I need in order to experience a lush Christmas.

So, a 59-year-old Autistic Tigger needs:

Before and after Christmas

An increase in my usual routines as Christmas approaches. I have specific seasonal special Christmas routines, films, music, decorations, food.

An increase in my stimming. More time alone, an increase in screen time, more time outdoors. Fewer social events and interaction after the season, especially after Christmas Eve/Day. I'll need a rest day between then and new year to recharge. I may spend time in bed on my screen.

Christmas Eve and Day

No surprises! I need to know the order of events on these days.

Continued...

Presents, linked to above, I hate surprises, even if it's something I love and want. So I like to know every present I'm going to get. If I'm honest, I don't even need them wrapped, but I'm ok with that, (some may not be, especially PDAers, the cultural demands of Christmas are huge!) If I'm very excited, or nervous, I might want to open my presents away from others. I may take time to process a present too, I might hold it, smell it, smile or cry. I might go back to presents after I've opened them, continually processing.

At times during the day, I'll need to remove myself from everyone, I'll need down time. I may begin to be extremely tired towards the end of the day, might even go to bed early, if my social battery is empty, I might just go away to a safe place.

After this time

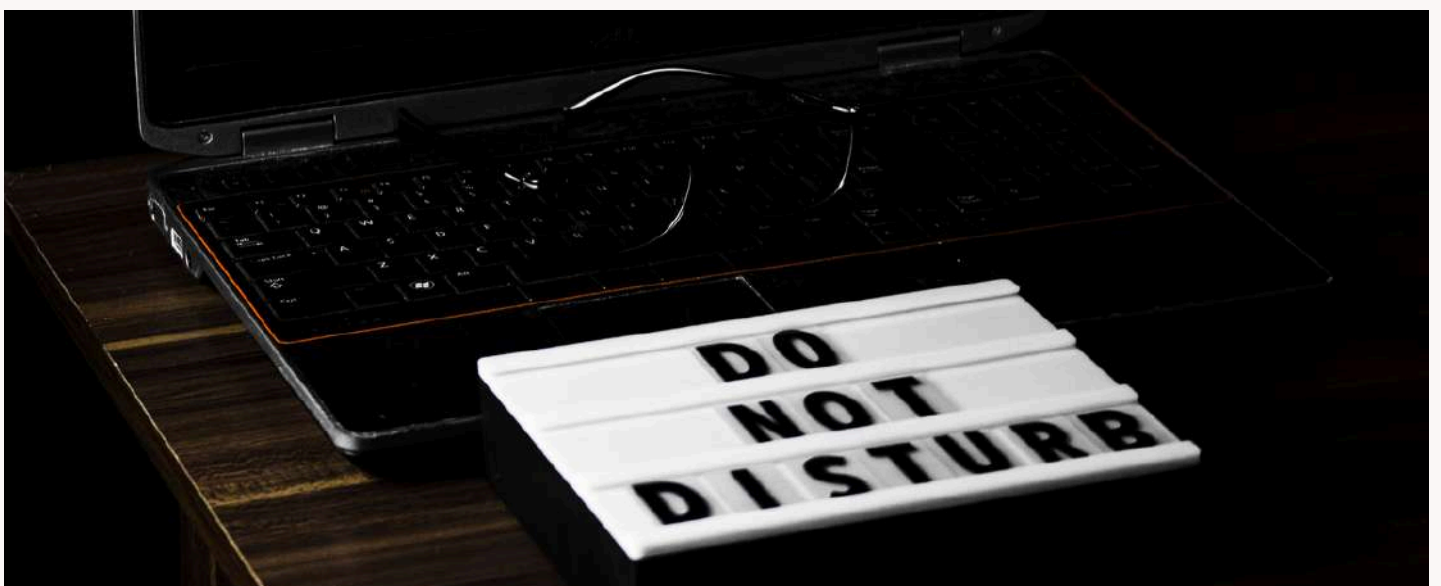
Any change in my usual routines and structures has a longer term effect upon me. So I may be more tired and

anxious than usual. If you are looking at a person's overall levels of anxiety, always look at what may have happened over several months (at least) before any big changes in usual routines. An event producing raised anxiety in the summer will still be making me anxious at Christmas, so some neurodivergent individuals may be experiencing Christmas with a higher level of anxiety than you may be aware of.

The above is about me, Neurodivergent Tigger. There hopefully will be some similarities with you, or individuals you know. I hope it's given you an insight into some of the needs of awesomely neurodivergent individuals.

I've a page too, on my website, with some more pieces of information around seasonal events, that might be useful. Merry Christmas all!

www.tiggerpritchard.com/seasonal-events-birthdays



Learning more each year

I will be honest, we are still working on what Christmas needs to look like so that I don't spend the day in tears multiple times, because the children are struggling. But every year we learn a little more and tweak a few things. This is what works for us.

Presents are opened with just our core family. We make sure we leave time after present opening to help get any gifts working/constructed before starting food prep. Having to wait until later in the afternoon once food is out of the way is just too long.

Everyone gets to pick what they'd like to eat, and where they would like to eat. There are no expectations for one meal or all being around the main table. We take turns to hang out with our child who may prefer to stay in their room when extended family arrive.

Main gifts are not a surprise, they are discussed and this helps decrease the anticipation. There is always a little gift for Christmas Eve to help the waiting.

If we are doing anything on Christmas Eve it ends by dinner time so that kids are not up late, making the main day tricky before it starts. Boxing Day is a quiet day.

**Gina Gush, Neurodivergent Mom & Occupational
Therapist, Tribe around the table**
www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61556795995751

Engaging with interests

Helen Edgar, Neurodivergent Parent and Educator, shares her thoughts on monotropism and a low-demand holiday season

Sensory and social overwhelm can be huge contributing factors towards meltdowns/shutdowns and burnout for neurodivergent people. This can all be much more intense over the holiday season and when there are big family gatherings and there are extra lights, sounds, scents and a general busyness everywhere!

Planning for events together collaboratively as a family can be really helpful if your children or partners are able. This means everyone's voices can be heard and needs can be met in the best way possible. Adopting a low demand approach has helped us as a family. This has meant that generally less is more!

Giving ourselves lots of extra cushioning time before events to prepare and rest and lots of time after events to recharge in our own ways means has been the biggest change we have made to help things go a bit smoother. If you are Autistic/ADHD, you may resonate with the theory of monotropism (Murray et al., 2005). Being monotropic means that it can take a lot of energy to shift attention from one event to another. Transition times from one event or space to another can be really hard to

navigate. By collaborating and planning things together it can provide a sense of autonomy for people (especially beneficial for PDAers) and when people feel in control and understood anxiety can be lower too.

Knowing what is going to happen in advance and allowing extra time can help people plan and consider what they may need to do manage the situation and make the most of it – and also enable them to enjoy the occasion in the best way possible! No one wants a meltdown or shutdown and whilst we can't plan or predict every possibility we can help to reduce the likelihood of overwhelm by working together.

When preparing to join or host family parties or go out for the day it can help to think of everyone's different sensory needs and have a check list, may be a post it notes on the fridge or front door with a 'Don't forget mum's ear defenders' or 'don't forget sister's Squishmallow toy'.

One idea is to set up either a family bag or individual bags with various sensory tools in such as ear defenders,

Continued...

fidget toys and people's favourite snacks and comfort items so it is always ready to go. Having use of some sensory tools can also be useful to help manage transitions as they can provide emotional reassurance and having familiar items to stim or relax with can help sensory regulation as you or your child move between events/ spaces.

If you are monotropic you may find that engaging in your special interests is another way of regulating and recharging that may really help you and your loved ones. Engaging in something that brings joy (however weird that interest may be or seem to others) can be restorative. Special interests and passions are more than just 'hobbies' for monotropic people, they can help with sensory regulation too and can be a way of restoring energy.

It is important to consider that if you are neurodivergent your 'rest' may look a bit different to that of a neurotypical person. If you are neurodivergent your rest may not involve watching TV, going to the pub/café or listening to a meditation. You may find that you feel more rested by running, stimming with a

light up sensory toy, listening to the same piece of music over and over again, or deep diving into your favourite research topic.

Whatever you do to rest it is valid, even if it is different to the way some people think you 'should' be resting. You need to do your rest in your own monotropic/Autistic/ADHD way that works for you (and also validate that need for those you support).

Planning ahead, adopting a low demand approach and being aware of sensory needs are all really important to consider when preparing for events and days out. Being flexible and giving more cushioning to allow time to engage in special interests over the holiday season may also help restore some energy as well as providing moments of joy.

We have found that generally having less sensory stimuli and less social engagement means less overwhelm and enables more quality time and can bring more joy! Hope some of this helps you too! Happy Holidays!

www.autisticrealms.com



Learning more

I hope you've found aspects of this guide helpful for you or your family. There are no rules. You get to do Christmas your way, however that looks.

Creating a Happy Neurodivergent Christmas is an ongoing process that may be different each year as your family's needs evolve; individuals become more aware of what their needs are; and you try out different approaches. It really is ok if everything doesn't go perfectly.

If there are autistic members in your family, or you work with autistic people, then you might find [Creating Safe Spaces for Autistic People](#) useful. It was co-authored by Laura Hellfeld and Scott Neilson.

Most of those who have written pieces in this booklet are active on social media and publish content to help you meet your and your family's needs all year round.

If you'd like to be the first to hear about the launch of my course to help you create your Happy Neurodivergent Life, [click here](#). I'd love to hear what you think it should cover and what would be most beneficial for you.

Jade Farrington



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