

Reducing Stress At Christmas

Christmas can be a really exciting and magical time for children and for their parents. But for some children, it can feel really overwhelming and challenging. There are many reasons for this.

For children with sensory difficulties, there are lots of new or unusual foods to eat, different smells. Moving from cold to hot environments, lots of really busy shops.

For children who struggle with change, Christmas brings lots of changes. The environment changes with people putting up decorations everywhere, routines in school can change as they practice for Christmas plays or concerts, TV schedules may change to show lots of Christmas specials, Christmas may fall on a day that they would normally eat chicken nuggets.

And then the whole structure of Christmas day can be really overwhelming for some children. The excitement of having so many gifts can mean that excitement can turn very quickly to anxiety.

So we wanted to give you some ideas to help reduce anxiety both in the lead up and during the day. The most important advice we can give is to build your own traditions, based on what works best for your family



When decorating your house, speak to your child about what decorations they would like. Think about keeping the decorations more minimalistic or getting your child to join in with decorating. You could even decorate over a few days so the change is more gradual and have a room which is Christmas free so your child can take a break when they need to.



For some children surprise can be difficult. You can manage this by preparing lists of the presents they want and only buying from this list. This is especially important for more meaningful presents as the excitement of receiving something they really like can become too much. It may also help to spread the gift giving over a few days or even weeks.



The Christmas meal can also be challenging. The best advice is to do whatever works for you and your family. This might mean that your child eats pizza or chicken nuggets because that's what they always eat on that day. Another consideration to help at mealtimes is to try and keep to your normal routines especially if your child is likely to become overwhelmed from the rest of the day.

As discussed above Christmas can be fun, and it can also be a stressful time of the year. It is important to take time out for yourselves and link in with trusted others. Enjoying a hot chocolate is often a fantastic experience in itself especially if you can do it with a friend, or as an enjoyable activity with your children.

For this activity we are encouraging you to take Time to Pause and this mindfulness exercise can enhance the experience of drinking a hot chocolate even more!

Step 1 - Holding: First, take the cup in your hands and take some time to enjoy the warmth against your hands and fingers. Feel how this warmth penetrates deep into your skin.

Step 2 - Seeing: Take time to really focus on your drink. Gaze at it with care and full attention. Imagine that you have dropped in from Mars and have never seen anything like this in your whole life. Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the light reflecting on the surface, or the way the bubbles have formed, or the ripples on the whipped cream and any asymmetries or unique features.

Step 3 - Smelling: Hold the Hot Chocolate beneath your nose and take a few deep breaths. With each inhalation, take in any smell, aroma, or fragrance that may arise. As you do this, notice anything interesting that may be happening in your mouth or stomach.

Step 4 - Placing: Slowly raise the cup to your lips, noticing how your hand and arm know exactly where to position it. Gently, and without swallowing, take your first sip of the hot chocolate, noticing first how it enters your mouth. Spend a few moments focusing on the sensations of having it in your mouth.

Step 5 - Tasting: Begin to take notice of how the hot chocolate tastes, take account of the temperature changes.

Step 6 - Swallowing: When you're ready swallow the hot chocolate, paying close attention to any body sensations that happen, do you notice the warmth flowing through your body as it moves to your stomach, what other sensations do you notice

Step 7 - Following: Now you have taken your first drink, notice how your body is feeling as a whole. Finish your drink, all the while, taking account of your senses. (Adapted from <https://mindfulnessbox.com/raisin-mindfulness-exercise/>)

Mindful Hot Chocolate Drinking



Upcoming Awareness Days

Parent Mental Health Day

27th January

A day to reflect and be aware of mental health in parents and how this can affect their day-to-day lives.

Time to Talk Day

1st February

An opportunity for friends and families to come together to talk and listen about each others mental health.

LGBT History Month

1st February - 29th February

A month to celebrate the community that fought for the rights to express who you are!

Children's Mental Health Week

5th February - 11th February

A day to think about the importance of children's voices, and how we can ensure they are heard.

