



Season's greetings to you and your family. Unfortunately, we can't ice the cake or wrap the presents for you, but there are things we can all do that can ease the strain of Christmas holidays!

Lots of adopted children find the heightened excitement and the change in routine cause extreme stress and anxiety, which will show itself as difficult behaviour.

One useful tip is to keep all the festivities as low key as possible.

Stick to a **routine whenever you can**, with regular bedtimes, and limited festive food and fizzy drinks as these can trigger wild behaviour in susceptible children. **Fresh air and exercise** – yes, that long Boxing Day walk – can reduce stress levels and help a child to settle well at night.

Too much frenetic activity – school plays, pantomimes, parties, visits to relatives – as well as the excitement of lots of new toys can all exacerbate behavioural problems in stressed-out children. Aim for **fewer presents, fewer outings, and lots of one-to-one time** for you and your child. If your child would enjoy a soothing massage, this could help to regulate his or her mood.

For children who find the loss of routine difficult to cope with, a **daily calendar** can be a way of reducing stress. Take a large piece of paper or a chalkboard and write up the day's activities: 9.00 am Breakfast; 10.00 Visit to Granny's; 5.00 home for tea and bath; 7.30 Bedtime.

It can be useful to draw a **large question mark** on a post-it note. Explain to your child that we can't always know everything that's going to happen each day, and sometimes we need to change our plans. Reassure your child that everything will be just fine, and there's nothing to worry about, and that we can all cope with change. Then, if an unexpected event does occur – a visit from a friend, a trip to the doctor - the question mark can be placed at the appropriate section of the calendar, and you can remind your child that everything is fine.

It is wise to avoid letter box or direct contact over the Christmas period, as this can heighten a child's anxiety. Save that birth family letter for a boring day in January when there's no festive fun to disrupt!

And remember that Christmas can be peaceful, fun and the source of happy memories for all your family.

