



Kings Meadow SEND News



Autumn 2 2024

Dates and Events

ADDvanced Solutions Preparing for Christmas

Strategies to support neurodivergent children and young people to transition into the Christmas holidays.

9th December -
9.30-11am (Online) -
Register on:
<https://eu01web.zoom.us/j/7vx7MHYQ4uYGnuZVznFlg#/registration>

OR

11th December -
5pm -6.30pm at:
Thornton Family Wellbeing
Centre,
Stannyfield Drive,
Thornton,
Liverpool,
L23 1TY
0151 934 4991

REACHOUT ASC Autism and Christmas

This free online course looks at how you can choose the parts of Christmas that can be accessible and enjoyable for children with Autism and their families.
<https://www.theabilitybridge.com/courses/autism-christmas-free-version>



Welcome to Kings Meadow Primary SEND newsletter!



Miss Karen O'Brien
SENDCo/Deputy Headteacher

As Kings Meadow Primary School Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo), I am here to offer support and advice regarding additional needs or SEND support for your child.

As a school, we value the engagement of our parents, so please do not hesitate to get in touch via our School Office if you have any questions, or would like a paper version of this Newsletter.

Alternatively, you may find further information about our SEND provision on the school website:

<https://www.kingsmeadowprimary.co.uk/send-information/>

Spotlight on Intervention:

WellComm



WellComm screens children for their speech and language ability, often identifying problems early. At Kings Meadow, we offer this intervention to identified children in our Nursery and Reception classes.

The WellComm programme provides around 50 fun activities and strategies that can be used to support children in their speech and language development. The activities are tailored according to ability and focus on particular areas of difficulty such as: understanding, grammar, vocabulary, narrative or social skills.

Sefton's Local Offer



The SEND Local Offer for Sefton provides local information for families with a child with a special educational need or disability. Within the online resource you can find useful links to support groups, activities, clubs, benefits, information, advice and guidance. There are lots to support parents and carers of a child with SEND. Do have a look at this link to see more information;

<https://www.seftondirectory.com/kb5/sefton/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>



Kings Meadow SEND News



SEND in Focus



Christmas and Emotional Challenges

Christmas is a wonderful time where we can see loved ones, exchange gifts and make memories. For some adults and children, Christmas can be extremely challenging especially if there are difficulties with anxiety, social communication or Autism. Not only can it be tricky for the adult or child with the need, but also for the family members who are supporting them. The Christmas holidays are a time of great excitement and anticipation. Holidays also mean changes in routine or schedule, visitors, crowds, socialising, noise, changes of food, clothing etc. plus many times where dealing with the unexpected becomes an expectation and reality. Many of the demands placed upon families and children with anxiety, social communication or ASD are those which usually would be avoided if not for the festive season.



In relation to receiving presents, if this is difficult during the rest of the year for the young person, then it is no different at Christmas. Presents often mean surprise. Whereas many young people love a gift, some may not enjoy not knowing what's about to happen. Anxiety around presents can be reduced by making it easier for your young person to understand what to expect.

Since Christmas is the time for giving, it will help if your family and friends are aware of any triggers, accommodations and special interests beforehand.

Tips for Christmas presents

Wrapping options

If your person enjoys unwrapping, you can wrap up the presents together, or use paper printed with their interests. If they don't like surprises, you could leave the presents unwrapped or wrap them in clear/patterned cellophane so the present is still visible.

Ready, set, play

Make sure gifts are ready to play with to avoid frustration. Remember to put batteries in or assemble any toys.

Managing surprises

If you do wrap presents, put a note or photo on the gift tag, and encourage family and friends to do the same. No surprises means less anxiety.

No pressure

Remove the pressure of opening presents in front of everyone by having your young person open them in private.

Perfect presents

Buy presents related to their interests and encourage others to do the same.

Something old, something new

If they are reluctant to open new presents, put the gift next to a favourite item (like an existing toy they like)

Set limits

If presents are tricky, set a limit (one from parents and one from grandparents). Encourage others to give money or vouchers.

Slow and steady

Introduce presents one by one rather than all at once. They may even open their presents gradually over a few days.

Manage expectations

If they are very honest about presents, find it difficult to speak, or open presents in front of people, help by making adjustments and prepare family members.

Prepare

If they like to thank people but find it difficult to come up with things to say in the moment, work out with them what they'd like to say and write it on cue cards. Like "Thanks for my present, I'm going to open it later with my others".



Kings Meadow SEND News



While the winter holidays can be a great time to relax and recharge, they can also bring challenges for children and young people with special needs and their families.

Often the lack of familiarity, structure and routine, normally created by the school day, and the changes resulting from Christmas approaching can create anxiety leading to differences in behaviour that may be difficult to manage for the young person and those around them.

Tips for Christmas dinner

Visualise it

Plan a menu of what they would like to eat and go over it a week before Christmas so they are prepared. Younger children may enjoy drawing or collaging their meal on a paper plate. Older ones might like using a menu template. You can let them choose recipes, and cook the meal the day before to try it out. Take a photo of it as a visual reminder.

Stick to the usual

If possible, stick to the same meal times as usual. If not, prepare them with a Social Story, add it to their visual schedule for the day, or have snacks ready.

Go safe

If they dislike traditional foods, it could be an opportunity to choose their favourite foods as a celebration meal.

Be aware

Large gatherings can be stressful. Be aware of sensory overload like noise levels, crackers and party poppers and smells.

Be consistent

If you dress the table, keep their usuals. They might prefer to sit in the same spot, use the same plates and cutlery.

Alternative arrangements

They might prefer eating alone or separately with TV on. This could help 'mask' the noise from the dinner table and reduce social pressures.

Prepare

If visiting others, prepare them for different meal times, where they will eat and what's on the menu. They may prefer a packed lunch to take with them just in case.

Plan B

Discuss whether they would like to eat all or part of their dinner with everyone else. Suggest sitting closest to the door, so if things become overwhelming they can have some time away. You could set up a secondary dinner area just for them in another room. They may choose things to take away with them during this time (like toys, favourite object, or sensory items)



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.

Accommodate

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.

How can I support my child over Christmas?

Family

Prepare family members with what will and will not work with your children. Manage time expectations, i.e. is it better to spend the day or evening with family members? Does your child often need to spend 'down time' at home after being out of the house for a while? It is possible that your children may not have seen a family member for a long time - do you need to explain to your children how they can behave around their grandparents or aunts and uncles? Can they give them a kiss and cuddle to say hello and goodbye?

Routine

Try to maintain routine as much as possible. As difficult as this may be over the holidays, try to find parts of the day which you can keep the same i.e. meals. This will give your child something to focus on which stays the same and is predictable offering reassurance and security.

Presents

For most children, receiving and opening presents is full of excitement and joy. However, for children with anxiety, social communication difficulties or Autism, receiving and opening gifts can be part of the holidays which causes distress. Did I get what I put on my Christmas list? Does Santa think I have not been good because he didn't bring the gift I really wanted? What happens if I don't like my present from Nanny? What do I say if I really like my presents? Is Mummy cross with me because I am not playing with my gift? These are some of the questions which may be going through your child's mind before opening their gifts and anxiety over presents does not stop with them. Parents and family members often feel the anxiety along with their children - reassure yourselves and your children that it is ok. Remind family members that the reaction they are hoping to see when they give their gift may not be the reaction they receive and that this does not mean your child is not grateful or appreciative - extend this to your children so that they do not feel under pressure to react in a certain way.

Food

If your child finds different foods challenging let your hosts or visitors know that offering new foods may cause anxiety. Family members often mean well and feel that children are missing out if they are not trying the Christmas treats. Let them know that it is ok not to offer and to wait for children to ask! Also...chicken nuggets are a perfectly acceptable Christmas meal if it brings joy instead of worry!

Self-Care

Lastly, and perhaps this is the single most important suggestion, please try and plan a few nurturing ways to take breaks and care for yourself over the holidays! Even if this is as simple as taking five minutes to sit and have a cup of tea or adding holiday activities that you enjoy into the mix as well. Explaining that you are incorporating your own self-care into plans is a brilliant, lifelong gift to pass on to our children.