

## Casey's Top Tips for an Inclusive Holiday Season

Everyone deserves to enjoy the holiday season, here are some ways to help your autistic person feel comfortable:

- Have a visual timetable of what the month is going to look like as December tends to be very different to other months. You could also make a visual timetable for the big day broken down hour by hour. This can help ease anxiety about the change and the uncertainty that the holidays bring.
- Try giving presents in blocks instead of all at once, as that can be quite overwhelming and can lead to meltdowns. Allowing them to open a couple at a time, gives them time to process everything they have received.
- Instead of wrapping gifts, try putting them in gift bags or not wrapping them at all. It can be quite overwhelming unwrapping gifts and knowing what reaction we are supposed to give that is socially acceptable.
- Allow them to have what they want for dinner instead of Christmas dinner. If its chicken nuggets, let them have chicken nuggets, if its pizza, let them have pizza.
- Create a space for them to have some downtime, family and friends are great but they can be very overwhelming and all those conversations can be overstimulating so sometimes down time is needed to recharge and enjoy the company of others again.
- Quite often holiday outfits can be overstimulating and very uncomfortable so allowing them to wear their regular clothes will help them feel safe and can help them self regulate.
- Try doing a secret santa with relatives instead of everyone getting a present from everyone. This can minimise the overwhelming nature that comes with exchanging gifts.
- If you are travelling for the holidays, take a bag of things your child needs to feel safe, for example, headphones, fidget toys, blanket and so on.
- Create a seating plan for big dinners in advance so they know what to expect and they choose who to sit next to, to make them feel more comfortable, ask relatives to stick to this plan.
- Have a dedicated space for them to open their gifts privately so they don't feel overwhelmed but also ask others to maybe wait until they are not in front of them in case the reaction is hard to read.
- If travelling for the holidays, pack your own food instead of having them eat what everyone else is eating that might not be safe foods. That way, there's no offence to the host for them not eating or not liking the food and your young person gets to stay and enjoy their own food.

## Some things to remember:

- Forget what society tells you what you should or should not do during the holidays. Every family is different and different things work for different people. We live in a society where the “rules” were written by and for neurotypicals so we have to adjust those “rules” for our neurodiverse world.
- Find pleasure in the little things over the holiday period. Your child being happy and excited is a win, it doesn’t matter if the reason they are happy is out of the norm (chicken nuggets for dinner for example).
- If your young person doesn’t give a huge reaction to gift you thought they were going to love, don’t be offended, they may love it but struggle to process their emotions. Quite often neurodivergent people have reactions the other way round and get super excited over the small things and seem disappointed over the big things but that doesn’t mean they are disappointed.
- You are allowed to have time out. Don’t feel guilty for having some down time to yourself without your young person. It is your holidays too.



Create a visual calendar of what December is going to look like so you can prepare.



DECEMBER 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Christmas shop
15	16	17	18	19	20 End of School	21 Chill Day
22 Dinner with friends	23 Final Food Shop	24 Family Cinema Trip	25 Christmas Day	26 Second Christmas with relatives	27 Chill Day	28 Chill Day
29 Dinner with family	30 Shopping Trip	31 Panto and Party	1	2	3	4

*Homemade*  
SUNITS MADE EASY

7am: Wake Up



8am: Open 5 Presents



9am: Take a Break



10am: Breakfast



11am: Open 5 Presents



12pm: Take a Break



1pm: Open 5 Presents



2pm: Family Game



3pm: Take a Break



4pm: Dinner



5pm: Take a Break



6pm: Family Game



7pm: Chocolates and Nibbles



8pm: Chilling and Chatting



9pm: Christmas Movie



10pm: Movie



11pm: Bedtime



12am: Asleep

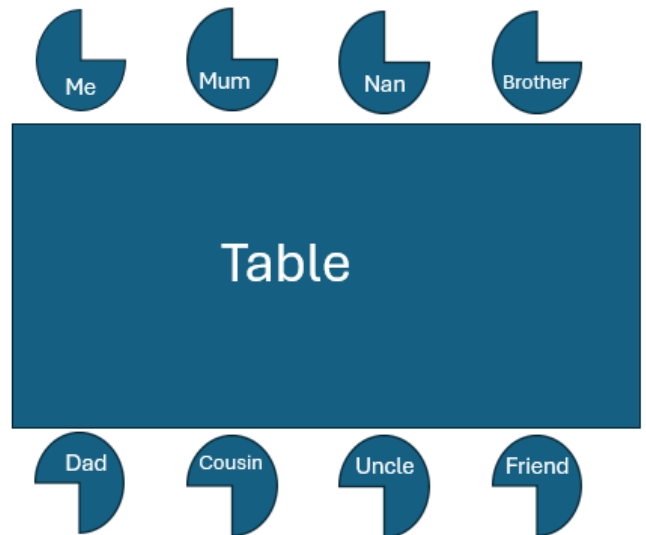


Make a schedule hour by hour for Christmas Day and remember to put in breaks so you don't get too overwhelmed.

If you don't like the traditional meals on the holidays, eat something you do like, for



Make a seating plan for big dinners so you know where everyone will sit and so you feel comfortable.



Have a safe space that you can go to when you need some time out.

Don't forget to take regular breaks. Even if you feel like you don't need a break, take 10 minutes anyway so you don't burn yourself out.

