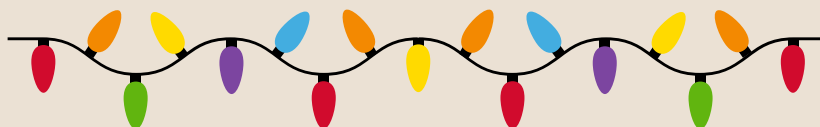


# The Autism Information and Advice Service



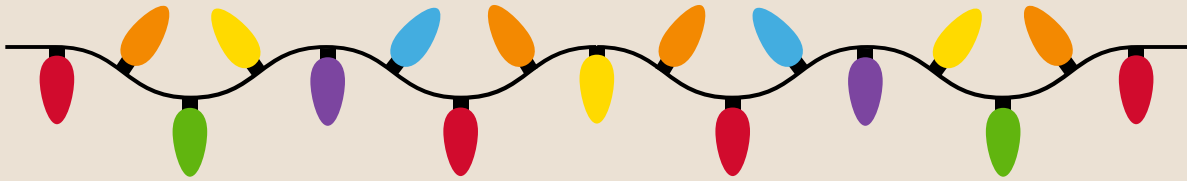
## Autism Christmas Guide

An autism friendly guide to navigating the Christmas period

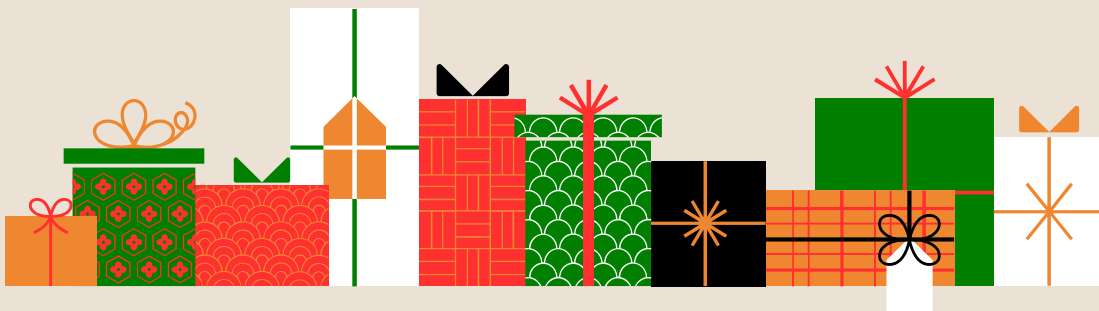


# 'Autism Christmas Guide'

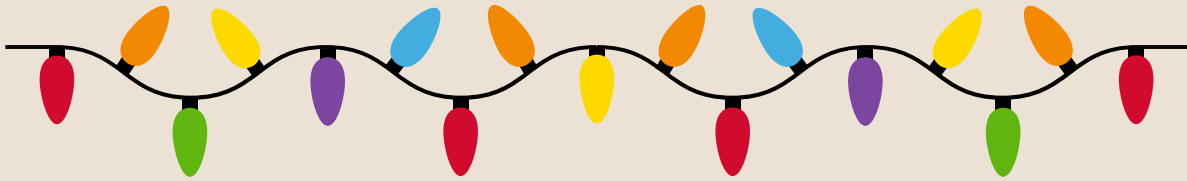
## contents page



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# Preparing for Christmas



For a lot of autistic people, Christmas can be an anxiety provoking time. This can be due to the changes that Christmas brings such as interruption to routines, increase in sensory input and the pressure of social expectations. Preparing for these changes can be really helpful in managing this period and reducing the impact this time has on an individual's mental health and wellbeing.



For some people, photos of the Christmas tree and Christmas activities from previous years can help create a social story of what they can expect from Christmas.



Christmas decorations can sometimes be overwhelming. Start by decorating a small section of the home to see how this feels before decorating fully.

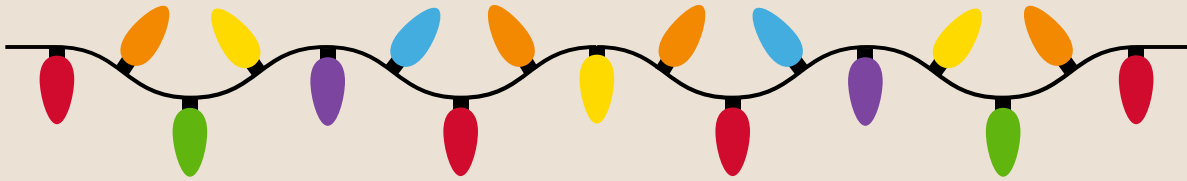


Try and keep some aspects of the daily routine the same in the lead up to the festive holiday, as well as Christmas day. For example, getting up or going to bed at the usual time.



Remember to have any repeat prescriptions and medication ordered and arranged to be collected or delivered as pharmacies opening times may vary during the holidays.

# Christmas countdown



For some autistic people, the countdown and anticipation for Christmas can feel overwhelming and induce high levels of anxiety due to being unable to process the emotions around these upcoming changes.

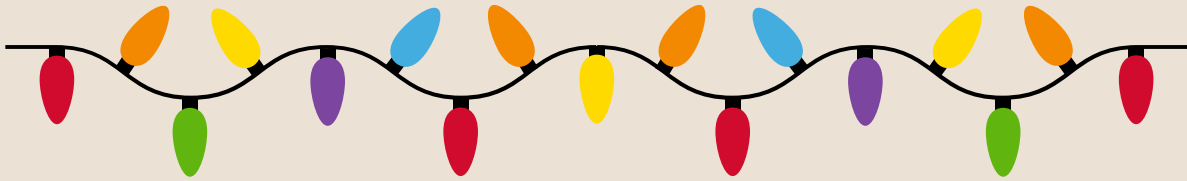
Countdown calendars can be helpful in understanding the 'days' counting down to Christmas and may be helpful to remind yourself or a loved one of some key events that are coming up in your family calendar.

For example, it might be useful to know when the school holiday starts and when friends and relatives might be visiting. It might help to look at what these might look like beforehand to ease anxiety around these changes.

Daily schedules for important days in the Christmas period like Christmas eve, Christmas day and Boxing day can also help you prepare for these days in advance by knowing what to expect.



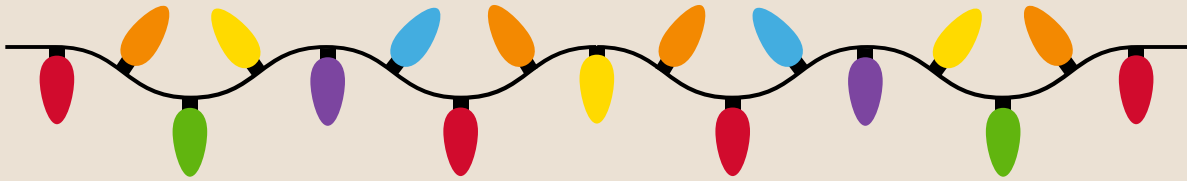
# Christmas shopping



The most difficult part of Christmas is the shopping. With knowing who to buy for, how to get it, and with the increasing cost of living it can make the whole experience very stressful. Below are some best tips to help navigate this season of shopping. Remember as much as it may feel like it, Christmas is a time for spending time with friends and family, not for the amount of presents we give. We should all try our best to worry less about the gifts and focus on the joy of Christmas and spending this time with our loved ones.

- For some people online shopping is an easier way to buy presents, although this may not be helpful for others and can cause different anxieties. Remember to order your online presents in time for Christmas delivery (the cut off is usually around the 16th of December).
- Make a list of shops you need to go, usually if you google the shop there is a section with a barometer that shows busy or quiet times, this can help you plan the best time to go to the shops if you need to.
- Think about what you need before you go and make a list to get in and out quickly. Take someone with you that can give you additional support whilst you shop and take sensory aids to support you with the additional sensory input.
- Car parks can be very busy at this time of year. Remember to book spaces ahead of time online to avoid any additional stress when parking. If you or a loved one is autistic, you can also apply for a blue badge which can make future parking less stressful.

# Christmas Food and drink



While it can be nice for everyone to eat together and to try traditional foods, it is not essential you do this. Even if that means a plate of chicken nuggets for Christmas dinner – everyone's happiness on the day is the goal! It is also important to recognise that some autistic people experience Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) which negatively impacts the foods they will be able to eat because of their sensory differences.



Ensure that you have enough of the individuals favourite food and drinks so that they can still enjoy a Christmas meal without any stress or anxiety caused.



If the individual does not want to sit at the table, help them find a place to eat where they feel comfortable and safe.

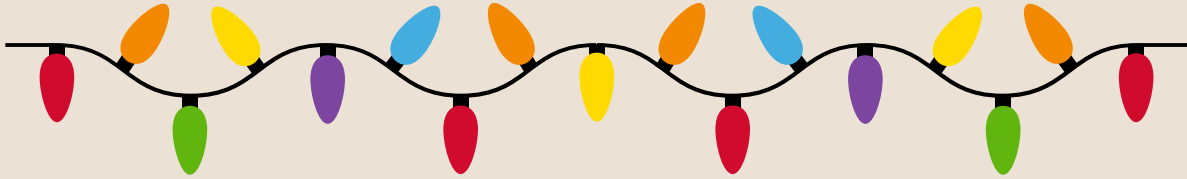


Be aware of the smells of food and how this can affect the individual as this may result in sensory overload. Provide a safe space away from the table and kitchen if needed.



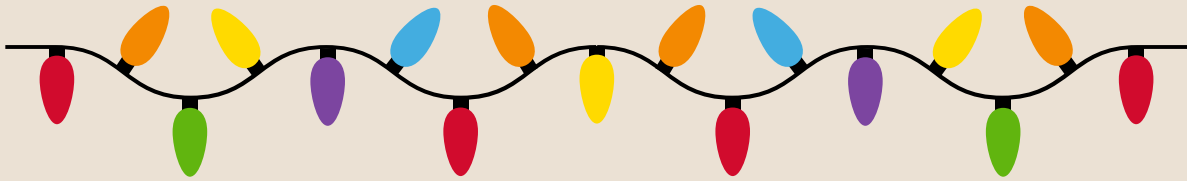
Be wary of Christmas crackers on the table as the loud noises may cause some individuals sensory issues. Please be respectful of sensory needs.

# Presents and gift giving



- When buying gifts for autistic people it is important to consider the person's sensory needs. If you are unsure of these, ask the individual what gifts they would like and what gifts they would not like receive. It is sometimes best to stay away from gifts such as clothes and toiletries unless you understand the individual's sensory needs well.
- Unwrapping presents can be stressful, some may prefer to know what they are receiving, or they may prefer gifts left out without wrapping paper or even left in open gift bags. If you are unsure, it's always best to ask the individual what they prefer but try to stay away from textured wrapping paper that might cause discomfort with noise or texture.
- An Autistic individual opening presents may want to do this on their own in their own space without being watched as this may make them feel uncomfortable.
- Some autistic people do not always like surprises so plan ahead and find out what they like as you might find that their expectation can be quite different to yours and can cause some heightened emotions if things do not go as expected.
- It can often be too much for an autistic person to open lots of presents on Christmas day. You could spread these out throughout the day or open a few and then have a break to make this less overwhelming. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to do this and it's okay to take your time and open the others on another day.

# Spending time with Friends and Family



There is a lot of pressure to spend Christmas time with loved ones which can feel overwhelming if you are autistic. Remember there is no expectation to do this if this is too much. Don't ever feel pressured to go to a friend or family member's house if you do not want to. Try your best to explain the situation and the impact this would have on your own or loved one's wellbeing.



If you choose to spend time with a loved one over the holidays, explain your dietary requirements ahead of time or remember to take your own food with you.



It is okay for an autistic person to be quiet at social gathering or need time alone. Do not pressure them into joining in and provide them with a safe space to self-regulate.

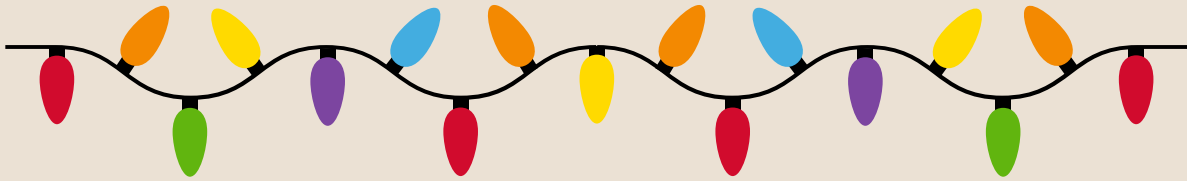


It is important to explain to Friends and Family that your difficulties during this time are not personal. If you are unable to explain this, ask someone to do this on your behalf.

**GOODBYE!**

When you or your loved one have had enough, be ready to leave to avoid meltdowns or shutdowns. Try and talk to your host about this before the event if possible.

# Self-advocacy and Christmas



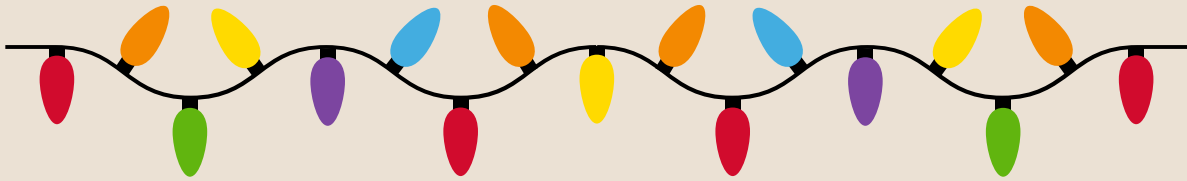
Christmas can be a very difficult time if you or a loved one is autistic. Remember it is okay to self-advocate for you or a loved one's needs during this time. Explaining your difficulties and what will help you can be really useful at navigating the Christmas period and getting the right support. If you are uncomfortable doing this, ask someone you trust to do this on your behalf so that the people you will be spending time with understand your limits and boundaries.

It is always important to have autistic people part of the decision making process. It's a good idea to discuss Christmas together with loved ones beforehand where possible to discuss what this might look like and what would benefit and support you or your loved one's individual needs during the festive period.

Remember self-advocacy is a skill and often takes time to develop. Get creative with the way you communicate what you need and use your voice in different ways. Your thoughts and opinions are just as valid written down over text or spoken over the phone. It's communicating what you or your loved one needs to others that matters the most.



# Christmas, gender and sexuality



For autistic people that also identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, Christmas can be a very challenging time due to the additional pressures of spending time with family members who may not accept this part of their identity or have made them feel like they need to hide this part of their identity in order to be accepted.

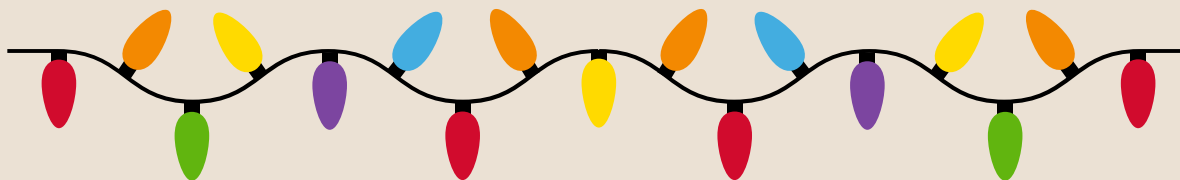
Some people may choose not to share information about their sexuality or gender with their family and that is okay. Remember to decide beforehand what you or your loved one are comfortable sharing with others. It is never okay for people to pressure someone into sharing personal information about their sexuality or gender.

If you or a loved one are apprehensive about spending time with family at Christmas time, remember your boundaries and make sure the individual has access to a safe space where they are free to be themselves without judgement and can escape situations which make them feel uncomfortable.

It is okay for people to say no to spending time with family members who do not accept them for who they are. Spend time at Christmas with people that make you feel loved, supported and accepted instead, as this is what matters most! Additional support over the Christmas period can be found by contacting the Switchboard LGBTQIA+ helpline on **0800 0119 100**.



# Support over Christmas



If you need require any support over Christmas please contact the helplines provided below:



## Beat Eating Disorders

A support line for eating disorder support open 3-8pm  
Monday to Friday

Call: 0808 801 0677 or visit  
[www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk)



## Childline

A 24/7 counselling service for children and young people

Call: 0800 1111 or talk to a counsellor online at  
[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)



## Derbyshire Mental Health Helpline and Support Service

A 24/7 mental health support line for mental health support

Call: 0800 028 0077 or call 111 and select option 2



## NHS 111

A 24/7 medical support line for those needing medical care (if urgent always call 999)

Call: 111 or visit  
[www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)



## Papyrus

A 24/7 support line for anyone under the age of 35 who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts

Call: 0800 068 4141 or visit  
[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)



## Samaritans

A 24/7 mental health support line for people living in Derbyshire

Call: 116 123 or visit  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)



## SHOUT

A 24/7 mental health support text service

Text: 'SHOUT' to 85258 or visit  
[www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org)



## Switchboard National

### LGBTQIA+ Support Line

A support line for the LGBTQIA+ community open 10:00am-22:00pm every day

Call: 0800 0119 100 or chat online  
[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)



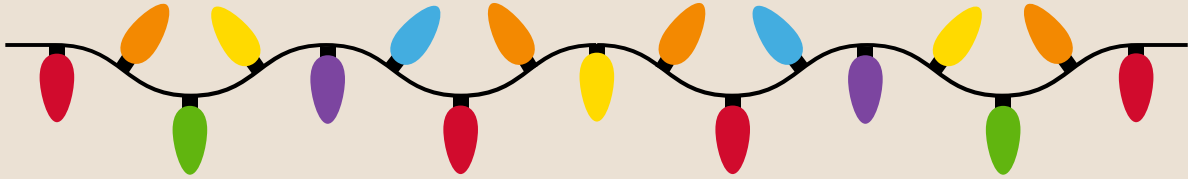
## The Silverline

A 24/7 helpline for people over the age of 55 who feel lonely or isolated.

Call: 0800 4 70 80 90 or visit  
[www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)



# Contacting the Autism IAA Service



The Autism Information and Advice Service will be closed from the 25th December to the 1st of January. If you would like to get in touch with service during this time, please feel free to do so and a member of the team will be in touch when we return in the new year!

## Get in touch

Telephone: 01332 228790 – 9am–5pm Monday to Friday

Email: [autismservice@citizensadvicemidmercia.org.uk](mailto:autismservice@citizensadvicemidmercia.org.uk)

[www.autisminformationandadvice.org.uk](http://www.autisminformationandadvice.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/autisminformationandadvice](https://www.facebook.com/autisminformationandadvice)

[www.instagram.com/autisminformationandadvice](https://www.instagram.com/autisminformationandadvice)

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your ongoing support. We wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year and look forward to seeing you all in 2025!

