** Preparing for Christmas**

**Christmas can be an exciting and fun time, but people with autism may be confused or distressed by all the new activity. Here is a list of tips that may help your family through the festive period.**

**Preparing**

A person with autism can find any kind of [change](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/preparing-for-change.aspx) difficult. You could:

* use a calendar or visual timetable to prepare for Christmas, for specific events, to count down to Christmas day
* talk about Christmas time and what this means for your family
* make a booklet about Christmas with pictures of Christmas trees, decorations and Christmas food.  If your child takes things very literally, they may become anxious if your Christmas does not appear exactly as the pictures
* prepare the person for specific events e.g. by showing them a photo of Father Christmas

**Schedules**

Many autistic people have a strong need for routine. You could:

* keep the daily schedule the same as far as possible, including on Christmas Day
* incorporate a Christmas activity that they enjoy into their daily schedule, e.g. opening the advent calendar, or switching on the tree lights
* give them quiet time with a favourite activity at key moments that may be stressful, such as when other people are opening their presents.

**Decorations**

Returning home to find a tree with flashing lights could be a bit of a shock. You could:

* involve your child in changes to the house e.g. take them shopping for decorations, let them handle decorations, let them see decorations being hung up, or let them help putting them up
* consider decorating gradually, e.g. you could put the Christmas tree in position, decorate it the next day, then put up other decorations even later
* keep things that might overload them away from communal areas e.g. flashing Christmas lights could go in bedrooms rather than the living room

**Presents**

Having a large number of presents could be overwhelming. You could:

* give presents one by one, instead of all at once
* put out a present next to a favourite item (e.g. a new toy next to a favourite toy)