



Christmas survival guide tips



Information Sheet No.2

Decorations

Change for children with special needs can be somewhat of a struggle. When it comes to Christmas, expecting your child to accept their home environment being drastically different is a very big ask. In order to reduce the impact Christmas decorations have on your child or young person, preparation is crucial. Try to think about the tools you use with your child during everyday life. How could you apply these tools to Christmas to ensure things run as smoothly as possible?

Please see below a series of tips families have found useful when preparing their child for the changes that take place over the Christmas holidays.

Preparation tips

Involve your child as much as possible, but only if you feel this would be beneficial. If your young person is someone who likes to be included in the process, you may want to let them choose some of the decorations you decide to have up in your home. Allowing them to have ownership over how the house is going to look will take away the element of surprise, and will help to eliminate some of their anxieties.

Show them photographs of previous years, as they may not remember how different the house looked. If you have any pictures or video footage of your young person with the decorations displayed in the background, these may help trigger their emotional memories.

Consider putting your decorations up gradually, in order to avoid overwhelming your child. If you have an artificial tree, think about bringing it in to your home a few days before decorating it. That way, your young person has time to process and adjust to the changes that are about to happen. Sometimes parents feel it's easier to put decorations up while their children aren't at home, although please bear in mind how unsettling it may be to return to an environment that looks completely different.

Equally, the decorations can be taken down in more gradual stages.

Use visual tools to help explain to your child that the Christmas tree won't be a permanent fixture in your family home. Consider introducing a Christmas Calendar, where you can clearly mark what's happening when, and countdown to each event. Does your young person know when the tree is being taken down? Are their anxieties heightened because they believe the decorations will be staying up forever? Things we may naturally know could be causing your child lots of worries.

Think about friends and family, and how they have their homes decorated.

When preparing your young person for the changes that are about to happen in your own home, don't forget to prepare them for how other people's homes are going to look too.



SNAP TOP TIP

Make sure you keep your child informed every step of the way, and if you say you are going to do things on certain days stick to it. Don't take the tree down days before you have agreed to.



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Sensory considerations for Christmas

When identifying what sensory issues could become apparent for your child over the Christmas period, think about looking at things from their perspective. Is their environment too loud or too quiet? Is the constant changing of the Christmas lights causing them considerable amounts of stress? Christmas can become chaotic at the best of times; however for a child with special needs, having their routine and

home environment changed so considerably can be extremely distressing. Consider how certain factors could be creating increased anxiety. Are the noise levels manageable? Do you feel the different smells are becoming a bit too much? Having a safe space to escape to could be the key to helping your child to cope over the Christmas period.

Christmas free zone

Keep in mind the confusion of Christmas could cause your child to become completely overwhelmed. Creating a room or space for them to go to, that has absolutely no reference to Christmas, could be extremely comforting for them. Allow your child the freedom to take themselves off to their Christmas Free Zone if they feel things are getting too much. If you don't feel a separate space is necessary, you could limit your decorations to one or two rooms, and ensure everywhere else remains the same.

If siblings are struggling with the thought of minimal decorations, consider letting them decorate their own bedrooms. That way you're giving everyone some ownership.

