



Adelaide Autism Adventures

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Tips for including your ASD child on Christmas

The holiday season is often a chaotic time for most families, add a dash of ASD in to the mix and you may have parents wishing Santa could skip the season all together. So here are some tips on how to include your ASD family member in the celebrations and some points to remember throughout the silly season

Things to consider

- Let go of your preconceived notions of how Christmas should be celebrated; things you enjoyed yourself as a child may not be enjoyable for your child. For example, you as a parent may be very excited about your child having a photo with Santa whereas your child may be less than enthused about visiting a loud, crowded shopping centre to sit on the lap of a stranger.
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- Prepare your kids for Christmas day and the events that lead up to it. Social stories are excellent tools to help explain the Christmas routine—putting up a tree, photos with Santa, Christmas day lunch etc. You can make these yourself with your own photos. Keep the writing clear and simple, "we go to aunty Sue's house for lunch and see lots of people from our family" etc. Visit for tips on making social stories.
- Does your child decimate any tree that you lovingly put up? Why not consider getting a wall sticker of a Christmas tree instead? Sure, its not exactly the same but it saves you a lot of frustration and cleaning up.
- "What do I get him/her for Christmas?" Ahh the question which plagues us every year. When looking for a present consider what your child's interest are as opposed to what the latest toy out is. Also, look at the developmental age of your child as opposed to the birth age of your child. What may be appropriate for other 8 year olds may not be for your own.
- Have a meltdown prevention and management plan for Christmas day outings. If you are attending a gathering at another persons house talk to them beforehand and arrange to have a quiet space for your child to chill out in if they are becoming overwhelmed. Keep an eye out for signs that your child is becoming overwhelmed so that you can head off a meltdown before one starts. Make sure you take along a 'calm down' bag full of sensory toys, favourite items etc that is just for your child.
- Don't push your luck— Christmas day gets harder as our families get bigger, and some of us split the day between three different groups of family and friends so that we can see everyone. Going to multiple places in the one day may not be an optimal idea for your child so be upfront with family and friends with what is a reasonable expectation for your family. Maybe you can only go to one Christmas day party. People may get their noses out of joint but limiting the amount of car trips and houses may make the day much more enjoyable for your child and by extension for you and your other children.



Wall decal from "Bright Star kids."

Ways to include your child in Christmas

- If you put up a Christmas tree include your child in the decorating, even if you use hand over hand. Try putting up lots of decorations which tie in with your child's interests i.e. dinosaurs. If you cannot buy these, why not make them yourself? Who cares if your tree looks a little strange with laminated pictures of air conditioners on it; the delight on your child's face more than makes up for the odd looks from visitors.
- Want photos with Santa but always ending up leaving the store without them as your child cannot wait in long lines or is uncomfortable with sitting on the lap of a stranger? Try prepping your child with social stories on the routine of photos with Santa and be upfront with the Santa and photographers about your child's ASD. Or mayhap you could buy a Santa suit for a male relative and have a photo at home with them instead. For the child who is wary of strange looking men with white flowing beards, maybe let them watch the relative get dressed as Santa to take the fear of unknown people out of the equation.
- Want to see the xmas lights but have a child who is a bolter or cant cope with bustling crowds? Try looking at the Christmas lights from the comfort of your car; Lobethal is a great place to do a Christmas drive or search online to find a local street with a large number of displays.



TJ decorating the tree :)

Christmas Themed Activities

- *Shaving cream Santa* - get out the shaving cream and draw Christmas shapes like trees, Santa, reindeers etc. Give yourself shaving cream Santa beards! Make sure you have some towels ready to clean up the messy fun.
- *Painting*— make Christmas hand paintings which you can then gift to family and friends, or print off Christmas themed coloring pages to paint. You could also use hand prints to make a Christmas wreath for your front door!
- *Santa's Sleigh Ride*— convert an old box or use the bed spread as a sleigh which mum and dad can pretend to be reindeers with and pull around the house.
- *Singing and dancing*—put on some kids Christmas songs and sing along whilst dancing up a storm.
- *Make your own clay decorations*—buy a brand of oven bake clay, such as Sculpey (available from Spotlight and produces creations which are have a bit of bounce when dropped) and help your child to make Christmas decorations or see what they create on their own. This year we made our own dinosaur decorations which the kids painted and we then hung on our tree. Remember to buy some hooks to press in to the creation so that you can hang them on the tree.
- *Put lights on your tree* - many ASD kids LOVE colourful, blinking lights.
- *Popcorn garlands*— help your child to thread popcorn to make a garland for your Christmas tree; its fun and doubles as a fine motor exercise!
- *Christmas Cookies*—make cookies together and use Christmas themed cookie cutters. This is a good activity for sequencing and turn taking.



Homemade clay and laminated dinosaur decorations