




FAMILIES SUPPORTING FAMILIES AT CHRISTMAS

**GIFFNOCK FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP
ADVICE AND INFORMATION TO HELP
NAVIGATE THE CHRISTMAS PERIOD**





Key Challenges at Christmas:

- Routine disruption
- Sensory overload
- Social expectations
- Gift-giving and surprises

COPING STRATEGIES

- **Manage Expectations** - adapt traditions to suit your family. Inform family and visitors of any requests. Spread out visits/guests and add rest periods.
- **Plan and Prepare in Advance** - use calendars, alarms, checklists. Keep the plan predictable and give options, timings, details.
- **Build Familiarity** - share social stories, show photos, show any reminders of previous decorations, events, gifts to provide comfort.
- **Create Safe Spaces** - provide a chill out space, calm box, fidget toys, ear defenders. Ask family to visit you so your child can go to their own room.
- **Reduce Sensory Input** - avoid noisy and crowded areas. Don't force 'fancy' clothing that can be itchy. No crackers or noisy wrapping paper...
- **Stick to a Routine** - keep as much of usual routines as possible, eating times, bed times, activities etc. Provide reassurances via charts/plan.
- **Decorate with Sensory Needs in Mind** - static lights (not flashing), decorate gradually, one area at a time. Keep an area undecorated.
- **Surprises Cause Stress** - leave gifts unwrapped or in easy open bags, offer choices or invite a list of choices.
- **PRACTICE GIVING AND RECEIVING GIFTS - LET YOUR CHILD KNOW THAT THEY DO NOT NEED TO PERFORM REACTIONS, A SIMPLE THANK YOU IS ENOUGH.**



Merry Christmas



REMEMBER

It is ok to say no thank you.

A peaceful, predictable holiday is
just as meaningful as a busy
festive one.

It is ok to have chicken nuggets for
Christmas dinner!

For some children the countdown and anticipation of Christmas can feel overwhelming and induce high levels of anxiety due to being unable to process the emotions around these upcoming changes. Countdown calendars can help with explaining, reminders and in understanding the days counting down to Christmas. They can start the conversation that will reassure many children of upcoming events.

**"DON'T FEEL PRESSURED
INTO FORCING PARTICIPATION."**

"CHOICE IS CALMING."

**"LOWER EXPECTATIONS EQUALS
LOWER STRESS FOR ALL"**





Helpful approaches for a PDA profile of autism at Christmas

Christmas can be an overwhelming time for autistic people. We've put together some general suggestions of helpful approaches for PDA families & individuals.

www.pdasociety.org.uk

Perspective & Preparation

- ~ Try not to let tradition or pressure from others determine your plans
- ~ Redesign Christmas to work for your household
- ~ Plan collaboratively with flexibility for plans to change as needed
- ~ Incorporate lots of downtime and where possible continue usual routines and activities



Events & Gatherings

- ~ Keep small, short & spaced out
- ~ Make safe spaces & sensory support available
- ~ Agree exit options



Festivities & Decorations

- ~ Make the most of opportunities when they arise rather than at specific times and accept that some things can't be done



- ## Gifts
- ~ Make & share a wish list of gift ideas & delivery preferences e.g. stocking not in bedroom* or gifts placed somewhere rather than physically handed over
 - ~ Reduce uncertainty & overload e.g. say what gifts are coming, wrap in one parcel/clear cellophane or don't wrap, open gifts at a comfortable pace
 - ~ Consider giving one or more gifts early if waiting causes anxiety
 - ~ Reduce expectations around saying thank you for gifts



*inform Santa too

Food

- ~ Put less focus on Christmas dinner
- ~ Offer choice around where, when and what to eat
- ~ Make familiar/preferred foods available



Traditions

- ~ Traditions can feel like demands
- ~ Creating your own family's routines, Christmas-themed or otherwise and with room for flexibility, can be helpful



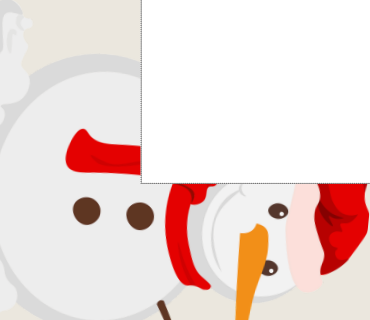
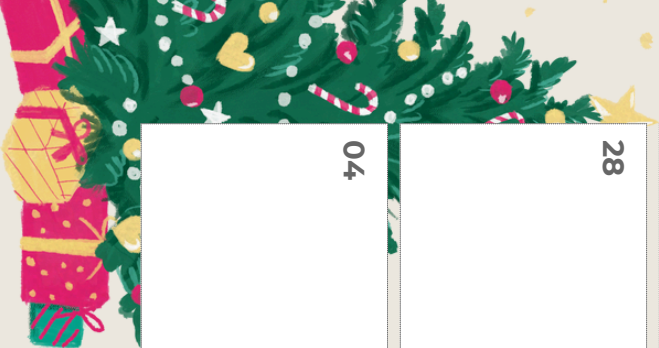
Recognising & Reducing Anxiety

- ~ Be aware of anxiety cues - it may not always 'look like' anxiety
- ~ Sudden emotional changes can occur more frequently when anxiety is high
- ~ Humour, rest & taking a break from Christmas-themed activities can be helpful
- ~ Keep calm & try not to take anything personally
- ~ Be aware of masking and how this affects anxiety later on
- ~ Build in lots of recovery time and personalised regulating/calming activities

December 2025 - January 2026

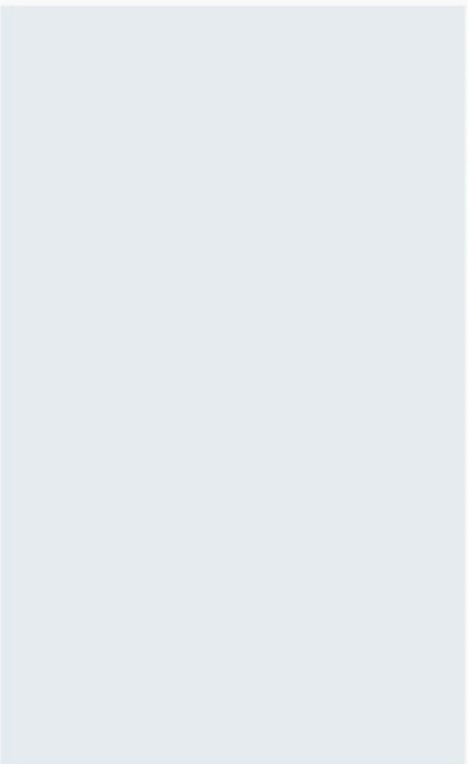


Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
14	15	16 SINGING ON THE STEPS 2.50-3PM	17 SINGING ON THE STEPS 2.50-3PM	18 CHURCH SERVICE 10-11AM 	19 LAST DAY AT SCHOOL ENDS 2.30PM	20
21	22	23	24	25 	26	27
28	29	30	31	01 	02	03
04	05	06	07 BACK TO SCHOOL 	08	09	10

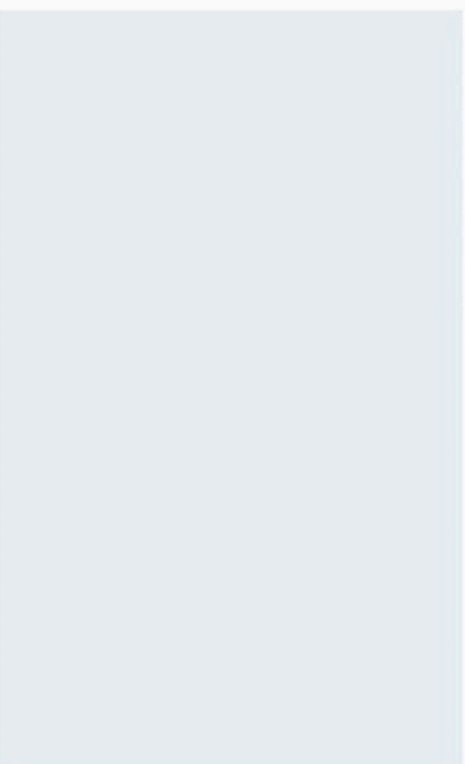


TODAY

MY MORNING LOOKS LIKE THIS

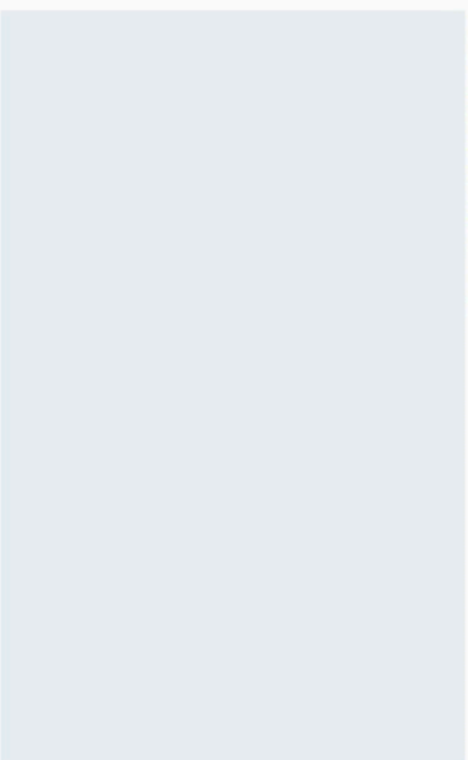


MY AFTERNOON LOOKS LIKE THIS

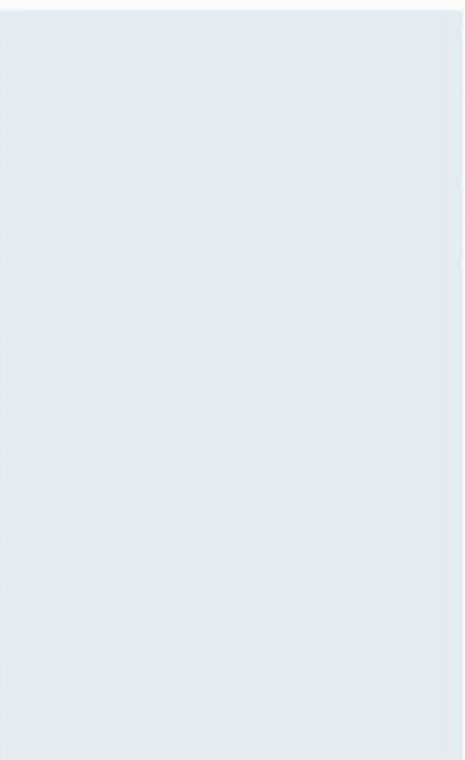


TOMORROW

MY MORNING LOOKS LIKE THIS



MY AFTERNOON LOOKS LIKE THIS



CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS SOCIAL STORY

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS IS A SPECIAL HOLIDAY. MANY FAMILIES CELEBRATE IT IN DECEMBER.

WE DECORATE OUR HOME WITH LIGHTS, A CHRISTMAS TREE AND ORNAMENTS.

WE LISTEN TO FESTIVE MUSIC AND SOMETIMES SING CAROLS TOGETHER.

FAMILIES GIVE GIFTS TO SHOW LOVE AND KINDNESS.

WE EAT SPECIAL FOOD LIKE TURKEY OR MINCE PIES.

SOME PEOPLE GO TO CHURCH TO CELEBRATE THE RELIGIOUS MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE SOME CHILDREN MAY HANG STOCKINGS FOR SANTA CLAUS.

ON CHRISTMAS MORNING WE OPEN PRESENTS AND SPEND TIME TOGETHER.

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT JOY, SHARING AND BEING WITH PEOPLE WE CARE ABOUT.



Christmas

CHECK LIST

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> VISUAL CALENDAR READY | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> QUIET SPACE IDENTIFIED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> QUIET SPACE PREPARED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SENSORY FRIENDLY DECS | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FLEXIBLE FOODS PLANNED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CALM BOX PREPARED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAMILY AND VISITORS
PLANNED OUT | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BOUNDARIES AGREED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COUNTDOWN CALENDAR
SORTED | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ALARMS/ALEXA SET UP | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | |