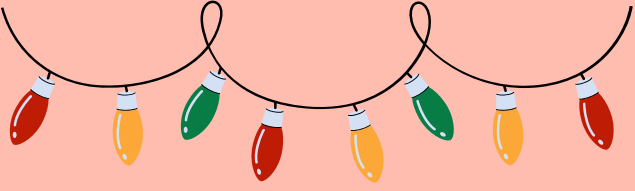


12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS GUIDE BOOK



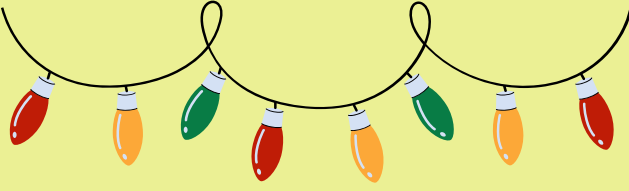


MAKE A LIST AND CHECK IT TWICE!

This guide will outline 12 “days” of considerations to ensure that your child has a Christmas season that brings the fun while supporting their needs!

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DAY 1:

PREPARATION



Christmas season usually means lots of changes to routines, going to different places, and maybe having more people at home than usual.

- 1- Prepare your child for what is happening as much as possible, by explaining to them, or using visuals or stories
- 2- Use countdowns or Advent calendars for Christmas Day
- 3- Use stories or videos to prepare for new or unexpected outings, such as going to see Santa at the mall
- 4- Have a plan in place in case a situation gets overwhelming, such as having sensory tools available for regulation; or be ready to leave an environment where necessary

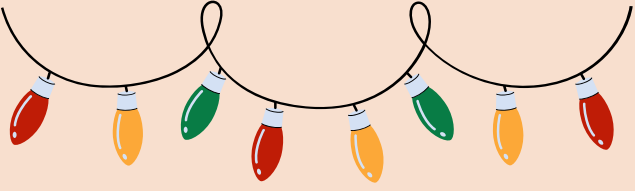
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DAY 2:

MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Your child's support needs aren't going to disappear just because it's Christmas! Manage your expectations and those of others to ensure your child is comfortable, safe and happy!



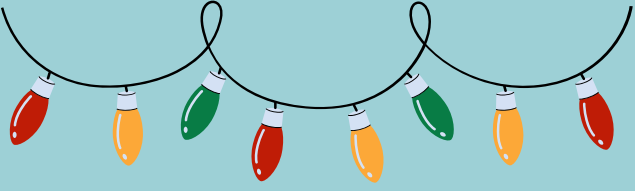
- Don't force your child into different or difficult experiences simply "because it's Christmas"
- Think about what would truly make the season an enjoyable one for your child
- Advocate for your child and manage the expectations of others as well, such as letting family members know what your child feels comfortable eating
- A happy Christmas means reducing pressure for all!

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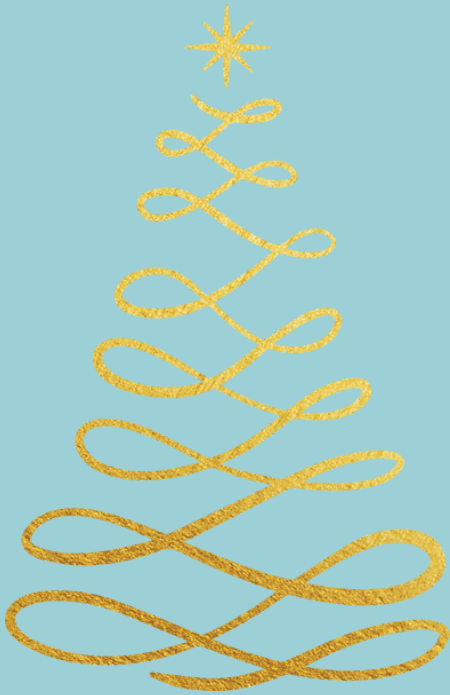
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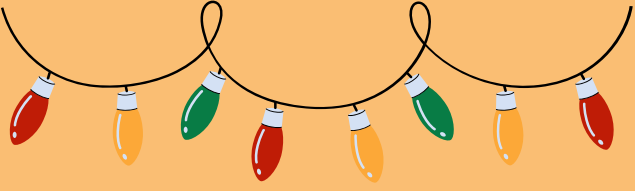
DAY 3:

ROUTINES



Try to keep schedules as consistent as possible to maintain a routine. This can decrease anxiety around any changes.

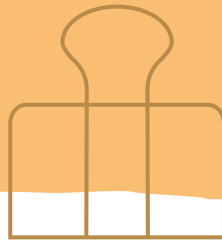
- Use visual schedules to let your child know the routine for that day
- Show pictures of unfamiliar guests beforehand and explain who is coming over if needed
- Try to keep a consistent daily routine, especially regarding sleep schedules



DAY 4:

SENSORY (SMELL)

The Christmas season might have LOTS of different scents that we don't typically get all year round: food, paint, or air fresheners.



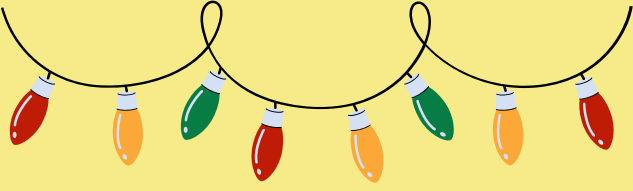
- Have a scent-free or neutral space to serve as a retreat if overwhelmed, such as a bedroom
- Try to use low-odour paint and have lots of ventilation, or consider painting at a different time of year
- Spread out the timing of cooking meals to reduce the potential for competing scents
- Consider catering food to reduce cooking odours at home

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DAY 5:

SENSORY (TASTE)



Similar to scents, Christmas time brings flavours and meals that are unique to the season.

- Do not force/pressure/bribe your child to eat unfamiliar or uncomfortable foods
- Have your child's safe foods readily available
- You can present new/different foods in small portions and separate containers, with no pressure to try them, but only offer one new food at a time
- Offer foods that are similar to their preferences
- Be honest about new foods rather than trying to hide them among preferred foods; this can create aversions to safe foods if they are altered in any way

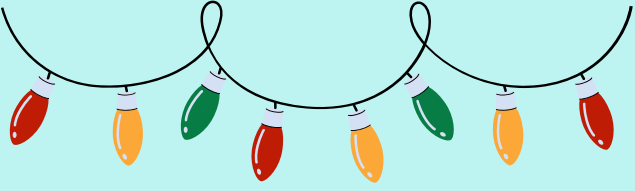
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DAY 6: SENSORY (HEARING)

Christmas is a NOISY time! Music, traffic, people, singing...it can be overwhelming!



- Plan ahead if going out: have ear plugs or ear defenders, or let your child listen to music through headphones
- If at home, have a quiet space that your child can go to at any point in time to regulate
- Check for any signs of distress, overwhelm or dysregulation and try to have self-regulation tools readily available

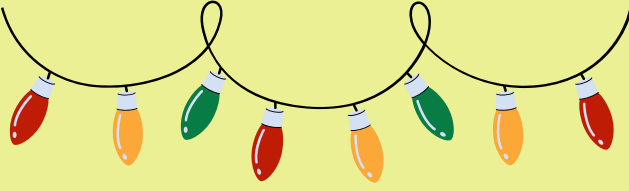
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DAY 7:

SENSORY (VISION)



At Christmas time there might be a lot more visual stimulation than usual, such as lights or decorations. Some children might experience increased anxiety with flashing lights, while some might love the extra sensory stimulation.

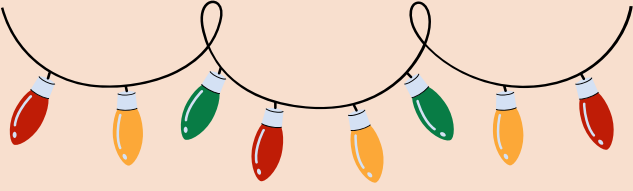
- 1- For children who are sensitive to flashing lights, consider letting them know what times the lights will go on and off, eg 6pm - 11pm
- 2- If the lights have a remote and different modes, have your child select the mode with which he/she is most comfortable
- 3- Figure out the pattern for the lights so you can predict when they will flash
- 4- For children who seek out visual stimulation and you are anxious about potential harm to their eyes, redirect to another enjoyable and stimulating - but safer - option

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DAY 8: SENSORY (TOUCH)

Christmas is generally a time of meeting and greeting people; however all of those hugs and kisses can be extremely uncomfortable and distressing for someone with sensory differences to touch.



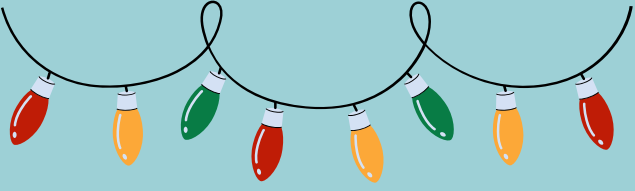
- Unwelcomed or unexpected touch can be overstimulating and dysregulating
- Give your child the autonomy to communicate “no” (by speaking or non-speaking means) if they are not comfortable
- Advocate for your child so that others will not force affection if it is unwanted

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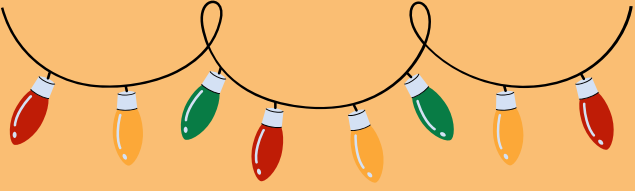
DAY 9:

RELAXATION



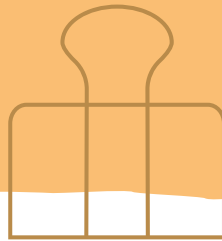
Christmas is a busy and overwhelming time! There is increased excitement for many people, lots of changes, and maybe some outings. It can be an overstimulating yet enjoyable time, but don't forget to RELAX!

- Your child might become dysregulated more frequently due to the excitement and differences in the environment and routine
- Have a quiet or safe space that can provide a sense of calm and regulation. These spaces might be cozy, such as a corner, under a table, in a tent
- Have regulating items such as fidgets, books, blankets, snacks or drinks readily available in their safe space
- Consider spacing out activities to maximise down time



DAY 10: ELECTRONICS

Use of electronics can be polarising, but there are positives and negatives to using them. Of course, children under 2 do not need electronics, but as children get older, using them can have benefits. At Christmas time, it can provide some familiarity when there might be several changes to the environment.



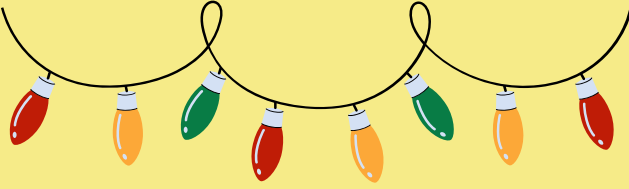
- A familiar game, app or song can be beneficial or even necessary for self-regulation
- Think twice about removing electronics if they provide comfort in that moment
- If electronics need to be removed, have other tools necessary that would provide a similar level of comfort or relaxation

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DAY 11:

UNDERSTANDING



While Christmas can be a super exciting time, it can also be overwhelming, and your child might want to retreat to their safe spaces more often. Understand that they may not always feel the “Christmas spirit”, but this does not mean they enjoy the holiday any less! All that’s needed is a bit of support so they can enjoy it in a way that’s meaningful to them!

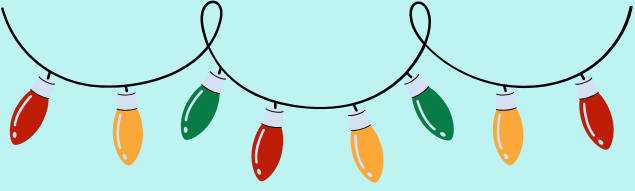
- Alter the environment as needed to support their needs
- Do not force them to do it all: space out activities, choose outings wisely, and consider what is truly important for their wellbeing
- Set expectations that can be practical for all. For example, if guests are over, they are expected to greet guests, but perhaps one at a time, or at a time of their choosing
- Respect a “no” from your child: they are communicating their needs and advocating for themselves

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DAY 12: PRESENTS

Christmas Day itself can be a sensory overload for EVERYONE!

Understand your child's sensory threshold so you can anticipate when he or she might be becoming overstimulated, and use the strategies that work to support them to have the best day possible!

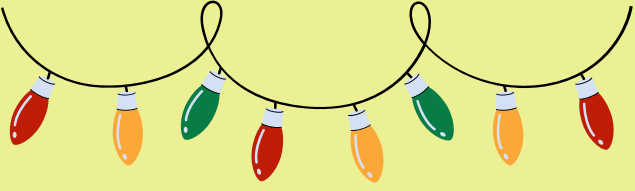


- Consider staggering the opening of presents
- Some children might not want to open presents with an audience and with all the fanfare, and might value quiet and privacy instead
- Choose wrapping paper that is easy to open/rip if needed, less noisy if your child doesn't like noise, or visually pleasing
- Allow lots of sensory breaks throughout Christmas Day, with lots of opportunities to relax and recharge (for you as well!)

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MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY
NEW YEAR

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