

1. Keep routines the same.
2. Introduce Christmas again, explaining what is going to happen in advance.
3. Plan for free time to maintain structure.
4. Prepare for any new or unfamiliar family activities and days out - plan in advance.
5. Introduce Christmas activities gradually, one at a time each day.
6. Limit visitors to the house and plan in advance.
7. Spread gift opening over different days.
8. Try and find time for yourself and your partner!



- **Don't just plan for Christmas day, plan for the whole festive break.**
- **Keep expectations reasonable and explain what these are to family members.**
- **Avoid surprises.**
- **Plan a sensory retreat for when it all gets too much. Make this a Christmas-free zone.**



Try these top tips for a Stress-Free Christmas



Don't try to shoehorn in a 'traditional Christmas' - it's better for the whole family in the long run to work out what a good Christmas for your family looks like.

Have a plan beforehand and share it.

Use visual aids such as calendars, lists and timetables.

Anticipate sensory issues and use sensory aids such as ear defenders.



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LIGHTS

If you or your child enjoy the Christmas lights and window displays, sit on the top deck of the bus and you'll get a bird's eye view without getting stuck in the crowds.



Food

1. Plan and discuss food in advance.
2. Keep food and meal times the same as much as possible.
3. Have alternative, familiar meal options.
4. Practise laying the festive table ahead of any special meals.
5. Do whatever works for you and yours. If it's pizza or chicken nuggets for Christmas lunch then that's OK.





Create a scrapbook

about the Christmas period with pictures of people your child will see, expected activities, food they will be eating. Be mindful that your child may take things very literally and become anxious if your Christmas does not appear exactly as the pictures.

Put out a present next to a favourite item - a new toy next to a favourite toy.

Introduce and establish activities they enjoy each day such as switching on the Christmas lights.

Blinking lights, glittery objects, new smells, sound making objects can wear down the senses over time without anyone even realising. Choose lights that stay on.

Make any new foods available to your child but do not insist they eat them. Christmas is not the time to introduce new foods.

Remember that your child isn't missing out if they do not see Father Christmas. He is no less magical when you see him from a distance or featuring in a seasonal film. Father Christmas is overwhelming for a reason. Every child loves Santa from a distance. It's the close up that



Encourage your child to share their concerns about Christmas by using worry toy, worry box, writing, drawing or

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Involve your child in any changes to the house, e.g. selecting decorations, decorating the house, deciding where the tree is placed. Make changes gradually; not too much all at once.

Leave their presents unwrapped unless they like the sensation of unwrapping and can cope with surprises.

Don't let anyone pressurise your child into a challenging situation such as insisting on a hug or kiss during present-giving. Encourage your child to says *please* and *thank you* but that's it, no one should expect more than that.

