



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 for some children. 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 countdown 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.

Santa:

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.