

Top 5 tips for helping those with Autism enjoy New Year's Eve

1. Set the scene

Start preparing for the celebrations in advance and let your loved one know what to expect on the night. Where will you be celebrating? What will you be doing? Who else will be there? If you're celebrating at home, explain that everyone will be staying up later than usual and that it may be noisy.

2. Use video and social stories

It's a good idea to use online videos to show what happens at typical New Year celebrations where you are - for example you could watch last year's coverage of Big Ben ringing in the new year and the fireworks being let off. You could also show how people join hands and sing Auld Lang Syne so that your loved one will know in advance that people may wish to involve them in this celebration, so they can avoid it if they are not comfortable.

Social stories about New Year's Eve can also help them understand why people look forward to celebrating the start of a new year.

3. Create a quiet space

Even with preparation, celebrations such as New Year's Eve can be overwhelming and overstimulating for someone with Autism. It is a good idea to choose somewhere familiar to celebrate, such as a friend or family member's house or somewhere public that they have been before, where you know there will be somewhere quiet for them to take a breather if they need to.

4. Involve your loved one in the preparations

If you are hosting a celebration at home, involving your loved one in the preparation can help them feel more at ease with what the night will entail.

If you're planning on adding some decorations, ask them to help you put them up. You could even make some decorations together such as paper chains – this will help the changing visual aspect of their surroundings to be more of a transition instead of a sudden shock.

Similarly, cooking/baking together, making music playlists together or asking them to choose the theme can help reduce any anxious thoughts they may have about the evening.

5. Create a comfort bubble

Try to ensure that everything is as comfortable as possible for your loved one, including clothing, food and drink choices. It may be tempting to buy something special for your Autistic child to wear for the evening, but be prepared that they may feel more comfortable in one of their current outfits that they know and love - new clothing and unfamiliar materials may feel itchy or restrictive to them.

Bringing along a 'packed lunch' of their favourite food and drink with you will prevent them feeling anxious or stressed about what they will eat over the course of the evening. Access to

something from home that they find comforting such as an iPod filled with their favourite music or a favourite book or toy can also help.

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