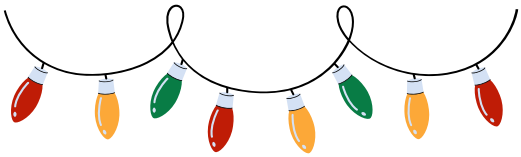
PDA PARENTING

Documents to support PDA families



A PDA CHRISTMAS SURVIVAL GUIDE

The festive season can be a magical time, but for many parents, especially those raising children with additional needs, it's also one of the most challenging periods of the year. As a parent, I've learned through my own experiences (and through plenty of trial and error) that the key to surviving Christmas lies in flexibility, preparation and compassion - for your child and for yourself.

Here's a compilation of practical tips and advice to help you navigate the season and make it as harmonious as possible for your unique family:

1. Be Flexible

Flexibility is essential. Rigid expectations of how Christmas "should" look can lead to frustration and stress. Adjust your plans as needed based on how your child is coping.

2. Stagger Activities

Break up the demands of the day. Spread out meals, gift-giving and social events to avoid overwhelming your child.

3. Modify Decorations

Decorations can cause a sensory overload for some children. Consider limiting or skipping decorations altogether if they're a trigger, or keep them up for a shorter time to reduce anxiety. It may be that the decorations are needed far longer than is traditionally expected and that's ok too.

4. Give Presents Early If Needed

The excitement of waiting can cause immense stress. Allowing children to open gifts early can help manage anxiety and reduce meltdowns.

5. Have a Visual Plan (But Stay Open to Change)

You could create a comprehensible schedule for the day to provide structure, but then be ready to adapt based on your child's needs and their tolerance to both demands or uncertainty.

6. Include Rest Days

Plan quieter days before and after busy periods to give your child (and yourself) time to recover.

7. Think Outside the Box

Find creative solutions for common stressors. For example, you could wrap gifts in cellophane to reduce the anxiety of surprises, or pre-assemble toys to minimise frustration. Perhaps think about previous years and what were the most distressing triggers for your child and you could come up with a solution involving your child in the planning process.

8. Prepare in Advance

Reduce stress by completing tasks ahead of time. For example, set up toys, prepare meals, and handle other logistics before the big day. Having a safety plan in the background or options for instance a safe meal option that you could fall back to.

9. Maintain Routine

Stick to familiar routines for meals, sleep, and daily activities as much as possible to provide a sense of stability.

10. Identify and Manage Triggers

Understand what causes your child anxiety and adapt accordingly. For example, create custom crackers or allow them to skip traditional activities like sitting at the dinner table if it's too much.

11. Brief Family Members

Communicate your family's needs to relatives in advance and stay firm in the strategies that work for your child, even if others expect you to do things differently.

12. Host at Home if Possible

Hosting at your own home can give you more control over the environment and rules, making it easier to accommodate your child's needs. Again, this will individual to each family, some

children might relish on the novelty of being somewhere new.

13. Avoid Imposing Expectations

Your child's version of happiness may not align with traditional Christmas activities. Focus on what brings them joy instead of what you think they "should" enjoy.

14. Limit Social Media Comparisons

Social media often portrays an unrealistic view of the "perfect" Christmas. Remind yourself that these are curated snapshots, not reality.

15. Allow Screen Time

Screens can provide a comforting escape. Don't feel guilty about screen time if it helps your child manage their emotions - this might be something they enjoy or could be their safe space.

16. Take Comfort Breaks

Treat the holidays like you would a school day in that the reasonable adjustments are needed just as much even though you are at home and it is the holidays. You could build in breaks and opportunities for play to help your child recharge, if that is what they need, but focussing on moments of energy replacing activities are key.

17. Get Fresh Air

If possible, take a break outdoors to help everyone reset. If leaving the house isn't an option, try simple indoor exercise like putting some music on and dancing - anything that can lift the mood. Some movement, in what ever form, is good for everyone and it is something that might be difficult to incorporate as the holidays are a change in routine.

18. Avoid Queues and Book Ahead

Minimise stress by avoiding long waits. Plan activities in advance whenever possible and always ask ahead of time for any support opportunities or adjustments that can be made for carers to help.

19. Allow Family to Split Up

It's okay for family members to do different activities if that's what works best. Avoid forcing everyone to participate in the same thing.

20. Manage Expectations

When things don't go to plan, practice empathetic communication. Validate your child's emotions and work together to restore calm.

21. Offer Options

Provide choices rather than demands. For example, depersonalise gift issues if they are unattainable, as well as trying to collaborate together using reasoning that enables the child to feel more in control particularly as it might feel quite unsettling.

22. Don’t Take Reactions Personally

Understand that your child’s responses to gifts or plans are not a reflection of your effort. Their reactions are often out of their control.

23. Focus on the Small Wins

Overloads and meltdowns may happen. What matters is how you recover and focus on the positive moments instead of striving for perfection.

24. Be Kind to Yourself

Parenting during the holidays is no small feat. Give yourself grace and celebrate your efforts, no matter how small they may seem.

25. Create Your Own Version of Christmas

There’s no one-size-fits-all Christmas. Embrace what works for your family and let go of societal pressures.

26. Reward Yourself

Whether it’s a quiet moment with a cup of tea or treating yourself after the holidays, acknowledge the hard work you’ve done to create a meaningful experience for your family.

Remember, surviving the holiday season is an accomplishment in itself. By focusing on what works for your unique family, you can create a Christmas filled with special moments that truly matter.

Safe and calm holidays from PDA Parenting!