



Christmas

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON FOR ADOPTED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

CHRISTMAS IS NOT CONDITIONAL

Don't discuss 'naughty and nice lists' or tell your child that Father Christmas knows they have a good heart. Let them know they will get presents no matter what.

ROUTINE

Keep as much routine as possible. Keep the main meal at the same time as it is every day. Keep bedtime the same. Use them as anchors for your child to feel safe.

BE PRESENT

Christmas is hard for both children and parents. Try to focus on little moments of connection with your child. Play a game with them, watch their favourite show together.

adopt
south west

RELEASE EXPECTATIONS

Christmas may not be able to be the way you imagined. Allow yourself time to recognise and grieve for this.

THROW OUT WHAT DOESN'T WORK

You know your child best. If expectations or traditions don't work for you, don't do them. That might mean keeping the day low key, not putting up decorations, having takeaway instead of Christmas dinner or telling your child that you buy the presents.

Do what works for your family.

PLAN AND PREPARE

Use visual timetables, social stories and countdowns to aid understanding.

Paperchains (where you remove a chain each day) can be a great festive visual countdown- use these for Christmas or back to school countdowns

LIMIT SURPRISES

If your child doesn't enjoy surprises let them know in advance what their gifts will be. Consider leaving gifts unwrapped to avoid unnecessary anxiety

NO SPYING ELFS

Elf on the shelf can be very scary and shaming for traumatised children. Scrap it completely or make it into a game of find the elf each morning

LOOK AFTER YOURSELVES

Self care is vital. Ask for support if you need it, do something small for yourself when you can. It really does make a difference

IDEAS FOR

Self care

OVER CHRISTMAS



TREAT YOURSELF

If you can, consider buying yourself a present- something you really want or that doubles as self care

TAKE AN EXTRA DAYS LEAVE

If you are employed, an extra days leave after your child returns to school provides some space for you to rest.

DANCE

Play some music and dance, with or without your child. It helps release tension

AVOID THE STRESSFUL BITS

Know your limits (and those of your child). If social situations are too stressful just do what you WANT to do, not what others feel you should

USE YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Be creative about how you use your support network.

Perhaps they could help with Christmas shopping or wrapping, support you with Christmas outings, lend a listening ear or 'babysit' to allow you to go and get a coffee.

BABY STEPS

Start small with self-care. Take 5 minutes to yourself if you can,, eat that extra mince pie, whatever you need, for you each day. Baby steps!

CONNECT

In the chaos it can be hard to remember to connect with the important people in our lives. Schedule it in if you need to and be creative- have a virtual chat with a friend when your child is asleep if needed.

BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF

It's unlikely things will be perfect. That's okay and it's okay to feel sad, angry or other emotions about that. Be kind to yourself.

PLAN AHEAD

Having a plan for the big day or the holidays in general can reduce stress levels and help with fatigue.

CHRISTMAS

Strategies

USED BY OTHER FAMILIES

REGULATION

Use regulation techniques throughout the day to reduce overwhelm and meltdowns.

some examples:

Regular sensory breaks to jump, swing or have deep pressure.

Regular snacks

Calming music

Noise cancelling headphones

Creating a 'safe space' at home like a den.

LIMIT SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS

Keep things low key and familiar when possible

ADAPT THE NARRATIVE

The idea of father Christmas coming into the house can be scary.

Maybe he sends the gifts, is met by parents at the door or isn't part of the gift giving at all

HAVE AN OPEN BUFFET

When a sit down meal is too much change the expectation of the set up.

HAVE A PLAN BUT BE FLEXIBLE

Visual timetables really help but don't be too rigid with times if it will cause more stress

DOWNTIME

Downtime between the chaos is a must

SPREAD GIFT GIVING OUT

Give and open gifts over a few weeks or spread them out to avoid overwhelm

JUST GET THROUGH THE DAY

Christmas day is always too much so we focus celebrations on other days like boxing day.

TRADITIONS

Use gentle yearly traditions to mark the occasion at home

KEEP IT SMALL AND RELAXED

Spend Christmas day just as immediate family. No expectations.

DON'T DECORATE

No Christmas decorations of just one or two to avoid overwhelm

ALLOW SPACE

Let the child go to their room or safe place if they need to

THERAPEUTIC ELF ON THE SHELF

Some families have had positive experiences using an altered 'therapeutic elf on the shelf' where the elf leaves positive messages for the child.

NO ELF ON THE SHELF

It's too shaming we don't use it at all and we ask the school not to as well

DON'T WRAP PRESENTS

Take away the unknowns and anticipation and leave gifts unwrapped

PICK YOUR BATTLES

Children may struggle to follow expectations so pick your battles.