



Christmas Survival Guide 2021



Packed full of tips, ideas and activities
to help make Christmas less stressful



This year we are pleased to see a return of many festive events and activities, with the hope that Christmas will be a much more recognisable one compared to last year. At this moment in time (the start of December) whilst we put together our annual Christmas Survival Guide there are currently no Christmas restrictions, so we ask that you bear in mind that some of the information or suggestions may be subject to change.

Back to Normality?

After the last year's 'very different Christmas' many people are looking forward to making the most of the festive season with visits to Father Christmas and Festive Fetes, school plays, nativities or carol concerts and most importantly spending time with the extended family.

However, before the holidays kick in, it might be helpful to take a moment and consider what works best for your individual family.

We heard from many parents that although last year's Christmas restrictions were disappointing, it allowed them to have a far more relaxed and quiet day. The pressure to conform to a traditional Christmas was gone and made for a less stressful and more enjoyable day for all the family.

So whilst we are excited to be able to go back to a more familiar celebration, it is worth considering if there were things that worked well last year that could become part of your "new normal".

Communicate Clearly with Your Family

With many grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins excited to have a big family Christmas again, it is easy to feel pressured into agreeing to everything and everyone.

If there are adaptations to the holiday that you want to make following last year, then the easiest way to do this is to talk to your family as soon as you have decided. Setting expectations and ground rules early, helps everyone to do their best to support your child or young person with additional needs.

Perhaps sharing this guide with your family members will help them find some useful strategies they could use too, such as taking a photo of the present they have bought your child before wrapping it (see Information Sheet 1 - Gifts) or not insisting that your child eats a traditional Christmas dinner.

Expect the Unexpected

Following the Government's announcement everyone is likely to be busy making plans, but it is important to remember to have a backup plan (even if it is only vague). People may have to suddenly self isolate over the festive season and it can be reassuring to your child that if plan A can't happen then plan B can.



Magical Memories

Some children with additional needs find it difficult to retrieve clear memories of past events, even special occasions. Those who may be able to remember the event itself may not necessarily be able to connect it to how they felt in that moment. We refer to this as “emotional memory”. This can sometimes make them hesitant to do things they have done previously even if they enjoyed it.

Use photos or videos of past Christmases to help your child recall memories and discuss how they felt. It may also help to figure out if there are aspects of Christmas they find overwhelming, such as twinkling fairy lights, the smell of brussels sprouts or itchy Christmas jumpers.

Looking back at past Christmases can also help prepare for this year and can be a starting point to talk about what will happen this time. You may want to compare it to last year’s ‘very different Christmas’, as well as ones from previous years.

Our following information sheets will look more in depth at different aspects of Christmas that some children and young people may find challenging and offer some practical strategies to support them. We will also include some great festive resources and activity suggestions!

If you have any suggestions of strategies that may help other families, email in to info@snapcharity.org as we will be compiling a list of SNAP Family suggestions.

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Information Sheet No.1

Gifts



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.

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.

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

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.



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!"





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.

Information Sheet No.1

Gifts



Sensory toy ideas

Rompa: A Sensory Christmas
<https://www.rompa.com/sensory-christmas>

Sensory Toy Warehouse: Gift ideas
<https://www.sensorytoywarehouse.com/>

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/>

"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."

SNAP Parent

Information Sheet No.2

Decorations



Change for children with special needs can be something 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 that 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

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

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.



Decorations

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 that 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.



Information Sheet No.3

Food



Food for thought

If you're planning on introducing new foods

Don't leave it until the last minute and expect your child to try things all at once. In the run up to Christmas, think about gradually incorporating different ingredients into their normal dinners to see how they get on. You could even put the food on a separate plate to their main meal, and give them the option of trying it if they want to. That way when it gets to Christmas Day and they're presented with a different dinner, they won't be completely confused by the new ingredients you have included.

Consider having them help choose the menu

If you're expecting your young person to have a traditional Christmas Dinner, why not offer to include some of their favourite foods too? Using visual tools, you could show your child what you are planning on serving and ask them if there are any additions they would like to be made to the menu. If expecting them to eat a roast dinner is going to be too difficult, how about making them a different dinner altogether? Try not to get pressurised in to serving something just because you feel you should.

Think through the length of time you're expecting to spend at the dinner table

Christmas dinner is traditionally all about sitting together at a table for a long, leisurely meal. This may be a huge challenge for a child who struggles to wait, sit for long, or cope with the social conversation. Perhaps think about your expectations and how you can make it easier for your child to manage.

If a sit down meal seems too stressful, why not have a buffet?

Giving your child a choice over what food they eat could be really beneficial. By having a buffet, you are allowing them to have ownership over their Christmas dinner. You could even incorporate some family favourites too. That way it isn't as noticeable if your child with additional needs chooses not to have the same foods as the rest of the family, which would work well if you have relatives visiting who aren't so understanding.



Expecting your child to accept having their home environment changed over the Christmas Holidays can be a big ask, especially if they rely on routine.

While they may have been well prepared for the display of decorations around the home, they may not be expecting the dinner table to look different too. If your child is used to using certain cutlery, make sure you stick with the same on Christmas Day. Having their food presented on a different plate could be the reason they decide not to eat dinner.

Too much sugar!

Christmas goes hand in hand with over-indulgence and eating too much of the 'naughty' foods. Too many sweet foods and drinks may have an adverse affect on your child's behaviour. Try to pace them if you can, or time their sugar rush for a time when great-auntie isn't going to witness it and give an opinion on your parenting style!



Food

Spending Christmas away from the family home

If you've decided to spend the Christmas Holidays at a friend or relative's home, make sure your young person is well prepared for the trip. Consider thinking about the following things:-

Seating

If you don't feel your child is going to be comfortable sitting at a table to eat their dinner, ask your relatives or friends if they can create a quiet space for them to sit separately. It would be good to broach this subject several weeks before the big day, so that there is plenty of time to sort the suggested adjustments.

Cutlery

As mentioned above, if your young person likes to eat their meals using certain cutlery, consider taking this with you. You could prepare a bag with all the essentials in it, to make your child feel as comfortable as possible.

Choice of food

It would be good to check exactly what food is being served well in advance. If you feel the choices on offer aren't going to be to your child's taste, suggest taking something for them that can be

heated up quickly in the oven. By doing so, you could avoid the awkwardness of your child saying they don't like the food that has been offered to them.

Time

If your young person is struggling with the thought of spending Christmas Day at a different house, let them know a time you are going to be leaving and try to stick to it. If they know exactly what time they will be going back home again, this should minimise their anxieties around the day.



Information Sheet No.4

Visuals and Timetables



If your child is a particularly anxious person, having them well prepared for the activities and events that are going to be happening over Christmas is crucial. Consider which resources you currently use to support your young person with managing their daily routine. How can you apply these trusted methods to make Christmas as comfortable as possible?

Below is a selection of tips that parents have used to make the holidays more manageable for all the family.

Preparation tips

Use a Christmas calendar

Or visual timetable to clearly display which activities and events are happening and when. Talk through the timetable with your child to check they are aware of upcoming events, ensuring they understand there are going to be some changes to their normal daily routine. Consider showing your child photographs of the places you are going to, so they are prepared for what to expect when they are there. Giving them as much information as possible in the lead up to the event could reduce their concerns considerably.

Keep their routine the same for as long as possible

If your child likes their days to be structured, make sure you maintain this as much as you can over Christmas. For example, you may feel pressurised into letting them stay up later as it's the school holidays, however this could really throw your young person and leave them tired and confused.

Consider speaking with your child's school

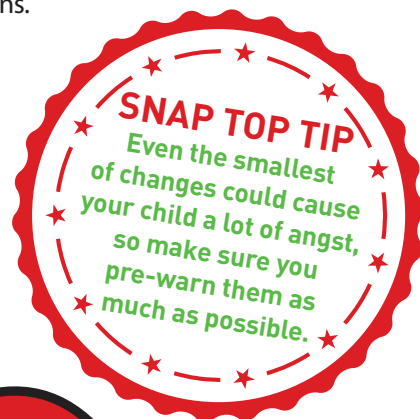
To see if they can use the same strategies as you. When you decide to start preparing your young person for Christmas, make sure everyone else is on board too. The normal school routine is always abandoned in the run-up to Christmas and most children love the different and exciting festive activities, but for children with additional needs this can be a difficult and stressful change. See if the school would

Please find links below to useful visual resources:
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/visual-supports>

consider creating a visual timetable or calendar to have up in the classroom, so that your child can be prepared for the changes that are happening in school as well as at home.

Allow for Christmas free time

Over the Christmas period, there are lots of added expectations. If you feel your child is becoming overwhelmed, consider factoring in time for them to be away from the festivities. Celebrate all successes, no matter how small, and try not to dwell on the situations where your child may have struggled.





Making your own family timetable

If your child uses a visual timetable that breaks down their day, it's important to have one prepared for the days you will be celebrating on, as they are likely to be different to your normal routine. You could have this separate to your normal timetable or simply change the current one.

You can find pre-made resources online, but it is just as easy to make your own. Using images you find online, or better yet photos that you have taken. Your

visual timetable may be printed images or words that you stick up, or you may just write/draw things on a whiteboard or piece of paper.

A nice Christmas Eve activity to do with your child might be to talk about Christmas Day and place or write your visuals on the timetable together in order.

Think about just how much detail your child will need - and remember to encourage your child to look at their timetable instead of asking what is happening next!

Here is just one example of a Christmas Day visual timetable - ideally this would be presented in one long strip.

	Get up		Christmas
	Open presents from stocking		Watch a film
	Eat breakfast		Play family games
	Get dressed		Evening meal
	Nan and Grandad arrive		Watch television
	Open presents from under the tree		Storytime
	Play with toys		Get ready for bed

Information Sheet No.5

Events and Activities



Unfortunately, many regular and new events **are still 'on hold' this year**. There are a few planned activities that are hoping to go ahead - please check carefully for updates before booking or attending any of these events.

Relaxed performances

Brentwood Theatre – Jack Frost

11th December 2021 11.30am and 2.30pm

<https://brentwood-theatre.co.uk/event/jack-frost/2021-12-11/>

Southend – Cliffs Pavilion – Cinderella

31st December 2021 11am

<https://southendtheatres.org.uk/online/panto-southend-essex-panto>

Chelmsford – Civic Theatre – Beauty and the Beast

30th December 2021 2pm

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/theatres/whats-on/children-and-families/relaxed-performance-of-beauty-and-the-beast/>

Basildon – Towngate Theatre – Beauty and the Beast

7th December 2021 5pm

<https://towngatetheatre.co.uk/beauty-and-the-beast/>

Clacton-on-Sea – Princes Theatre – Jack and the Beanstalk

30th December 2021 2pm

<https://princetheatre.co.uk/event/?i=873623504>

Colchester – Mercury Theatre – Aladdin

12th December 2021 – 12.00pm

<https://www.mercurytheatre.co.uk/event/aladdin/#book>

Sadler's Wells Theatre - Mousetrap Theatre Projects – Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker!

9th January 2022 2pm

<https://www.mousetrap.org.uk/nutcracker-rp-overview-page>

The Party Kingdom – Video Call with Father Christmas

<https://thepartykingdom.co.uk/product/video-call-with-father-christmas/>

Mace Playce – dedicated special needs session on first Tuesday of the month 4pm to 6pm

<https://www.mace-playce.co.uk/pages/special-needs-evening.php>

Bluewater Ice rink

Quiet sessions of half capacity and no music – 10am on Sunday mornings from 21st November 2021 to 2nd January 2022

<https://bluewater.co.uk/ice-rink>

Rock Up Lakeside – Autism & SEN-Friendly Sessions

<https://www.rock-up.co.uk/activities/climbing/product/autism-and-sen-friendly-session---child-or-adult/246>

Marsh Farm Ice Skating Winter Spectacular

<https://www.marshfarm.co.uk/events/winter-spectacular/>

Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre, Thurrock – Festive Fun Day Saturday 4th December 2021 10am to 3pm. Outdoor fun for all ages.

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/grangewaters-outdoor-education-centre/grangewaters>

Epping Ongar Railway – Santa's Special Trains

<https://www.eorailway.co.uk/events/santa-specials/>

Colne Valley Railway Santa Specials – Castle Hedingham

<https://www.colnevalleyrailway.co.uk/#upcomingevents>

Festive Day Out With Thomas – East Anglian Railway Museum – Colchester

<https://www.quaytickets.com/dayoutwiththomas/en-GB/shows/festive%20day%20out%20with%20thomas%20-%20east%20anglian%20railway%20museum/events>

Winter ActiveAte Clubs (Holiday Activities and Food Programme) – Venues across Essex

<https://www.activeessex.org/children-young-people/essex-activate/bookings/>

Christmas for Kids / Embracing Arts

– Free digital show for children with complex needs.

'Phoebe's First Christmas'

is an interactive, sensory, festive show.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/phoebes-first-christmas-a-digital-sensory-christmas-show-registration-169467075585>



The contacts and links given via this SNAP information sheet have been shared as a starting point for your own research. We believe the information to be genuine and correct at the time of publishing, however no responsibility for loss occasioned by any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of the material contained herein can be accepted by SNAP.



Sensory Christmas Activities

If your child or young person is overwhelmed by the thought of accessing clubs and events over the festive holidays, why not try sorting some activities for them to try at home? Produced by the company Twinkl, below is a link to a selection of Sensory Christmas Activities you could consider incorporating into your child's Christmas routine. When looking for sensory activities on the Twinkl website, make sure to type [Sensory Christmas](#) in to the search bar.

* Please be aware there is a subscription charge to access all of the resources produced by Twinkl. We would suggest asking your child's school if they are subscribed to their services as they may be able to share some of the resources with you.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search>

<https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/christmas>



Here are some Festive Activities you can do at home which you can adapt to meet the needs of your family.

Candy Cane Hunt

A Christmas version of an Easter Egg hunt! Simply hide some festive treats, such as mini candy canes or chocolate coins around your house (and/or garden) for the children to hunt out. Top tip: make a note or take a photo on your phone where you hide them all - to avoid any being forgotten.

Adaptations -

- ★ If you don't want the children loaded up on sugar you can use anything Christmas related, like baubles, sparkly pom poms or anything you have to hand. Once the children have found them all they could win a prize such as watching their favourite Christmas film.
- ★ For children with mobility difficulties - make them "search team leader" they can instruct you or their siblings where to look. This could be done verbally or by pointing/signalling to parts of the rooms or a photo of the room.

- ★ For children with visual impairments - make a trail for them to follow, this could be done using a ribbon/ string. Alternatively depending on their level of vision you could use bright coloured card arrows or luminous masking tape on the floor.
- ★ Make the hunt multi sensory - perhaps what they find makes noise such as bell, a strong smell like mint, or spritz non edible items with a christmassy scent, or the items has flashing lights or an interesting texture.
- ★ Hunt by torch light - now the evenings are getting dark earlier, perhaps turn all the lights off, or just have your Christmas lights on. Then give each child a torch to help them find the items. Again children with limited mobility could shine the torch where they want their "helper elf" to search.
- ★ Turn it into a scavenger hunt with clues, these could be written, given verbally or using visuals/pictures. You could also do this for what they are trying to find rather than hiding lots of the same item.

Events and Activities



A Handful of Decorations

Hand and foot prints can be made into a wide variety of Christmas Decorations or cards. Green handprints can be overlapped to make Christmas trees. Brown footprints can turn into reindeer heads with handprint antlers. There are lots of ideas you can find quickly online.

Adaptations -

- ★ If your child struggles with having “messy” substances on their hands or feet, simply draw round them or allow them to wear gloves or shoes (that you don’t mind getting paint on).
- ★ If you are finding it hard to get a clear prints of their whole hand or foot - then fingerprints can also be turned into festive images.
- ★ Struggling to get more than one print before their attention shifts? If you have a scanner at home you can scan the imagine into your computer and print off multiples - if you are a computer whiz you can also change the colour on the image! No scanner? then you can take a photo on your phone. There are lots of photo apps that allow you edit photos and add “stickers” or draw onto photos. These would make a lovely ECard to send to family.

Snowman Bowling

Plastic bowling pins are the perfect Snowman shape - so if they are not white already give them a lick of paint or spray paint (or have colour snowmen). Then get the family involved in turning them into proper snowmen. Use pens, paint, stickers - whatever you have. Then host a family bowling tournament! This activity needs adult supervision, and please be careful of breakable items and make sure no one is stood near pins!

Adaptations -

- ★ No bowling pins? You will be surprised what you might find in your recycling that would work! Cardboard tubes, tin cans, plastic cups and plastic bottles are all great items that would work.
- ★ If someone might have difficulties in hitting the snowmen - try

making the ball bigger or putting them in a long row close together to give a wider target.

- ★ If using cups, toilet rolls or tins - you can also stack them up to create a slightly different version of the game.
- ★ If your child struggles with throwing or rolling a ball - find something to use as a ramp that they could push the ball down (much like at a real bowling alley). Or use something to “fling” a soft ball or pom pom at the snow men - such as ruler on the edge of a surface or a large rubber band.
- ★ Make it educational - give each snowman a different number on their tummy - your score is the total sum of the snowmen you knock over.
- ★ Give the game multisensory elements - use bright colours to decorate the snowmen, tie bells round their neck so they jingle when they fall over. Instead of a normal ball - use a squishy pom pom (if you don’t need it to roll) or a ball with bells inside.
- ★ Put the snowmen in different formations to make it easier or harder to knock over.



Information Sheet No.6

Makaton, Braille and BSL



Here at SNAP we have researched and compiled a selection of Makaton, Braille and BSL resources, tips and ideas that you may find useful over the Christmas holidays.

Makaton

Christmas signs and symbols

Makaton has produced a free Christmas Vocabulary resource for families to download. Alongside this there are activity sheets and games to help practice the new vocabulary including: Make Your Own Christmas Cards, Decorate the Christmas Tree, and The Christmas Memory Game. To access any of the Makaton free resources you will need to create a free account on their website: https://makaton.org/TMC/Free_resources.aspx

Christmas carols and songs

Makaton has produced a selection of books and information sheets that contain both words and drawings of signs of popular Christmas carols and

songs. The information sheets contain the details for one song, or the books contain details for around 13 different songs. There is a charge for both. For details on costs and how to order, go to: https://makaton.org/TMC/TMC/Shop/Stories_songs_nursery_rhymes/Christmas_Carols/TMC/SHOP/Christmas_Carols.aspx?Category=SS_CHCA&hkey=ae84fce9-f5cb-45b3-b5ea-fc1b4cc74514

Makaton Stories

Makaton: A first Christmas story book. Makaton has produced a Christmas Story printable resource, which includes all the signs and symbols required to help talk to your child about the Christmas Nativity Story. There is a small charge to download the resource. For more details visit: https://makaton.org/TMC/TMC/Shop/Stories_songs_nursery_rhymes/Christmas_Carols/TMC/SHOP/Christmas_Carols.aspx?Category=SS_CHCA&hkey=ae84fce9-f5cb-45b3-b5ea-fc1b4cc74514

Makaton Youtube and Facebook

Make sure to take a look at the Makaton Youtube Channel or Facebook page for their sign of the week. As well as their daily Christmas Makaton treat in the countdown to Christmas starting December 1st. Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/makatoncharity/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheMakatonCharity>



Makaton, Braille and BSL



British Sign Language

Christmas books

Deaf Books has produced a selection of Christmas books that include British Sign Language within them. The different books they can provide include: BSL Christmas Signs Flashcards, BSL Christmas Songs with Signs, and a selection of specific Christmas songs. Head to the link below for more details https://letssign.co.uk/?s=christmas&post_type=product

BSL Christmas resources and activities

The company Twinkl provide a variety of British Sign Language Christmas resources, which can be looked at online. In order to download the resources, there is a subscription fee required.

Resources include BSL Christmas Songs, BSL Christmas Card Activities, BSL Christmas Signs, and more. If you would like to learn more about the products Twinkl produce, go to <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/search> and type in BSL Christmas.

Signed stories app

Available on the itunes Store for Apple devices, the Signed Stories app has best-selling children's books performed in British Sign Language including several Christmas themed books. The app is free to download and there is a charge for the books.

Braille

Letters from Santa

Santa has contacted his friends at the Royal National Institute for the Blind to help him reply to blind or partially-sighted children in braille, audio or large print. See the website for more details. <https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living/family-friends-and-carers/resources-parents-blind-or-partially-sighted/letter-santa>

If you are struggling to find suitable gifts for a child or young person who is blind or partially sighted, Braille Works has produced a gift guide according to age range that you may find helpful <https://brailleworks.com/christmas-gifts-for-children-with-blindness/>

Information Sheet No.7

Festive Apps



When trying to keep your children entertained in the run up to Christmas, you may find yourself looking for festive apps to keep them amused. The website A Day in Our Shoes has produced a list of 20 fun, educational, Christmas apps for children and young people with additional needs. Included in the recommended list are apps that work on vocabulary building, picture identification, and much more. Click on the link below for more information.

<https://adayinourshoes.com/christmas-apps/>

Festive Apps for all the family

See below a selection of suggested Christmas apps that can be accessed by all the family.



Toca hair salon – Christmas Gives you the opportunity to cut, colour and style Santa's hair and beard. This special Christmas Edition allows you to choose between styling Santa and creating a Christmas Tree. The app is free to download, and is available for Apple devices only.



Message from Santa! Free personalised phone call or video message from Santa Claus. Send and receive text messages with Santa, or leave him a voicemail with a wish list.



Christmas tree Allows you to decorate your very own Christmas Tree with a variety of different ornaments. There are calming sound effects and different festive backdrops to choose from. The app is free to download, and allows you to decorate several trees at a time, so all the family can get involved.



i Get... Christmas social skills stories Provides a photo social skill story for children needing support in understanding the process of Christmas. It can be individualised for the user by adding your own photos.



Christmas countdown 2021 Tells you how many days, weeks, hours, minutes, seconds and heartbeats until Christmas. Each day it will give you a new fun thing to do to get into the Christmas spirit.



Manage Christmas A Christmas gift list manager for those wanting to stick to a budget and organise their gift ideas and purchases.



Christmas Colouring Book Colour in your favourite Christmas characters

Sensory Apps

Sensory Apphouse has produced a range of sensory apps that have been designed to help with relaxation, developing communication, and stimulation. All of their apps are switch accessible and can be accessed by Apple and Android users.

For more information about the apps they offer and where to download them, click on the link below. <https://www.sensoryapphouse.com/>

Other Sensory Apps include: Fun Bubbles, Fluidity, Sensory Light Box, Art of Glow, and iLoveFireworks.

Information Sheet No.8

Christmas Tips from SNAP Families



"I think the most beneficial thing that I have learnt over the years is to remain calm and remember that Christmas only lasts a few days. If a situation becomes too much, I make sure to remove myself and take a few minutes to gather my thoughts before reacting."

"Something that has really helped us over the Christmas holidays is making time to relax. There are so many different activities and events going on, it is easy to agree to everything and become overwhelmed. Not to mention the expense of it all. I have learnt that it is okay to say no if things are becoming too much. Christmas free time is really crucial for us as a family."

"It has taken me many years to master, but I have now given up worrying about what other people are doing over Christmas and have started focusing on what makes it work for us as a family. Relatives who aren't so understanding will always question our decisions, but I have learnt to let these comments go."

"We have found several key strategies that seem to work really well for us over the Christmas holidays. Keeping things as "normal" as possible really helps make things more comfortable for our child. If we are eating out anywhere we will always take her preferred cutlery with us, and we've always got a bag of favourite things on hand to keep her happy when we are visiting friends or relatives."

"A big turning point for us was taking the element of surprise out of Christmas. We no longer wrap our son's presents as the stress of the unknown really heightens his anxiety. The same applies to putting up the decorations. We will always allow him to be involved if he wishes, and will give him plenty of warning as to when they are going up, and also when they are being put away."

"Asking for help has always been something I have struggled with which is why I have found online support so beneficial. I have joined some great support groups on Facebook that I can access anytime I may need some extra help over the Christmas break. It is also nice knowing that you are not alone, and that a lot of struggles you may be experiencing others have also gone through themselves."

"I have learnt along the way that introducing things gradually and letting my son do things when he is ready works much better as it makes Christmas less overwhelming for him. We leave his presents under the tree and let him go to them when he is ready – Sometimes this can take days. To start with we did find it upsetting, but we have learnt to accept that these are the adjustments we need to make in order for Christmas to be more manageable for him."

"When I first heard about the idea of using a visual timetable, I wasn't sure how successful it would be for our family, however after giving it a try a couple of years ago it is now such a crucial part of our Christmas. I find we need it more once Christmas is over, as my daughter really struggles with the festivities being over and things going back to normal. It is also a great way of preparing her for what will be happening when. It certainly reduces her anxiety."

"I think the hardest but most liberating part for me was accepting Christmas wasn't going to be quite as I wanted it to be. It took me a long time to get there, but I now accept that we do things slightly different to others, and that that is okay. It is still enjoyable, which is all that matters to us."