



Avoiding Christmas Chaos at School/Nursery

Christmas time can be a very challenging time for some children, young people, and their families. Change, crowds and surprises aplenty can be overwhelming. Sensitivities to touch, taste, light and noise can lead to extreme responses. Gift giving can also be a confusing idea. Every individual will respond differently. It is important to try to find out what the child expects and to be aware of their triggers. Share these thoughts with the child's parents or carers. Where possible, try to prepare together. Some of the ideas below might help with this. Support will make a difference to many but it is equally important to consider whether full participation in everything going on is suitable for the individual child.

School and classroom:

- Make a countdown calendar or number of sleeps board for when the school holidays start.
- Add the surprise symbol to a timetable or teach Christmas symbols e.g. nativity symbol



Decorations:

- Make a countdown calendar for when:
 - decorations are going up
 - decorations are coming down
- Take photos prior to decorations going up- explain how the school will look once again after all the decorations are back down.
- If the child wants to, let them help put up the decorations. If not, do this when they are able to watch it happening.

Parties:

- Practicing 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 idea.
- Santa can be a bit loud and overwhelming for many. 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.

Nativity/ Performances:

- Let the child spend time in the decorated hall when it is empty.
- Start by taking the child along for short time slots and build this up.
- Think about the position of the child in the group.
- Send a copy of any words home for the child to practise with family.
- Send a copy of any Social Stories home.
- Consider whether it might be better for the child to have their part early on so that they can leave if they need to.
- Have large-scale symbols to flash as required, e.g. 'Stand Up' 'Sit Down' 'Clap' 'Bow'.
- Have a whiteboard and pen handy to write instructions/calming information in the moment.
- Wearing a costume can be a challenge for some. Take account of the child's sensory preferences and consider:
 - letting the child choose their own
 - introducing it slowly
 - sending it home to practise wearing it
 - letting the child change somewhere separate from the noisy general area
 - accepting that it is okay not to wear one!
- Have a dress rehearsal in front of a relaxed audience (other classes?)
- Let the child choose to do a calming activity just before the performance.
- Some children prefer to be in the hall to watch the audience arrive gradually rather than walk into a busy hall.
- Allow the child to use a fidget toy in the hall.



Do not wind down! Keep using the visual timetable, routines and structures right up to the last day!