

Special occasions, celebrations and holidays can be overwhelming for autistic people. We've put together some general suggestions of helpful approaches for PDA families & individuals which can also be shared with wider family & friends to help everyone understand what helps.



Perspective & Preparation

- Try not to let tradition or pressure from others determine your plans
- Redesign occasions to work for your household
- Plan collaboratively with flexibility for plans to change as needed
- Incorporate lots of downtime and where possible continue usual routines and activities
- Make the most of opportunities when they arise, rather than at specific times, and accept that some things can't be done

Events & Gatherings



- Keep small, short & spaced out
- Ensure sensory support and safe spaces are available
- Agree exit options

Traditions

- Traditions can feel like demands
- Creating your own family's routines with room for flexibility, can be helpful



Gifts

- Make & share a wish list of gift ideas & other preferences e.g. placing gifts somewhere rather than physically handing over and any wrapping preferences (wrap gifts together/individually; with paper/clear cellophane/open gift bags or don't wrap etc.)
- Reduce uncertainty e.g. say what gifts are coming or make sure gifts 'happen to be seen' in advance and consider exchanging one or more gifts early if waiting causes anxiety
- Reduce overload by opening gifts at a comfortable pace
- Reduce expectations around saying thank you for gifts



Food

- Offer choice around where, when and what to eat
- Make familiar/preferred foods available



Balancing needs

- If whole family time isn't possible, try to spend time with siblings/extended family separately
- Share info about how others can help
- Take care of yourself - adjusting priorities & expectations and being creative with self-care can help



Recognising & Reducing Anxiety

- Be aware of anxiety cues - it may not always 'look like' anxiety
- Sudden emotional changes can occur more frequently when anxiety is high
- Humour, rest & taking a break can be helpful
- Keep calm & try not to take anything personally
- Be aware of masking and how this affects anxiety later on
- Build in lots of recovery time and personalised regulating/calming activities

