



A Sensory Friendly Christmas Guide



This guide supports families in navigating sensory experiences throughout the festive period. Each day focuses on a specific sensory theme and provides practical activities and considerations to help children enjoy Christmas in a way that meets their individual needs.





A Sensory-Friendly Christmas at School

Christmas time at school can be exciting, but it can also bring changes in routine, louder environments, bright decorations, and unfamiliar activities. This may feel overwhelming for some children, so here are some simple and practical ways to support them during the festival period at school.

Changes in routine

- ❄️ **Use a visual schedule:** Create a simple visual school timetable for each week in December to show your child upcoming changes at school, such as Christmas trips out and Christmas dinner in the hall.
- ❄️ **Christmas countdown calendar:** A visual countdown can help your child prepare for special school events, such as the Christmas play, and understand how many days are left until the school holidays.
- ❄️ **Share social stories:** Use short, step-by-step stories to help your child understand and prepare for Christmas school events, making the changes in routines feel more predictable.



Christmas School play

- ❄️ **Explore different role options:** Talk to your child's teacher about the different ways they can take part in the performance. This could be quieter or behind-the-scenes roles, like narrator or prop helper, so your child can take part in the school play in a way that feels comfortable for them.
- ❄️ **Practise the sensory elements:** Support your child to try on their costume at home, or visit the hall when it's empty so they can become familiar with these sensory elements.
- ❄️ **Plan an exit strategy:** Agree on a safe space your child can go to if they start to feel overwhelmed. Knowing there's an option to step away can reduce anxiety and help them feel more confident.
- ❄️ **Participating in part of the show:** If a full performance feels overwhelming, can your child take part in just part of the show.



Our top tip is to talk to your child's teacher about what Christmas time will look like at school. Discuss ways activities can be adapted to support your child's sensory needs and explore strategies you can use at home to help them during the festive period.

Simple sensory tips:

Quiet corners: Ensure your child has access to a quiet corner at school, particularly in environments with increased sensory stimulation.

Gentle reminders: Ensure your child is given advance warning before transitioning to activities or environments that may be noisy, crowded or over-whelming.

Ear defenders or headphones: Help reduce discomfort during loud activities like assemblies, rehearsals, or festive events.

Alternative Environments: Some children may benefit from spending busy school events in a quieter environment. For example, they might be more comfortable in a calm classroom rather than the main dining hall during Christmas lunch.



Out and about at Christmas

Visiting Santa's Grotto or going Christmas shopping can be exciting, but busy crowds, bright lights, festive music, and new experiences may feel overwhelming for some children. Here are some simple and practical ways to help make outings outside the home calmer and more enjoyable for those children with sensory differences.

Important tips to remember:

- ❄️ Whenever possible visit shops or events during quieter times to reduce exposure to loud, busy, or overwhelming environments.
- ❄️ When out and about inform your child of a calm area where you can retreat if things become too noisy or overwhelming. This might be outside the shopping center or a nearby café. Encourage and support your child to use this space if you notice signs of sensory overwhelm.
- ❄️ Before leaving the house, prepare your child by explaining what the visit might be like including noises, bright lights, strong smells, and busy crowds. Use pictures or other visual supports to help them anticipate what they will see, creating predictability and reducing sensory overwhelm.



Santa's Grotto

Look into your local Santa's Grotto, many across the UK now offer sessions specifically for children with autism or sensory processing difficulties. These sessions often feature fewer people, lower lighting, softer or no music, and a calmer environment.

Watch First, Visit When Ready:

A "test visit" lets your child observe the experience without being directly involved, giving them time to process the sights, sounds, and interactions at their own pace, reducing overwhelm and providing predictability.

Local Christmas Film Screenings

Many cinemas now offer "autism-friendly" or sensory-friendly screenings, designed for children with sensory processing differences. Check with your local cinema before booking to see what's available.

If cinema trips aren't suitable, try a cosy movie night at home. Close the curtains, add blankets and pillows, include favourite snacks, and enjoy the film without adverts for a relaxed, sensory-friendly experience.

Christmas Outing Essentials Ticklist:

- ☐ Noise-cancelling headphones or ear defenders
- ☐ Headphones or ear plugs (to pick your own music)
- ☐ Sunglasses or cap for bright lights
- ☐ Favourite comfort or fidget toy
- ☐ Crunchy snacks and drinks
- ☐ Chewable items to support self-regulation
- ☐ Visual supports or picture cards (to explain what's happening)
- ☐ (add your own)
- ☐



Sensory Gift Ideas

If you are looking for gift ideas this Christmas, here is a selection of sensory-based items, that could make a great present this Christmas. These items can be used to support self-regulation, and provide opportunities for sensory exploration.

Movement based equipment

Peanut ball: A peanut ball is an inflatable, peanut-shaped exercise ball. It can be used for sitting, rolling, or gentle bouncing, helping to improve balance, core strength, and body awareness, as well as aid regulation through purposeful movement.

Scooter board: A scooter board is a small, flat board on wheels that children can sit, or lie on, and push themselves around on using their hands or feet. It can be used for fun games, and can be a great tool for aiding regulation.

Wiggle car: A wiggle car is a sit on car, which a child can sit on and steer. It provides fun, active movement for children, and calming sensory input as they use their body to move and navigate the environment.

Deep-pressure equipment

Body sock: A body sock is a stretchy, lycra-like garment that surrounds the whole body. The gentle resistance of the fabric can provide calming deep-pressure sensory input.

Weighted equipment: Weighted equipment, such as a weighted teddy, lap pad or weighted blanket applies gentle deep pressure to the body. This pressure has a soothing effect on the nervous system, and can be an effective tool to aid regulation.

Disclaimer: The weight should not exceed 10% of the child's body weight. Please ensure children are supervised at all times when using weighted equipment.

Others sensory items

Small bubble tubes: Bubble tubes can provide calming visual stimulation through the moving bubbles and soft light, and can help create a calming, soothing atmosphere in a child's bedroom.

Therapy putty: Therapy putty is a soft, mouldable playdough like material that children can squeeze, stretch, and pull. It's great for building hand strength, improving fine-motor skills, and providing calming sensory input.

Sensory Tent: A sensory tent provides a quiet, enclosed space that reduces sensory stimuli in the environment, offering children a calming retreat that supports emotional regulation.



A Visually Calm Christmas

Christmas is full of bright lights, sparkly decorations and busy stimulating environments. For some children, this can feel exciting, however for others it can feel uncomfortable and lead to sensory overwhelm. However there are many simple adjustments we can make, to help ensure Christmas time is magical and enjoyable for everyone.

Sensory Considerations

to support children with visual sensitivity over Christmas

- ❄️ **Choose warm non-flashing lights:** Flashing white lights on a Christmas tree or outside can feel harsh, bright and unpredictable, therefore replacing these with static warm lights create a visually calmer, more comfortable visual experience.
- ❄️ **Decorations:** Keep decorations simple and uncluttered by limiting shiny, bright, or reflective items and sticking to one colour palette to reduce visual overwhelm. To maintain a calm and familiar space, keep the bedrooms and/or kitchen as decoration-free zones.
- ❄️ **Create a calm corner:** Create a calming indoor 'den' space with soft lighting, a blanket, and floor cushions to provide a quiet area with reduced visual stimuli, particularly during busy times like Christmas Day or social gatherings.
- ❄️ **Lighting adjustments:** Whenever possible, reduce reliance on strong overhead lighting by using natural light, partially turning off lights, or replacing them entirely with softer, warm lamps or fairy lights.



Sensory Exploration

Fun sensory activity's which provides visual stimulation

Sparkling sensory bottles: Fill a clear bottle with water, glitter, and food colouring to create a swirling, sparkling sensory bottle. Children can shake, roll, or tilt the bottle to watch the glitter float and swirl, providing calming, visual stimulation.

Glow stick dances: Give your child glow sticks to wave and dance with in a dim or darkened room to festive music. This activity provides engaging visual stimulation for children who seek bright or moving lights, while also supporting gross motor skills, coordination, and imaginative play.

Christmas Fairy Light Jars: Create Christmas fairy light jars by placing battery-operated fairy lights in clear jars or bottles. You can create festive scenes by adding fake snow, coloured tissue paper, or small plastic ornaments. These jars provide gentle visual stimulation and offer a cosy lighting alternative.





An Auditory-Friendly Christmas

From festive music and carols, to laughter and bustling crowds, the sounds of Christmas are all around us. While these sounds can be exciting for some children, they may be overwhelming or stressful for others. Here are a few simple strategies to help create a calmer and more enjoyable Christmas for every child.

Simple Sensory Strategies

to support children with auditory sensitivity over Christmas

- ❄️ **Quiet space:** Whether at a social event or while shopping, identify a calm area where your child can retreat if things become too noisy or overwhelming. This might be a quiet corner at home, a separate room, or even a nearby café. Encourage and support your child to use this space if you notice signs of auditory overwhelm.
- ❄️ **Inform others:** Before social events, share your child's sensory needs with others around you, so they can adjust noise or provide a quiet space, and inform others that you may have to leave early from an event if necessary.
- ❄️ **Out and about:** Whenever possible, shop online or visit shops, events, and parks during quieter times to reduce exposure to loud, busy, or overwhelming environments.
- ❄️ **Gradual exposure:** Let your child enter noisy environments early, before crowds and sounds peak, so they can adjust at a manageable pace. Gradually increasing the noise helps build tolerance.
- ❄️ **Pre-warn of loud sounds:** Give advance notice of any sudden or loud noises, and allow your child the option to step away if needed to avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- ❄️ **Use noise-reducing tools:** Introduce ear defenders or in-ear noise-canceling headphones in noisy environments. Use them for short periods to provide relief without creating dependence.

Sensory Exploration

Fun festive auditory activities

Christmas Sound Matching Game: Record familiar festive sounds, such as bells, jingles, or Christmas carols and encourage your child to match each sound to the corresponding object or picture. This fun activity helps them practice listening skills and identify different sounds in a festive, child-friendly way.

DIY Sound Bottles: Take small, clear bottles or containers and fill them with materials like rice, beads, pasta, or tiny bells. Encourage your child to shake, tip, or roll the bottles to explore the different sounds each material makes, creating a fun, festive sensory experience. You can even decorate the bottles with stickers or sequins to make this activity more Christmassy.



Deck the Halls

Decorating for Christmas is a magical way to engage multiple senses while encouraging creativity, focus, and fine motor development. Children can explore textures, colours, lights, and sounds through hands-on activities that stimulate tactile, visual, and auditory senses. These festive experiences support emotional regulation, hand strength, coordination, and confidence, all within a joyful, interactive environment.



Decorating activities can involve small or delicate items, so supervision is important for safety. Some children may find bright lights, sparkly textures, or loud sounds overwhelming, so provide a quiet or dimmed space when needed. Encourage children to explore materials at their own pace and avoid pressuring them to participate in ways that feel uncomfortable. Using predictable routines, visual supports, and familiar items alongside new materials can help children feel secure and confident. Soft music and gentle lighting can support emotional regulation, making the decorating experience both fun and calming.



Sensory Considerations

Creating a comfortable and inclusive sensory environment starts with being mindful of how children experience their surroundings. To support individual comfort, offer sunglasses or access to dimmer areas so children can manage visual input in a way that feels safe for them. Encourage children to explore textures like fabric, paper, beads, or tinsel at their own pace and on their own terms, allowing them to touch, sort, or manipulate materials in ways that feel enjoyable. It's also important to let children decide how much they want to participate, whether they fully join in, take part in small ways, or simply observe, so they remain in control of their sensory experience. Together, these small adjustments create a welcoming, flexible, and supportive environment for everyone.



Winter Textures

Winter Textures

Tactile play is all about exploring touch and experiencing different textures. Children can feel materials that are soft like fleece, smooth like ice or frozen playdough, squishy like "snow," or rough like pinecones. Exploring these winter textures helps them understand their environment, develop fine motor skills, and discover what feels calming or exciting. Seasonal tactile experiences can be soothing, energising, and provide a fun, hands-on way to enjoy the magic of winter.



Sensory exploration

Make sensory "snow": Mix baking soda and conditioner (or baking soda and shaving cream) to create a soft, moldable snow-like texture for squeezing, shaping, and exploring.

Create a texture tray: Fill a tray with winter items like ribbons, pine cones, fabric, or beads. Let your child touch, sort, and compare textures.

Build "snowmen": Roll play-dough or kinetic sand into small balls and stack them, adding beads, sticks, or buttons for arms and eyes.

"What's in the bag?": Place small objects in a bag and have your child feel and guess them, describing textures, shapes, and sizes.

Sensory Considerations

Some children may find wet or sticky textures uncomfortable, so it can help to offer gloves, spoons, or dry alternatives. Keeping wipes or a damp cloth nearby can make the experience more comfortable and manageable. Introducing new textures gradually, alongside familiar ones, allows children to explore at their own pace and build confidence with different sensations.





Merry and Bright Regulation Strategies

Importance of regulation support

Supporting self-regulation during the Christmas holidays is important because this time can be exciting, but also overwhelming for children. Changes in routine, busy family gatherings, new environments, and sensory-rich experiences can lead to anxiety, fatigue, or emotional overwhelm. Helping children regulate their emotions and energy levels allows them to engage more positively, feel safe, and enjoy the Christmas holidays. Providing opportunities for movement, quiet time, and calming activities helps children build resilience, manage stress, and make the most of holiday experiences in a fun and safe way

Top Tips to Support Regulation:

Include regular movement opportunities: Encourage dancing, jumping, stretching, or winter-themed obstacle courses to help children release energy and stay regulated.

Schedule quiet time: Set aside cosy, calm periods where children can rest, read, or play quietly; this is especially important during busy holiday days.

Use online regulating activities: Interactive YouTube videos like Danny Go, DOH Disco, or cardio drumming can support attention, body awareness, and emotional regulation.

Create a cosy, safe space: Soft lighting, blankets, pillows, or sensory toys can help children self-soothe and manage overwhelming sensations.

Offer choices and control: Let children decide the order of activities or how long to participate, supporting independence and self-regulation.

Visual supports: Use visual schedules, countdowns, or simple pictures to prepare children for upcoming events and transitions.

Predictable cues for transitions: Give warnings before changes, e.g., "Five more minutes of play before we go to dinner."

Deep pressure or heavy work: Encourage wall pushes, blanket rolls, carrying light boxes, or gentle hugs to help grounding.

Sensory triggers: Be aware of loud noises, strong smells, or bright lights that may overwhelm your child, and plan alternatives.

Plan breaks between social activities: Space out family visits, outings, or parties to prevent fatigue and meltdowns.

My Morning Routine

1 Wake Up	2 Meditate	3 Eat Breakfast
4 Brush Teeth	5 Play with Toys	6 Snack Time
7 Art	8 Lunch	9 Nap Time





Dashing Through the Snow

Movement and Gross Motor Activities Sensory Considerations

Gross motor movement is essential for helping children stay regulated during the busy Christmas holidays, when changes in routine, noisy gatherings, and sensory overload can feel overwhelming. Proprioceptive activities, such as pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, or deep pressure provide calming input that helps organise the nervous system, reduce stress, and support emotional stability. Vestibular activities, like swinging, jumping, spinning, or balancing help keep children alert, engaged, and moving during a time when they might be more sedentary due to travel or indoor activities. Embedding regular movement and heavy-work opportunities little and often throughout the day will help support your child's regulation during this busy time of year.

Proprioception involves the body's ability to sense where it is in space and how much force to use when moving. Activities that provide deep pressure or "heavy work" can help children feel grounded, calm, and emotionally regulated especially during the busy winter holidays.

Giant Snowball Push: Use a large exercise ball, yoga ball, or rolled-up duvet. Have your child push it across the room, down a hallway, or through a simple obstacle course.

Present Delivery Relay: Give your child small boxes or bags filled with books or soft toys and have them carry the "presents" from one station to another. You can make it a relay for extra fun.

Sled Pull: Use a laundry basket, blanket, or small wagon as a "sled" filled with pillows or toys. Let your child pull it across a carpeted area or backyard.

Snow Shovelling: Give your child a child-sized shovel or large spoon and a pile of cotton balls, scrunched paper, or soft balls to "shovel snow" from one area to another.

Reindeer Training: Pretend your child is a reindeer preparing for Santa's sleigh. They can stomp their "hooves," push cushions across the room, or use resistance bands to simulate pulling Santa's sleigh.





Dashing Through the Snow Continued

The vestibular system helps with balance, coordination, and body awareness. Activities that involve spinning, sliding, or changes in head position keep children alert, engaged, and moving which is helpful during the holiday season, when routines are different and children may be more sedentary.

Jingle Bell "Rock": For small children, two adults can gently rock a child side to side in a sturdy blanket or duvet. Older children can get vestibular input by rocking on a peanut ball or swinging at a local park.

Santa's Chimney Slide: Use a small slide, ramp, or cushioned surface and let your child slide down, pretending to be Santa going down a chimney.

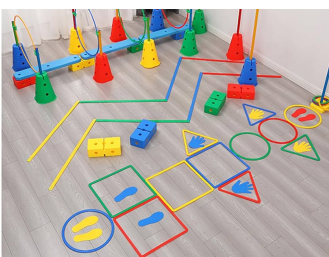
Snowflake Spins: Have your child spin slowly in a designated space, imagining they are a falling snowflake. You can add slow arm movements for extra fun.

Penguin Walk: Have your child waddle across the room like a penguin, optionally balancing a soft toy "egg" on their belly or feet.

Sleigh Ride: Place your child on a blanket and gently pull them across the floor like a sleigh ride.

Blizzard Balance Path: Use tape, cushions, or small obstacles to create a path for walking, jumping, or balancing. Pretend it's a snowy storm to make it fun.

Santa's Sleigh Ride: Have your child sit or lie on the peanut ball, pretending it's Santa's sleigh. Gently roll the ball forward, backward, or in small circles across the floor. Add a playful story, like delivering presents or flying over rooftops.





Festive fingers fine motor activities

Incorporating fine motor activities during the Christmas holidays can not only be a fun, but also help children develop hand strength, coordination, and dexterity they need for everyday tasks like writing, dressing, and using utensils. Here are some fun Christmas themed fine motor activities:

“Deck the Halls” Paper Chains: Cutting, folding, and decorating paper chains or cards strengthens hand muscles and improves bilateral coordination.

“Beaded Garland Magic”: Threading beads or cereal onto string enhances pincer grasp and hand-eye coordination while creating a festive decoration.

“Ribbon Wrapping Workshop”: Wrapping presents and tying ribbons promotes wrist stability, finger strength, and practical life skills.

“Candy Cane Catch”: Pick up and organise small candy canes or red-and-white beads using tweezers or tongs to strengthen pincer grasp.

“Gingerbread Builders”: Decorate gingerbread cookies or use playdough to make shapes, this can develop hand strength and precision.

“Ornament Artists”: Paint ornaments to enhance finger isolation and bilateral coordination.

“Snowball Scoop”: Use spoons or mini shovels to move cotton balls (“snowballs”) from one container to another, strengthening hands and wrists.

“Present Poppers”: Open small wrapped packages or unwrap “mystery” bags to practice finger dexterity and problem-solving.

“Festive Finger Painting”: Make Christmas cards using finger paint to strengthen finger muscles.





Seasonal Sensations

Christmas time is full of smells, flavours, and textures. From warm cinnamon and fresh oranges, to sweet chocolate and gingerbread. These sensory experiences provide a perfect opportunity for children to explore tastes, smells, and textures in a safe and playful way. Engaging in Christmas cooking and tasting activities encourages curiosity, builds confidence with new foods, and supports the development of fine motor skills. Here are some ideas:

- Bake Cookies or Decorate Cupcakes
- Make Fruit Skewers or Mini Sandwiches
- Explore Ingredients Through Touch, Smell, and Stirring
- Taste Tests of Winter Flavours: Offer small samples of seasonal flavours like cinnamon, orange, chocolate, vanilla, nutmeg, or ginger, encourage children explore at their own pace.
- Create "Edible Ornaments": Decorate cookies or fruit to make fun, festive shapes.
- Mix & Measure: Encourage children to scoop, pour, and stir ingredients.
- Holiday Smoothie or Drink Making: Blend simple seasonal drinks like hot chocolate or fruit smoothies.

Sensory Considerations

Cooking activities can be overwhelming for some children, due to strong smells, busy environments, or new textures, so offering a quieter, separate space can help. Always respect each child's food preferences and avoid pressuring them to taste or eat items; they should be encouraged to explore at their own pace. Using predictable routines, visual supports, and familiar foods alongside new ingredients helps children feel safe and confident. Supervision is essential for safety with small objects or hot items, and adapting tools, like using larger spoons or pre-cut fruit, can ensure all children can participate successfully.





A Very Merry Christmas Day

The big day has arrived! Christmas Day can be full of excitement, noise, and new experiences. Here are a few tips to support all children and families have an amazing day, filled with joy and happy memories.

Sensory Considerations

to support all children & families have a magical Christmas Day

- ❄️ **Maintain routine:** Routine is important, even on Christmas Day, try to keep mealtimes and bedtime consistent to provide familiarity and predictability.
- ❄️ **Christmas day timeline:** Create a clear, step-by-step plan for the day with visuals. This will provide predictable and reduce sensory overwhelm, especially if the day varies from the usual routine.
- ❄️ **Regulation breaks:** Christmas Day can be busy and overwhelming, so schedule regular movement breaks throughout the day to support regulation. Activities that involve pushing, pulling, or carrying heavy objects, such as carrying presents upstairs or helping to tidy toys away provides calming sensory input.
- ❄️ **Christmas Day Food:** Ensure your child has access to their preferred foods alongside Christmas Day food. This provides familiarity and predictability while still giving them the opportunity to explore new or less familiar foods.

Sensory Exploration

Fun festive sensory activities for Christmas Day



Wrapping paper sensory bin: Collect scraps of wrapping paper from opened presents and tear, crumple, or fold them into different textures. Place the pieces into a large bin or box, and add small festive items like baubles, pom-poms, or tiny toys for extra tactile and visual interest. This sensory bin encourages hands-on exploration, supports fine motor skills, and can be a calming, engaging activity for children who enjoy tactile play.

Santa 'Simon Says': Play a Christmas version of "Simon Says" with Santa, using actions like "Santa says, jingle your arms like bells," "Santa says, steer the reindeer on the sleigh" or "Santa says, wrap a present". This activity aids regulation and develops body awareness.

Snowball race: Using white pom-poms or cotton balls as "snowballs," give your child a straw and have them blow the pom-poms along a table or across the floor towards a target and back. Children can take turns or race side by side for extra fun. This activity engages the jaw muscles, and offers a focused, structured task that supports regulation.