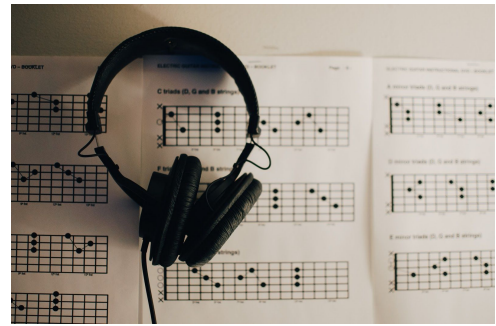




## 5 Ways to Win



Five tips for helping autistic individuals manage unstructured time and disruptions to routines.

*The break in usual routines during the holiday season, at home and at work, can be challenging for autistic individuals.*

### 1. Use a scheduling tool to lend structure.

This could be low-tech (a whiteboard), or high-tech (an app). Either way, if usual routines are going to be thrown out, a timetabling tool provides the cornerstones of daily structure: this can reduce anxiety and promote a sense of security. Maintaining some routine each day also helps, in the form of meal times, a walk, a chosen activity and regular check-ins with each other.

### 2. Provide advance notice of changes.

An investment of time spent preparing an autistic person for upcoming changes is worth every second. Using their preferred means of communication (a timeline, list, flow-chart, clock illustration, or table), share new plans together with clarity about the implications of these. In doing so, you build trust, confidence and independence.

### 3. Clarify available activities for down-time.

Unstructured time can be confusing and unsettling for autistic individuals. Spend time (together, preferably) generating a list of appealing and available options to fill those slots, then make both the list & the required resources accessible during down-time. This removes uncertainty, unpredictability and excessive decision-making.

### 4. Devote time to alleviating anxiety.

Festive traditions can provoke sensory overload and anxiety: different foods, new people, flashing lights, blaring music, costumes & decorations. Lean in and listen, respect individual needs and preferences, and accommodate these as best you can.

### 5. Support sensory breaks & regulation.

The need for sensory breaks is all the more important during the festive season. Make a calm, low-sensory space available at work and at home. Just as valuable, is accepting that an autistic individual will likely have their own preferred method for sensory regulation: accepting this activity (which may be repetitive), sensory object or stimming is part of respecting the individual for being their authentic self.

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