



Neurodivergent Families

**Top tips for
family celebrations and
holiday events**

*Wishing you a low demand,
happy celebration in a way that
works for you & your family!*



The PDA Space



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A Low-Demand Festive Season

There is a never-ending list of demands about how we feel we 'should' be planning and celebrating over the festive season. It can create an extra layer of stress on top of all the usual juggling and meeting the needs of your neurodivergent children and family life.

This booklet evolved from the webinar delivered in **The PDA Space Portal** with **Autistically Scott** and **Laura, ND Nurse** discussing low-demand celebrations.

We have collated some of the best tips and ideas from around our community to share with you to help make the festive season a bit smoother and less stressful for everyone!



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New Traditions

Our beliefs are often based on our own childhood experiences, which we don't tend to question until we get older. And even then, we are most likely not to until we meet someone else who is a big part of our lives, and that's when traditions can become 'merged' or 'blended', creating new ones for our own children.

Our unique children are most likely to be the ones who let us know the traditional way of celebrating festivities doesn't work!

We can create new traditions together that work for the family you have today.

LET'S CELEBRATE!



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Our beliefs are often based on our own childhood experiences, which we don't tend to question until we get older. And even then, we are most likely not to question things until we meet someone else who is a big part of our lives. That is when traditions can become 'merged' or 'blended', creating new traditions for our own children.

Our unique children are most likely to be the ones who let us know the traditional way of celebrating festivities doesn't work and can be quite stressful at times!

However, we can create new traditions together that work for the family you have today. The following pages may give you some ideas for a low-demand way of celebrating, which can be adapted for Birthdays, New Year, Diwali, Christmas, Hanukah or any other celebration.



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Family is important and it is always nice to see those you love.

It is important to set some boundaries though and if having lots of people visiting adds more stress then you could plan ahead. Let people know you are staying at home on certain dates and give a list of options for times that are convenient for you. It is ok to do what is right for your own family and splitting events up in to smaller low key occasions can also ensure you get more quality time with people too when things are less chaotic or busy.

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Instead of big sit down meals picnics and buffets can help reduce anxiety and enable people to eat what they want, where they want in a place they feel safe.

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Big surprises are not fun for everyone. It can help reduce anxiety to talk about gifts before hand so children know what to expect.

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“ Instead of using noisy wrapping paper why not help the sensory system and environment by using blankets instead or recycling bags!



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Unless you have lots of spare cash. It is important to set boundaries around spending, set your limit and stick to it. Money can be really difficult for PDA'ers.

For older children it can help to give them a set amount of money. Then as they choose things you can keep the change in a money box or purse so they can see what is left.

This can help make understanding money a bit more 'real' than buying online with a credit card.

Understanding money needs to be developed over time, but having real cash can help so they can physically handle it.

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“ We are adding decorations over a few weeks to help the children adjust to the change slowly rather than doing it all in one day. ”



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Some seasonal clothes can cause sensory overwhelm – too fluffy, too scratchy, too itchy, too uncomfortable! If you are also going out places it can be one thing too much on top of different smells and bright lights. Being comfortable is important – Pyjamas and onesies are ok if they feel good ! ”

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If we're going to someone else's house to eat, I ask ahead of time what they are serving. My son is very food sensitive with textures and taste. I can usually find something he will eat but also end up bringing something from home that I know he will like. That avoids a meltdown over something small as how much or what he eats. I have to remind myself that he will eat when he's hungry, even if it is a dinner roll. I try not to sweat the "small" stuff or make them seem bigger than they are.

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Uncertainty can increase anxiety and having gifts on display children are not allowed to open or touch can cause alot of problems!

Consider setting a new tradition of opening up gifts as people give them to you, this may be nice so they can share the joy too.

Another idea is to hide some away and open one a day in the lead up to a special event so it is less overwhelming and also helps prepare for the actual event (Birthday/ Christmas etc).

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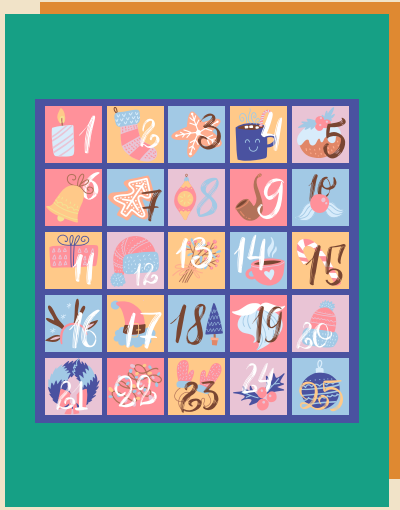
We are not putting up decorations everywhere this year & doing what suits us a family with our 2 PDA children. It can help to keep one or two spaces undecorated so people have a place to go when overwhelmed.

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Calendars can be helpful as a countdown for celebrations like birthdays and Christmas. as a way for children to know a big day is coming up.

Counting the number of ‘sleeps’ can help younger children understand the concept of time.

If you have an advent calendar for Christmas, does it matter if they eat all the chocolates on day one? Is it worth 24 days of stress? Consider weighing what is important in the actual moment, taking part in the tradition of having an advent calendar or learning only to open one door daily. ”



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Signposting for further ideas

The PDA Space:
www.thepdaspace.com

Autistically Scott:
www.autisticallyscott.uk

Laura ND Nurse:
www.laurahellfeld.co.uk

Autistic Realms:
www.autisticrealms.com

December 2023
Images created on Canva



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