

Putting up decorations can involve a lot of change inside and outside the places we are decorating. There will be lots of new additions or we may have moved furniture around to accommodate our decorations. Whilst lots of autistic people like decorations, returning home or walking into school to find these spaces fully decorated could be a bit of a shock, especially if the changes were unexpected. It's often important to prepare the person for any changes to how the usual space will look before you decorate. Here are some general ideas that may help. Everyone is different so it's important to find out what individual triggers and preferences are....

Consider decorating gradually, e.g. you could put the Christmas tree in position one day, decorate it the next day, then put up other decorations even later.

Involve the young person in changes to the space, e.g. take them shopping for decorations, let them handle decorations, let them see decorations being hung up, or let them help putting them up.

Understand and make accommodations for things that may trigger sensory overwhelm. Christmas scents and candles can often be overwhelming as can fast-flashing fairy lights and ornaments that play sounds and tunes.



Try and make sure the young person knows how long the decorations will be up. Some autistic people can struggle with the concept of time and may not automatically know that you will be taking the decorations down at some point. Even not knowing when they will be taken down can cause distress. It would help to mark the day on a calendar or schedule or for older children, set a diary reminder on their phone.

Keep things that might overload the person away from communal areas, e.g. flashing Christmas lights or noisy ornaments could go in other rooms rather than the living room or their bedroom. You could put a tree at the back of a classroom out of plain view. Have a 'Christmas-free' zone in your home or school.

Tree chocolates – some young people experience anxiety and become pre-occupied with how many chocolates are on the tree or when they can have them. They may want to eat them all at once. Try making it a game by adding one chocolate per day to the tree for the young person to find. If they don't like this, you could put the chocolates away and hand them one each day to eat.

If furniture needs to be moved around for the tree going up, try not to move everything at once and explain where things will move to. It may help to draw a plan of the room. Once the room is set for Christmas, take a photograph – this could then be used next year to prepare the young person for what the room will look like again in the lead up to decorations going up.