



# Christmas survival guide tips

While Christmas can be a very exciting and fun time for some, children and young people with additional needs can find the change in routine and increased social demands very stressful, rather than experiencing the joy others may expect.

When it comes to gift giving there is an expectation that children should want to give and receive gifts, however for a young person with special needs the idea of Christmas presents can create a lot of anxiety. They could want to know what the presents are before unwrapping them, to eliminate the anticipation of surprise. Or they may not want their Christmas presents to be wrapped up at all.

These ideas may not be deemed traditional, however these adjustments could make your child or young person cope better with the occasion, allowing the whole family to have a more enjoyable Christmas experience.

## Remove the anticipation of surprise

While some children may love surprises, if you know your young person has difficulties with the unknown, it would be beneficial removing the element of surprise from their Christmas presents. Ideas for doing so include leaving presents unwrapped and putting them in a gift bag, showing your child their gifts before wrapping them up, or popping a picture of the present on the gift tag so they know what it is they are opening.

## Stagger the opening of presents

Being faced with a large number of gifts on Christmas morning can be overwhelming for a child with additional needs. If they struggle with the amount of presents they are being faced with, stagger opening them over the course of a couple of days. If you find this infuriates their siblings, don't stop their brother or sister from opening their gifts all in one go. Find a method that works for all the family, even if that means each child does things differently. You could ask relatives to limit the number of gifts they are buying – one special gift could be preferable to a lot of smaller gifts, as it reduces the number of presents they are faced with opening.

## Provide friends and relatives with gift ideas

It can be a struggle suggesting gift ideas for relatives and friends if your child or young person doesn't have an interest in toys or games.



Parents can sometimes feel pressured into making suggestions that their child may not necessarily like, as others can't understand why they wouldn't want a particular toy that other children of their age are interested in. In order to get around this, we would suggest making a list of specific gift ideas, and if questioned by a relative or friend explain that these are the things your child will get the most enjoyment from even if they may seem like unusual choices.

If you don't feel confident broaching this subject in person, you could look at creating an Amazon Wishlist online. You can then email or message a link to the wish list, rather than having to provide a handwritten list in person.

## Ensure the gift is ready to go

When buying presents for your child, ensure that they are ready to be used from the moment they are given to them. This could involve some preparation beforehand; removing the packaging, sorting batteries if required, and making sure the toy is built. All this could contribute to preventing your young person from becoming frustrated and losing control.





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Information Sheet No.1

## Supporting your child with their social understanding

For children and young people with additional needs, social cues and expectations can be confusing at the best of times. Throw in a fortnight of festivities and increased social demands, and your young person could feel completely thrown by all of the change. It is important to prepare them for every stage of Christmas as much as you can, to ensure they are not thrown by social situations.

Gift giving and receiving can be a particularly tricky affair for individuals. They may not understand the social expectations that others seem to naturally pick

up along the way. When faced with a present they don't particularly like, they might not be aware that it is polite to say thank you, even if it is a gift they won't use. In order to avoid the awkwardness of your child saying they dislike a gift, we recommend working with your young person to help prepare them for the events ahead. Social Stories are a great way to help explain a situation that they don't fully understand. Here at SNAP we have written our own Social Story on Getting Gifts. (See below.) You may want to use this social story with your child to help explain the social expectations when receiving gifts.

### Getting gifts social story

- Sometimes people give me gifts.
- I may get gifts because it is Christmas, my birthday or for another reason.
- When I get a gift, I should say "thank you".
- When I say "thank you", the other person will feel happy.
- When it is time to open the gift, I can unwrap it or take it out of the bag.
- Sometimes I may not like the gift, but I should still smile and say "thank you".
- When I smile and say "thank you", the other person will feel happy. After I say "thank you" it is okay to put away the gift until I want to use it.
- If I decide not to use the gift at all, that is okay too.
- When I get gifts I will try to remember to smile and say "thank you".

'Thank you!'





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Information Sheet No.1

## Choosing toys for children with disabilities

**It is often difficult to choose a toy for a child with a special need or disability. It is important to buy something appropriate, but also fun and stimulating. The following considerations may help when buying toys for children with disabilities:**

- Multisensory appeal – does the toy respond with lights, sounds or movement? Are there contrasting colours? Does it have a scent? Is there texture?
- Sensory considerations – bear in mind any sensory difficulties the child may have when assessing the suitability of the toy. Is the child particularly sensitive to flashing lights, sudden noises etc?
- Method of activation – will the toy respond with lights, sounds or movement? What is the force required to activate? What are the number and complexity of steps required to activate?
- Where will the toy be used – can the toy be used in a variety of positions such as side-lying or on a wheelchair tray? Will the toy be easy to store? Is there space in the home?
- Opportunities for success – can play be open-ended with no definite right or wrong way? Is it adaptable to the child's individual style, ability and pace?
- Current popularity – is it a toy that any child would like? Does it tie-in with other activities like TV, films, books, clothing etc?
- Self-expression – does the toy allow for creativity, uniqueness, and choice making? Will it give the child experience with a variety of media?
- Adjustability – does it have adjustable height, sound volume, speed, level of difficulty?
- Child's individual characteristics – does the toy provide activities that reflect both developmental and chronological ages? Does it reflect the child's interests and age?
- Safety and durability – consider the child's size and strength in relation to the toy's durability. Is the toy and its parts sized appropriately? Does the toy have moisture resistance? Can it be washed and cleaned?
- Potential for interaction – will the child be an active participant during use? Will the toy encourage social engagement with others?
- Ease of use – can the toy be played with independently? Will it require assistance from a helper?

Use this list to help you when looking at toys in shops or online. The SNAP Directory lists some specialist suppliers in the Toys, Clothing & Specialist Equipment section.

### Places to source specialist gifts

If you're struggling to find suitable gift ideas for your child or young person, have a look through the links below for alternative organisations to source specialist presents from.



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## Sensory toy ideas

**Rompa: A Sensory Christmas**

<https://www.rompa.com/sensory-christmas>

**Sensory Toy Warehouse: Gift ideas**

<https://www.sensorytoywarehouse.com/>

**Sensory Education: Christmas sensory gift ideas**

<https://www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk/sensory-christmas-ideas-149-c.asp>

**Sense Toys: Christmas guide ideas**

<https://www.sensetoys.com/>

## Specialist catalogues and toy collections

**Fledglings catalogue**

<https://fledglings.shop/collections/toys-sensory-learning-resources>

**Special needs Christmas gift guide from  
'Have wheelchair will travel'**

<https://havewheelchairwilltravel.net/ultimate-gift-guide-people-special-needs/>

**ToyLikeMe collection**

<http://www.toylikeme.org/toys/>



**"I stopped worrying about what other people think and do at Christmas.  
Our family does what works for us now and we're all a lot happier for it."**

– Parent of a child with autism