

Jane Mitchell 2017

# The 12 “Do’s” (and “Dont’s”!) of Xmas



DO!	DON'T!
Take time to remember that this is a highly stimulating, over-exciting, unpredictable time with sensory overload. (and that's just us!)	Don't have unrealistic expectations of your child(ren)'s ability to cope. Christmas makes stuff harder for them, not easier!
Plan your Christmas – make a visual timetable to increase predictability and stick to it. Keep to usual meal structures as far as possible.	Don't plan surprises and spontaneity unless you know your child(ren) can cope with this.
It is much harder to “let off steam” in the winter. Have winter walks, visits to soft play, Trampoline parks – whatever your child can manage to help them get rid of excess energy.	Don't get too busy around the children or they will ramp up as well. Make sure they are occupied when you are busy, or be prepared to interrupt your activity if you need to help them calm down.
Build in “down time!” give the children (and you) a chance to process and calm down between activities. If you have a busy day, arrange a clear day afterwards.	Don't expect children to understand that this is a “special” day and they should “be good” etc. They are the same children as on every other day. Let's not make it more difficult than it needs to be.

Space out the “fun” events over the coming weeks. Make it manageable. ie visit to Santa one week, decorate tree following week, visit to relatives week after.	Don't worry if they hate a traditional dinner. Its fine to have chicken noodles instead. If you are eating Dinner away from home, plan ahead and ignore the tutting!
Timetable your jobs. Reduce your stress! Prioritise – what can you let slide over the Christmas period?	Don't sweat the small stuff! (Try) and let all those annoying little things float over your head.
Ask for a supporter or partner to help out with child(ren) if you have an unavoidably busy day.	Don't worry if they hunt out all their gifts ahead of time. Surprises can be hard to manage, as can uncertainty about whether they will get the gift they have set their heart on.
Have the Christmas you want – not the one you feel you should have (or the one presented by M & S et al...).	Don't put presents under the tree until the last minute (when they are in bed, Xmas eve). Or be prepared to have them all opened to check contents...
Remember if this is your first Christmas with a child or children (just for this year) keep it as calm, simple and fuss free as possible. Find out as much as you can about how previous Christmases were for them in case there are any specific triggers.	Don't be surprised if there is a melt-down on Xmas day, even when you got everything they wanted. Think now about how you might respond therapeutically and empathically in that situation. If in doubt, just let them know that you can see they are having a difficult time right now. Don't worry, as you can help with some of their muddled feelings. Christmas can get a bit too big and exciting sometimes. Lets just sit quietly away from everyone for a bit until you feel better.
Take time out for you. If necessary book a day (or two) just to look after yourself and build up your reserves before Christmas while the little ones	Don't worry if things go wrong. Those are the things that make up our memories later and give us things to laugh about. Also any

<p>(or big ones!) are still at school. Use this time to do things that will nurture you.</p>	<p>mistakes give us an opportunity to show our children how to learn and be resilient from our mistakes.</p>
<p>Use the opportunity to play silly games, laugh, connect, enjoy your family, watch daft TV, stay in your PJs all over boxing day.....</p>	<p>Don't use Santa's naughty and nice sheet as a threat. Or any other threat. Christmas is a wonderful opportunity to have truly unconditional gestures of regard and affection.</p>
<p>And finally – remember to pause before you react, breathe, and Keep Calm – its only Christmas.</p>	<p>Don't forget to have fun! Carve out an hour for you and your partner (if appropriate) at some time over the Festive season.</p>