



Welcome to
Mansfield SEND!



Your newsletter for
parents and carers of
children and young
people with Send.

Inside this issue:

Managing Expectations at
Christmas

Supporting Wellbeing

Inclusive Christmas
Activities

Supporting Communication
during festivities



DECORATIONS
Introduce decorations
gradually into chosen spaces.

Involve your young person in
the decorating, and listen to
their opinions about what is
used where.

Keep some decoration-free
zones to maintain a calming
and usual place to be.

Mansfield Send



Autumn Term B

December 2025



It seems like only five minutes since we were preparing for back to school in September, and here we now are, getting ready for the run up to Christmas!

Whilst Christmas is a time of joy and celebration, it can also bring challenges to many people, for many different reasons. Our children may find some aspects tricky, and Christmas may need to look different for some of you. So in this edition of the newsletter, we are looking at practical tips and ideas to help 8##]make Christmas enjoyable and stress free for you and your family.

We will focus on how to manage expectations and support emotional wellbeing, and then there are also ideas around inclusive Christmas activities, gift ideas, supporting communication, and a reminder about how to support young people with sensory processing differences.

And of course, we would also like to take this opportunity to send a massive Merry Christmas wish to you all. Please take care of yourselves in the build up to Christmas—it is very easy to be so busy running around after everyone else that you forget to care of yourself. At times when our young people need a bit of extra care, please remember it has a knock on effect, and you will may also need a bit of extra care as well.

Supporting Sensory Processing at Christmas

Christmas can be a sensory overload—bright lights, loud music, lots of people, strong smells, the list goes on! Make sure you have safe places to retreat to, and possibly limit decorations in main spaces. Plan how you will support yourself and your child from becoming overwhelmed, or to get energised and engage in activities.

1

Keep Moving

The festive season can involve a lot of sitting around. Plan in regular movement breaks, and a chance to get some fresh air. Activities involving pushing, pulling or carrying heavy weights can be helpful.

2

Keep Calm & regulated

Fall back on favourite regulation techniques to support young people to self soothe—for example, music, fidget toys or jewellery, chewing gum or crunchy foods, colouring or screen time.

3

Maintain routine

Routine is key—try to keep them as much as possible. Keep bed times and meal times the same, and try to section your day in the way you normally would, then slot Christmas plans around your routines.

4

Schedule quiet times

Prioritise quiet times by scheduling them on the calendar. Quiet days are great to re-energise, and shouldn't be a luxury! On busy days, make sure you schedule in quiet slots to recharge and get you through the day.

FOCUS: Emotional Wellbeing at Christmas

Christmas can be overwhelming for a lot of our young people, for a variety of reasons;

Sensory overwhelm — for those with sensory processing differences, the intense and often constant sensory experiences can be exhausting and challenging to process.



Unpredictable routines and environment — Changes, social gatherings, activities outside your routine— these can all lead to anxiety, and make it difficult for young people to remain grounded. In addition to this, familiar places often change due to decorations, or we visit unfamiliar houses. For people who find safety in familiar place, this can be destabilising.



Social expectations — Spending time with unfamiliar family, making small talk, hugging -Christmas gatherings can be full of unspoken expectations, and this can be overwhelming. And that is before we even think about the social expectations around giving and receiving gifts. There can also be additional pressure to mask autistic traits, requiring constant energy and leaving people feeling disconnected and exhausted.

So what can we do to help? Below are some hints and tips to try and make things a bit easier for your families.

Keep routines the same.

Amongst all the changes going on at Christmas, if you can maintain familiar routines, this can help children feel secure and reduce any anxiety.

Try to keep key parts of the day, such as wake up time, mealtimes and bedtime, similar to the usual schedule. If your child always has a story before going to bed for example, make sure this still happens.

Consider all the things in your day that can stay the same. This predictability will provide comfort and help your young person manage the excitement and sensory demands of Christmas without becoming overwhelmed.

Prepare for changes in advance

Where you know changes are going to happen, prepare your child in advance.

Use a visual timetable or schedule to help your child to understand what is happening now and what is going to be happening next. You could write activities on the calendar so they know what is happening each day, or make their own visual calendar for the festive period. You could also create a countdown so they know when they are finishing school, and when they will be going back.

Below is a link to some Christmas visuals to support with changing routines.

[Christmas Visual Schedule](#)

[Autism Christmas Countdown Calendar PDF](#)

Lower the pressure

It does not matter if celebrations look different for your family. Concentrate on what works for you and your family.

There are no rules about how Christmas has to look. You can create a Christmas that is supportive of your families needs, and feels comfortable and enjoyable for your young person and family. This might mean celebrating in quieter ways, skipping big family gatherings, not wrapping gifts or incorporating your child's special interests into the celebrations. What matters most is that your families traditions celebrate who you all are, rather than conforming to outside expectations.

Christmas Communication

Christmas can be full of new or unfamiliar experiences, and so it's important to give young people clear, accessible ways to express their needs and choices. Using visual supports, choice boards, and their own familiar communication tools help reduce anxiety and give children confidence to participate. When things are different and possibly overwhelming for our young people, it is important that they are heard and understood.

Offering choice boards for food or activities can help, as well as making sure your child has a way to communicate when they need a break, or if they do not like something.

Click the link for the communication board shown above;

[Autism Christmas AAC little puddins Amanda mcguinness](#)



Managing expectations at Christmas

The festive season often comes with big ideas about what celebrations “should” look like, but every family—and every child—is different. It’s okay if your Christmas doesn’t match the picture-perfect version we see on social media. Focus on what feels comfortable for your family rather than trying to do everything. Setting realistic expectations helps reduce stress for everyone and allows space for joy in the moments that matter most. A calm, happy child is far more important than a packed schedule.

- **Decide what matters most.**
Pick one or two traditions that work for your family, and focus on those.
- **Celebrate your way.**
There’s no right way to do Christmas, just a way that is right for you. Think about this when you plan activities, and go for things that work for your family, rather than things you feel you ought to be doing.
- **Prepare for changes.**
Use visual schedules or photographs to explain what will happen, and to remind or introduce young people to unfamiliar family and friends.
- **Lower the pressure.**
It is okay to say no to extra visitors or events if it helps your young person to feel safe.
- **Inform and prepare.**
Talk to family and friends, letting them know that about any needs that should be met, and that you may need to be flexible with timings, or bring your own food to suit your child for example.
- **Wellbeing over perfection.**
A relaxed, happy child is more important than a packed schedule or perfect decorations.



Inclusive Christmas Activity ideas.

Simple, low stress festive activities that all children can enjoy...



Simple craft activities;

Try activities such as Christmas colouring, salt dough ornaments, making paper stars or snowflakes, sticking buttons or pompoms onto a picture of a Christmas tree, or using Christmas stickers to make Christmas cards.



Alternative celebration activities;

Instead of big gatherings, you could try cosy movie nights with favourite snacks, a walk or drive around the local area to see the Christmas lights or a small family meal to try some festive foods alongside preferred foods. Choose a Christmas book to sit and read together under weighted or cosy blankets.



Movement and regulating activities;

Make a list of Christmas items and hide them around

the house to create a Christmas scavenger hunt. Choose some calm and gentle Christmas music to move and dance to.



Sensory Activities;

Try using soft textures and letting children choose decorations to decorate a mini Christmas tree—try to avoid flashing lights. You could also fill a box with safe items such as tinsel, a pine cone and soft fabric to create a Christmas sensory box. Make some red or green playdough using calming scents like vanilla or mild cinnamon.



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

Schools and Families Specialist Services
Communication & Interaction Team

Mansfield Parents' and Carers' Group

A network for families of autistic children and young people on roll at
Mansfield Schools and Colleges (no diagnosis necessary)



Join Joe Butler and Jenny Byrne, specialist advisory teachers from
Nottinghamshire County Council's Communication and Interaction Team, to be part
of a supportive local network to discuss and learn from each other about 'all things
autism'.

Through a mix of virtual drop-in sessions with opportunities to ask questions and
chat to other parents and carers, to focused sessions covering the areas that most
matter to you, you will find a warm 'neuro-affirming' welcome where autistic
differences are celebrated and creative ways to support your child's unique needs
are explored.

There is no need to book for these sessions, simply turn up and
drop in. You can either join in the conversation, or sit there and
soak it all up—whatever you are more comfortable with.
This is the link to join sessions, and it will be the same each time.

[Join the meeting now](#)

Monday 2nd February 11 – 12am

This session, we will focus on **communication** and how we can support our young people. We will think about the **double empathy theory**, and also look at some resources and strategies that you can use to help unpick what your child is really thinking, and how you can use this to make sure you get the right support in place.

Monday 23rd March 11 – 12 am

What do we mean by information processing and differences in executive functioning? We will look at the impact of neurodiversity on executive **functioning**, and also think about some of the skills that we often see in our autistic young people. We will also hopefully have a chance to look at some **frequently asked questions** – so if you do have any questions. Please bring them along to the session!

Monday 18th May 11 – 12 am

In this session, we will look at **what it means to have an internal presentation**. We will talk about **masking**, and how we can support young people through **energy accounting**. We will look at what **energy accounting** means and how do we go about doing it.

Monday 26th June 11 – 12am

In our final session we will think about an **external presentation of autism**, what this means and how we can support. We will also think about our summer plans; what are your plans for the **summer holiday**? How can you meet the needs of everyone in the family, and make sure you all get through the summer!