

United Learning Oxfordshire Schools



Hill View Primary School

The best in everyone™

Part of United Learning

Inclusion, Family and Wellbeing Newsletter

Christmas Holiday 2025-26 Edition

Happy Christmas Holiday is possible – plan ahead!

People have great expectations of Christmas being a time of joy... when actually it can be a catalogue of all the things children with SEND find hard:

- Sensory overload of lights and noise
- Crazy changes to routines
- More people, and more visits to/from people you are less familiar with
- More indulgence of your safe adults
- Realisation of the expense of everything
- Different foods, bedtimes, rules
- And much more

CHRISTMAS REMINDERS (AUTISM EDITION)



You don't have to do what everyone else is doing



Take time out in a quiet space when needed



You are allowed to say no



Noise, lights, social stuff and change can be hard



It's okay to stick with your normal safe foods



Be kind to yourself



Good emotions can be overwhelming too



Routine and normality will return soon

@ItsEmilyKaty

Autism Friendly Christmas Tips

Christmas is different to other times of the year – it can be loud, intense, bright, unpredictable & busy.

LIGHTS

Get lights that have controls to adjust the brightness and the flashing function

TAKE A BREAK

Christmas day can be intense..ensure there are opportunities for breaks, quiet space & keep headphones handy

PRESENTS

Not everyone likes presents, not everyone likes opening presents in front of others, not everyone likes the surprise of a wrapped gift

VISITS

Unannounced visits are unpredictable... let the person know that someone is calling

UNPREDICTABILITY

Prepare a person for what's happening around the Christmas period, e.g. social stories, timetables, who will be visiting/what time is dinner

EATING

A person's idea of Christmas dinner may not be the same as the traditional meal...pizza or pasta is cool to eat too!

HAVING FUN

Create games that includes everyone...change the rules if you need to so that everyone can play



Things to help things feel manageable

- *Clear, one-step instructions...* at all times!
- *Pre-warning of change* - even small changes feel big when there are lots of other changes and sensory stimulations going on
- *Visual reminders* - timetables, checklists etc work so well and are very handy at this time of year
- *'Now and Next'* so children get tricky things done but are rewarded by a treat or down-time afterwards
- *Timers* so children know things will end and are prepared for that ending



1. How to handle change

Some people with autism find change difficult. Changes to routines, environment and social expectations can mean that Christmas can be a confusing and challenging time. For those who value predictability surprise guests can be overwhelming.

The abstract nature of the festive season can also heighten people's anxiety. Overall these changes can result in an unpleasant experience, so what can we do to help people enjoy the festivities and reduce distress? Introduce the decorations slowly so the changes to the environment are not sudden. Alternatively, just have the decorations up from Christmas Eve to Boxing Day in order to reduce the length of the time of the change.

Involve everyone in planning the changes; for example shopping for decorations, deciding where to put them, deciding on the number of decorations.

Create a schedule for Christmas day including all activities such as opening presents, eating lunch, and family visits. A schedule will create structure and reduce the unpredictability of Christmas day.

Create a safe Christmas free zone. If Christmas becomes overwhelming this can be used as a retreat.

2. Sensory Overload

Christmas can be an overstimulating time of year for someone on the autistic spectrum. Some will appreciate the new high impact sensory stimulation, for others this can be a struggle.

The types of extra sensory stimulation that we tend to associate with Christmas include:



Vision—Extra visual stimulation to process such as lights and decorations.



Smell—Different and often more intense smells such as incense, perfumes, cooking, rich food to smell and taste.



Touch can be affected by new clothes, adornments, decorations and crowds.



Sound—New and multiple layered sounds to process such as crowds, background music, excited children, carol singers and brass bands.

With heightened sensory stimulation someone with autism can find these sensory stimulations overwhelming and not at all pleasurable. Here are some tips to reduce sensory overload and to manage difficult situations.

- Steer clear of crowds if you know this is a difficult situation.
- Keep decorations to a minimum.
- Avoid Christmas crackers.
- Offer structure to present opening e.g. take turns opening gifts, restrict the number of gifts from each person.
- Use preferred therapeutic tools to reduce sensory overload e.g. ear defenders, fiddles, weighted therapy.

3. Communication aids

Communication aids have been shown to reduce anxiety for people on the autistic spectrum. Big changes in routines such as going to events, parties and meeting new people can not only make the world appear chaotic and unpredictable, but also places new social demands on the person which can lead to heightened levels of arousal and distress.

Good communication is vital in preparing people for change; without the appropriate communication strategies those with autism can feel excluded and find the festive period stressful.

So what strategies can we use?

- Countdown calendars to visually communicate Christmas day and the events leading up it.
- Story boards to communicate changes in routines.
- Visual schedules to communicate daily routines and reduce the level of disruption.
- Christmas Makaton signs to enable the person with autism to feel included.



Create a 'kit' of things that could help your child in times of overwhelm

- A chosen *place* to be for peace a quiet – perhaps make a sign for that place with your child
- A *timer* of how long they would like to be there for - a phone app or post-it note in the shape of an arrow next to a clock's minute hand
- A special comfy *cushion* for the room they have to be in
- A special *teddy* they will go to in times of noise or anger
- A specially decorated set of *cards* asking for 'quiet time' or a 'brain break' in their bedroom, or similar
- A *game or toy* that makes them feel calm... perhaps kept in a special place, or a Calm Box so that it is portable and can go with you to activities.
- A special *jumper* of yours that helps them feel like they are having a hug from you
- A special set of *colouring* pictures (ask Mrs Jeavons to print you some at school if you need them)
- A card with a *song* request so that at times of argument or upset, you can show the card and play the song to cheer you up - that works for grown ups too!!!



Free Downloads available [here](#), or ask your school SENCo if you would like a copy.

A Sensory Being's Christmas Wish List

- **Festive lip balm:**
Lip balm offers taste and smell experiences without the need to swallow. It is great for encouraging people to move their lips which in turn strengthens muscles used for breathing, swallowing and making sounds. Get a range of flavours.
- **Hula hoop and shower curtain:**
Create your own mini sensory room by clipping a shower curtain to a hula hoop and hanging it from the ceiling. Inside you can play with toys that light up, or make sound, small immersive environments like this are great for getting increased responses or for hiding out from the Christmas chaos. A plain shower curtain is ideal but ones with scenes printed on them are also fun.
- **Sound responsive bracelet:**
These are great for encouraging vocalisations and are available for £1 on eBay, they light up in response to sound, play in a darkened room.
- **Rave gloves:**
So much fun for playing within the dark, black gloves with fingertips that light up and change colour, again you can pick them up for a few pounds on ebay.
- **Magic blackout paper:**
To make the room dark so you can play with all your fun light up toys.
- **Scent bottles:**
In a well-ventilated room melt small holes into ordinary 500ml drinks bottles. Fill the bottles with smells, e.g. a sprig from the Christmas tree, cloves, herbs, spices, flowers, potpourri, screw the lid on tight and offer one or two to play with at a time.
A UV light bulb and some fluorescent fun:
- **A membership to a local scrap store:**
If you have a scrap store near to you this gift is akin to giving your Sensory Being free toys all year. Scrap stores are repositories of sensory wonderfulness and members are allowed to take as many resources as they like whenever they like!
- **Space blanket:**
A foil blanket, the sort that marathon runners get wrapped up in after they have finished a race. They cost about 50p and are wonderful, wonderful sensory fun, light, noise, shine a light on them, or sit near sunlight and they are dazzling! Store inside a fabulous box and help develop anticipation and excitement every time they are revealed.

Christmas crafts ideas for children with Special Needs

25 Christmas Crafts & Activities

FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



There are lots of ideas after you Google 'Christmas crafts for children! Lots of these are quick and only use cheap, easily found materials and stuff you might already have around the house.

For one good article, click [here](#)!

It includes:

Christmas Sensory Rice [here](#).

Christmas Tree Sensory Bags [here](#) .

Gingerbread Playdough Recipe [here](#).

Christmas Fine Motor Sensory Play

Styrofoam Christmas Tree Decorating

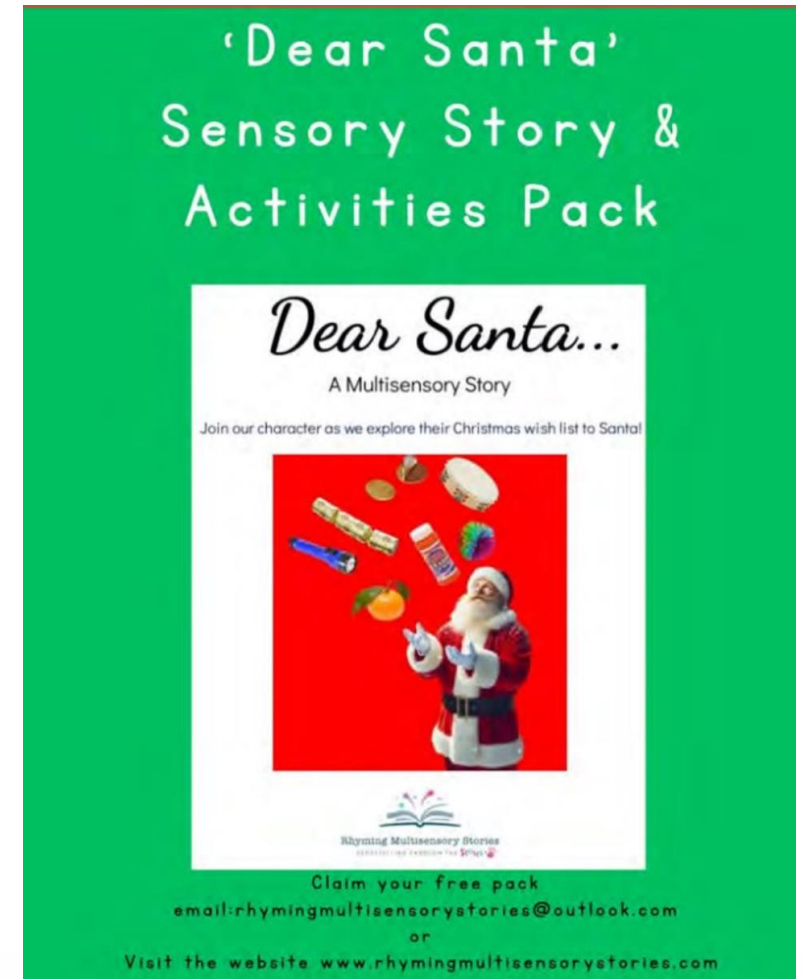
Cotton Ball Snowman

String of Lights Fingerprint Frame [here](#).

Build a Snowman [here](#).

Rhyming Multisensory Stories

- Rhyming Multisensory Stories writes sensory stories, resources and activities for children and teenagers with additional needs.
- They have written a fully resourced, step by step sensory story called 'Dear Santa', a sensory story told using props to back up the spoken word and deliver a sensory experience.
- All of the props are items found around the home. The resource also includes lots of themed activity ideas. The resource is free and can be downloaded free [here](https://www.rhymingmultisensorystories.com) or claimed by visiting the website www.rhymingmultisensorystories.com



Seasonal Support: Self-Regulation Strategies

– free video



Colin Foley, National Training Director from The ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity, presents a live webinar sharing advice and strategies for helping parents of neurodivergent young people navigate the festive period.

In this webinar, Colin explores practical ways to support your young person with emotional regulation and behaviour regulating strategies during the festivities of Christmas including events, family gatherings and much more.

Watch for free [here](#)

Social Stories

- 'Social stories' are short stories, written in first person, explaining how to behave in a particular scenario or situation. A social story helps a young person understand what is and isn't socially appropriate. They can also be used as a basis for discussion.
- The Witherslack Group have created a step-by-step Social Scenario Guide to help you and your child prepare for what to expect with spending more time at home over the festive break.
- Click the image to download for free



Self-care for you – you can't give from an empty cup!

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

10 Days of Happiness

Free online program to boost your wellbeing

Join the Program



Learn how to be happier

10 Days of Happiness is a free online program to boost your wellbeing, through daily actions for happier living.

It is designed for challenging times, based on the latest research from positive psychology, neuroscience, and behavioural science.

And it takes just a few minutes each day!



Small daily actions for big positive changes

We all want to look after our mental wellbeing, but this can be hard to do - especially in challenging times. This program helps you learn simple daily actions which are proven to give you a boost and help you feel happier.

Find out more and join for free [here](#)

Self-care for your family – be deliberate about being calm



Build a happier family with Headspace

From our Mindful Parenting collection to our kids' podcast 'Goodnight, World!' and animated series The Mindful Adventures of Unicorn Island, explore new content for parents and kids today.



Bedtime Stories & Meditations for Kids

Calm Kids helps children **fall asleep faster, sleep more soundly, and manage their feelings mindfully**. Explore our library of Sleep Stories®, meditations, and lullabies made for all ages.



Insight Timer

Kids Meditation

Mindfulness and meditation for kids is a great way to support children's well-being. Explore our free guided meditations and resources especially created with kids in mind.

These are all free apps for phones, or find out more by clicking below:

[Headspace](#)

[Calm](#)

[Insight timer](#)



United Learning
The best in everyone™

■ Ambition

■ Confidence

■ Creativity

■ Respect

■ Enthusiasm

■ Determination

New Year Resolutions for Parents of Children with additional needs in 2026

- **Make your own happiness a priority.**

If you are stressed, those around you will sense it. Do not neglect your own needs. Make sure to add in healthy choices that **focus on YOU** too. Beyond benefitting your own physical and mental health and well-being, some simple self-care can also have a positive impact on your kids, spouse, parents and even friends or co-workers. Need some ideas on how to put this resolution into action? We also have [10 quick tips for coping with stress while caring for a child with autism](#).

- **Connect with your child through their interests.**

License plate numbers, various species of insects, types of airplanes, road signage, and Marshall from Paw Patrol might not interest you, but they could be a big deal for your child. All kids have special interests, and while some might be restricted interests that can cause challenges at times, they are all valid. It is easy to push them aside, but make a point this year to get involved in something that [brings them joy and help them harness their interests](#). For example, set goals for a museum visit to view fossils for the kid who loves dinosaurs. If your kids is obsessed with rocks and their shape, color or placement, read books about rocks and minerals together at home.

- **Write down one thing you are grateful for each day.**

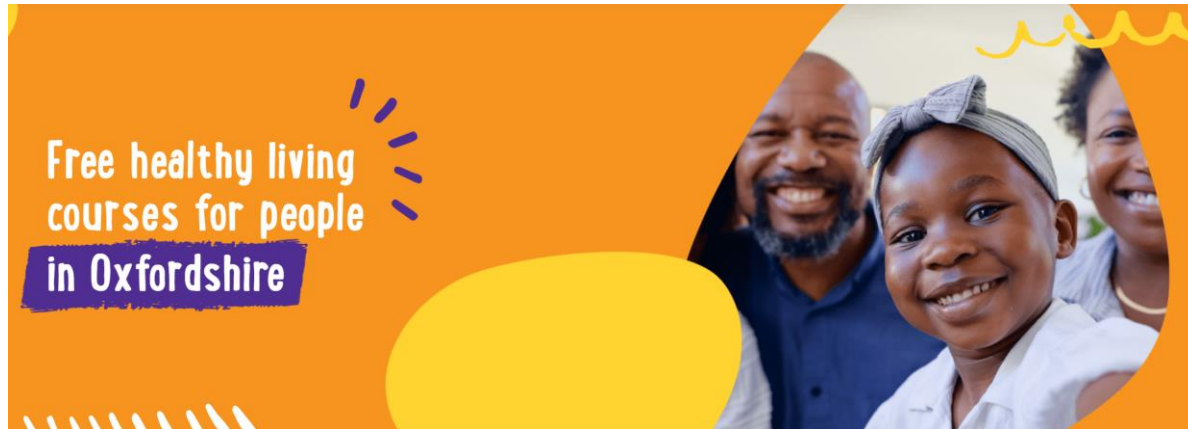
Even on days when it feels like the world has thrown everything at you, this simple act can provide a new outlook. Some people like to write it down in a private journal while getting ready to lay down at night, others like to wake in the morning and plaster it across a chalk board in the kitchen so everyone can see it before they start the day. Do what works for you, but be honest with it. Maybe your child sat down to eat breakfast for an extra 30 seconds today, or a spouse handled therapy drop-off so you could enjoy a cup of coffee to yourself. It could be a [stranger at the store who offered to help](#). Do daily notes seem too overwhelming? Start with one thing you are grateful for each week.

- **[Here](#) is a full list that I know it is tempting to roll your eyes at... but most might just work and are important!!**



2026 – what will you do for you?

Create lifelong habits that
really make a difference



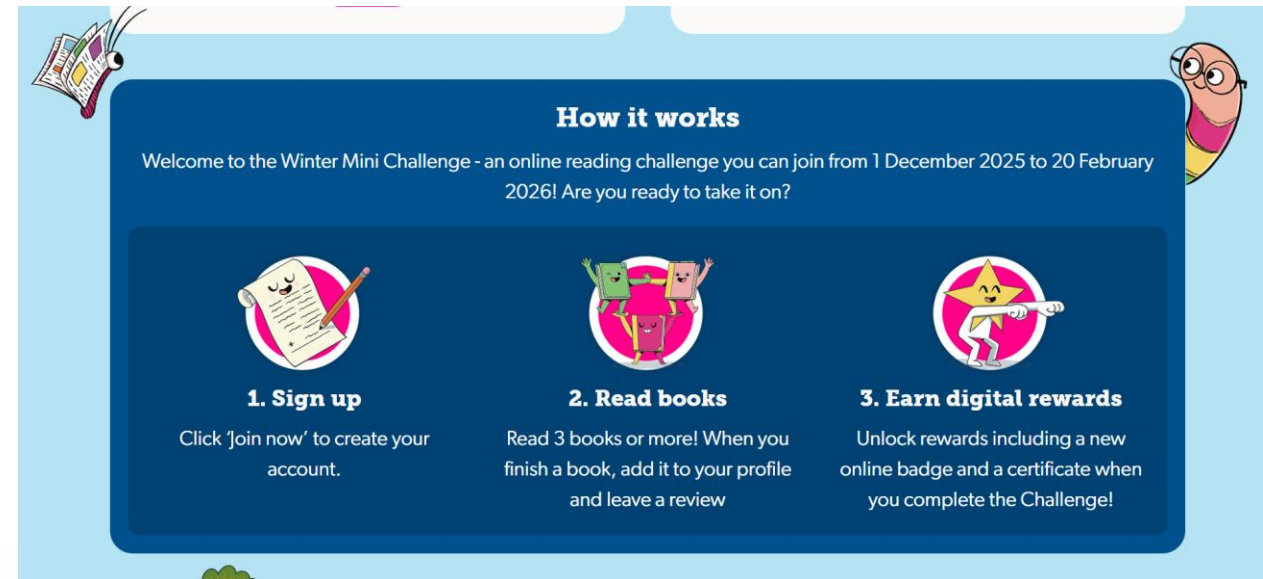
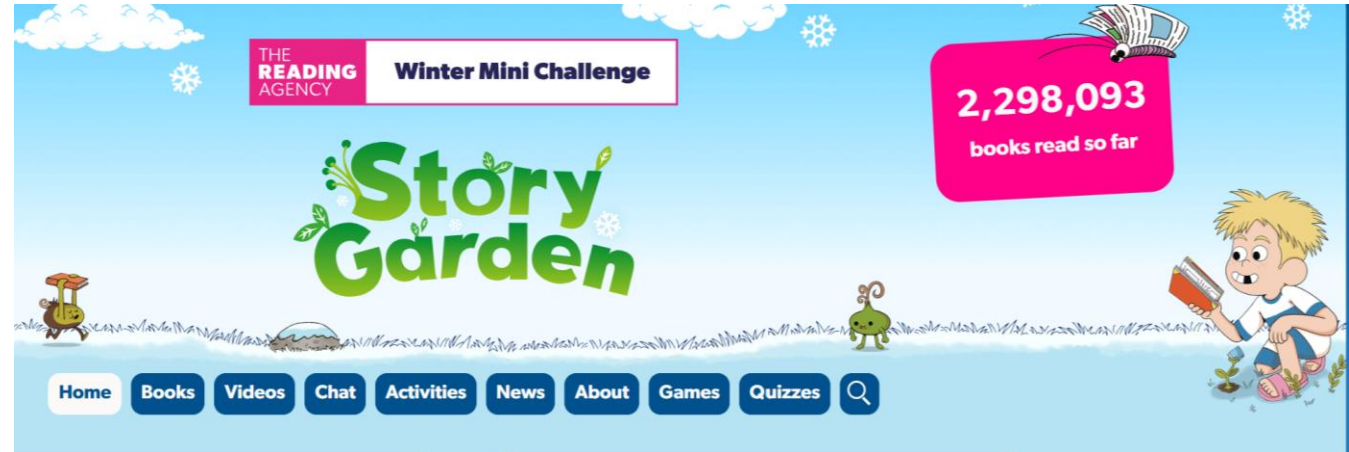
Click [here](#) to find out more about how you can get free health support and join groups and services, like Weightwatchers for free



What's On?

Encourage children to read over winter with this free online reading challenge! It's an amazing confidence booster and the perfect thing to keep the reading momentum going. **Join [here](#) for free!** Gamifying reading may help your child a lot!

Taking part is simple. Children read three or more library books (anything they like - eBooks and eAudiobooks count too) add them to their profile. Reaching their reading goal will unlock an adorable limited-edition online badge and a new certificate of achievement to print off and treasure. Find some ideas for reads on [Borrowbox](#).



What's On?

- This will be a virtual session via Microsoft Teams and can be accessed on a phone or PC/Mac.
- **BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW:**
- Please email Christine Ireland Speech and Language Therapist on Christine.ireland@ouh.nhs.uk (and let her know the name of your child). You will receive an email confirmation of your place. Information about how to join the session will be sent near the first session date.

Autism Information Session

For parents and grandparents of children diagnosed with
Autism

Virtual evening workshops in 3 parts

Please attend ALL 3

Tuesday 20th January 2026

Wednesday 21st January 2026

Thursday 22nd January 2026

From 8.00pm -9.30pm

- An introduction to autism and communication difficulties
- Information about sensory differences
- Support available in Oxfordshire
- Opportunity for questions and chat
- Meet other parents

What's On in Oxfordshire?

OCC keep families and professionals informed through the monthly Short Breaks Update bulletin. If you would like to receive your own copy of the Short Breaks Update, please [email](#) your request to be added to the mailing list.

- [Short Breaks update - Upcoming activities - December 2025 \(pdf format, 14 MB\)](#)
- [Short Breaks update - Regular activities - December 2025 \(pdf format, 8 MB\)](#)
- [Short Breaks update - Other - December 2025 \(pdf format, 2MB\)](#)
- [Parent/carers support groups - December 2025 \(pdf format, 3 MB\)](#)

If you would like a previous issue, please [email us](#).

Facebook group

- We also have a Facebook group page - [Oxfordshire SEND Families Together](#). This is a group for parents of children and young people with impairments living in or near Oxfordshire. The group page is designed for sharing information, activities, events that will be useful and relevant to families.