

### Preparing for a Positive Christmas

While Christmas is fun and exciting, it can also be a challenging time for many who celebrate this holiday. We've put together some of our favourite tips on having an enjoyable Christmas and Celebration period.

- Acknowledge that everything at Christmas doesn't have to be perfect! This includes how the gifts are wrapped, which gifts are purchased, and how the food is cooked. Focus on enjoying the present moment with family and friends.
- Try and reduce stress levels by planning and preparing for Christmas early. As children can sense their parents stress levels, one way to reduce this is to give yourself plenty of time to get all the required tasks completed.
- As the daily routines can be heavily impacted by Christmas and the holiday break, explaining to children clearly what Christmas is going to look like is very helpful. This could involve explaining where they are going, who they will see, what's going to happen when they are there, how long they will be there for, what the behavioural expectations are, what may be challenging or difficult for them, and what they can do/where they can go if they begin to feel overwhelmed or distressed (i.e., is the car a possibility, their bedroom, a quiet room of the house or a walk outside).
- Prior to Christmas Day it is recommended to set clear boundaries with extended family. Christmas Day can be a time to see family members we don't often see. However, this doesn't mean that we force children to say hello or be uncomfortable (i.e., having to hug or sit at the table for long periods of time). Another thing to consider is how your child goes with opening presents in front of others. It may be worthwhile speaking to extended family and letting them know your child will open their present later on in the car, or once they get back home.
- Consider if your child can become overwhelmed by sensory input and ensure you have a plan to help manage this. For example, if your child is noise sensitive could they go into a different room whilst bon bons are being broken or pack ear defenders for support during present opening or family lunch/dinner.
- At Christmas time sleep can be impacted heavily as a result of excitement. As such, children can fatigue and become more dysregulated as the day progresses. Being aware of this ahead of time is helpful especially when considering what time to be home.
- Spending time outside exercising is a great way of destressing. As the weather improves, getting out into nature for a walk or to play in the park helps our bodies to reset and decrease stress hormones. A family walk at nighttime to look at Christmas lights is also a great way of celebrating the end of the year.
- After Christmas, schedule time for nothing! Allow your child time to play with their new Christmas gifts and give ourselves time to reset. Focus on being gentle on yourself after such a busy time.

