

Decorating can involve a lot of change in the home or classroom. Moving furniture, new colours and textures, new sounds - all can be a bit of a shock to a young person. While many autistic people like decorations, some can find it unexpected to find familiar places changed.

It's important to prepare the person for any changes to their usual spaces. Everyone is different so it's essential to find out what individual triggers and preferences are.

Tips for Christmas decorations

Decorate gradually

For example, put the tree up one day, decorate the next day, then arrange other decorations even later.

Get them involved

Let the young person make some decisions for the space. Take them shopping, let them choose the placement for some decorations, ask them for help putting them up.

Accomodate

Understand triggers and be ready to make adjustments for any sensory needs. Some of the usual stimuli like strong scents, loud songs and bright lights can be overwhelming.

Plan

Provide a timeline for how long the decorations will be up. Some people struggle with the concept of time and might find reassurance in knowing the decorations will come down at some point. Mark the day on a calendar, or add a reminder on their phone.

Keep away

Keep things that might overload the person away from communal areas. Consider having a "Christmas-free" zone in your home or school.

Traditions

Hanging chocolates in your tree might be distracting and overwhelming to a young person. They may become preoccupied or anxious about the number of chocolates or with permission to eat them. Try adding a chocolate a day and make it a game to find them, or hand them out each day.

Expectations

If you need to move furniture, try not to move everything at once and explain where things are moving to. Draw a plan of the room to explain any changes. Take a photograph once all decorating is done and keep it to explain the changes next year.