

Helping children who have language difficulties, autism or anxiety enjoy the run up to Christmas

If your child's behaviour gets worse in the run up to Christmas, they become tired or withdrawn, or they find change difficult here are a few strategies that may help them:

Preparing your child

- Use a calendar or visual timetable to warn of events e.g. for Christmas events, to highlight school days and home days, or the night when Nana is coming to sleep
- Talk about Christmas time and what this means for your family this year – keep your language simple, using short sentences and pictures where possible
- Make a booklet about Christmas with pictures of Christmas trees, decorations and Christmas food. Bear in mind that, if your child takes things very literally, they may become anxious if your Christmas does not appear exactly as the pictures
- Talk to your child's class teacher so that you are using the same strategies and visual supports at home as school is and you know what events are coming up. Every child is different – share what works for your child
- Talk about future events and what might happen, e.g. by showing them a photo of a man dressed as Father Christmas
- Encourage children to share their concerns about Christmas e.g. by using a worry-eating toy.



Routines

- Routines are hard to keep at Christmas! Keep your daily schedule the same as far as possible, including on Christmas Day
- Sleep is important when your child has busy days – try and keep to sleep routines and avoid screen time (e.g. TV/tablet) just before bed time
- Incorporate a Christmas activity that your child enjoys into their daily schedule, e.g. opening the advent calendar, or switching on the tree lights
- Give your child some Christmas-free time each day
- Give your child quiet time with a favourite activity in a Christmas-free zone at key moments that may be stressful, such as when other people are opening their presents and after stressful activities such as shopping.

Decorations

Flashing Christmas tree lights and loud music can be overwhelming! You could help by:

- Involving your child in changes to the house, e.g. take them shopping for decorations, let them handle decorations, let them see decorations being hung up, or let them help putting them up
- Consider decorating gradually rather than all on one day; avoid surprising your child with a completely decorated home
- Warn about music that might be playing in places you visit. Have a quiet space at home where your child can be calm and the only noise is coming from them!

