



Autism Spectrum

Ten Top Tips for Christmas

As the excitement builds in schools in the run up to Christmas, with changes to routine to fit in special events, decorations appearing overnight, busy social occasions such as plays and carol-services, and parties, it is important to consider the impact on students with an Autistic Spectrum Condition. You and most of your students may be excited about Christmas but for students with an ASC the sensory and social demands of the season can potentially become overwhelming. Here are some top tips from members of the Autism Spectrum Team to help you and your students to enjoy the remaining weeks of term.

- Use Social stories or comic strips to plan and prepare ALL your seasonal changes in class and School
- Consider different scenarios that Christmas brings such as 'What do I do if I don't win the game?' that would benefit from a Social Story.
- Don't be afraid to be selective about which aspects of Christmas you celebrate with your ASC student. They may be happier to keep with the structure and 'carry on regardless'.
- Think of alternative activities for your ASD student when it comes to the 'school play' if performance makes them anxious. They can muck in with the props, do the lights, even direct. Use their strengths!
- This could be a good time of year to do jobs around the school
- Have a clear alternative plan available for special occasions so that if your student is becoming stressed they can go to a safe space where they can do what they need to calm down.
- If there are concerts or plays or extended assemblies where your students are in the audience consider their seating carefully – eg on the end of a row, away from loud music
- If there are occasions when students are expected to wear different clothes such as plays or parties, liaise carefully with parents around sensory issues, be explicit about what is expected and give choice to the student
- These students may hate surprises. They may prefer to know 'the secret' in advance even if it means showing them the present before wrapping it up.
- Avoid stress with picky eaters. It may be helpful for parents to provide the child with their own version of a Christmas dinner or party food to bring to school.