

Top 10 tips to make Bonfire Night enjoyable for those with Autism

1. Plan in advance

Create a countdown calendar so that your child can follow along a visual guide of the lead up to the day. If you are attending an event outside the home, use an itinerary to explain what is going to happen at what time, including what time you will leave the home, what time the display starts and finishes, and what other activities will be taking place there.

2. 'Practice' watching the fireworks

For those with sensory processing disorders, fireworks have the ability to cause stress, anxiety and discomfort due to their noise and unpredictability. Watching videos of firework displays can prepare your child for what to expect in a safe and controlled environment.

3. Use Social Stories

Social stories can help those with autism to understand sequences and functions by explaining what to expect in certain situations. Use social stories to explain why we celebrate bonfire night, where we go to celebrate it, who will be joining you at the event, and how you will get there to bring a sense of understanding and familiarity to the evening and reduce anxiety.

4. Bring comforting items

Bring some snacks and drinks with you that you know your child likes so that they don't feel anxious about what and when they are going to eat. Other comforting items such as a favourite jumper or blanket can keep them warm and help them feel more relaxed, and a favourite toy to hold can provide distraction if needed.

5. Cover your child's ears

If your child doesn't mind having their ears covered, ear defenders can help reduce anxiety by allowing them to watch the visual aspect of a firework display without the loud noises. Headphones are also a great alternative to help block out noise and allow your child to feel in control by playing their favourite music at their chosen volume.

6. Watch from the distance

Large crowds can be worrying for someone with autism, so try to choose a quieter spot away from the main throng. If your child tends to find public events and spaces overwhelming, watching from the car nearby will allow them to enjoy the festivities while remaining in the comfort of a warm and familiar space.

7. Look for some autism-friendly events

Speak to your local council, check local newspapers or keep an eye out on social media sites for local autism-friendly events. Many places will put on sensory-friendly quieter displays with designated safe spaces to sit away from crowds before their main event for those with autism, so it's worth checking if there are going to be any near you.

8. Be positive

Children will often pick up on the energy of those around them, so try to set an example by remaining calm and having fun. Seeing you enjoying yourself can have a calming effect on your child and encourage them to relax too!

9. Create your own display

If the idea of attending an event is too overwhelming, creating your own display using quieter fireworks such as Catherine wheels or fountains can be a great way to enjoy the evening whilst limiting the stress and anxiety that can accompany the loud noises of a traditional display.

10. Create distractions

Not everyone is obliged to take part in Bonfire Night celebrations – its fine if your child doesn't want to! If they want to stay at home, try to provide some distractions from the noise such as playing their favourite games or watching something they like to watch on TV with a comforting or familiar sound. You may also wish to speak to your neighbours and find out if they are planning to set off fireworks, and if so what time, so that you can be well prepared.

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