# Tips for coping with Christmas

**Christmas is an exciting time for children. Sometimes all the excitement can get a bit stressful for you and your child.**

Christmas gives a wonderful opportunity for families to enjoy spending time together and to catch up with friends and extended family. It is also a very exciting time for children.

Sometimes all the excitement, visitors, special food and presents can get a bit stressful for you and your child.

With all the build up to Christmas and with all the pressure of planning the day, the cost and the high expectations it is natural for families to feel some stress or anxiety.

Here are our tips for having a calm Christmas:

* Give your child lots of cuddles, attention and praise. During the busy Christmas season try to give them individual attention whenever you can. This will help them feel calm and secure over the busy period.
* Keep up your routine, as far as possible. Your child will find it reassuring if you try to keep to their normal mealtimes and bedtimes. Some children don’t respond well to change. It may help if you explain what things will be different during your Christmas celebrations, such as who will be visiting and when you will open presents. Keeping to your bedtime routine can help ensure your child gets enough sleep.  A lack of sleep can affect a child’s mood and behaviour.
* Christmas Shopping. Try to avoid shopping at busy times, and pack a drink and healthy snack. Keep your baby or child entertained by bringing along a small toy or book, pointing out things you see around the shops, playing games like ‘I spy’ or singing a song like “The wheels on the bus go round and round.” Try to keep shopping trips short. It is hard for children to be patient for long periods
* Plan ahead. Try to avoid planning social visits and visitors back-to-back. When you go out and about have a few small toys, a drink and a healthy snack on hand. It’s worth keeping in mind that if you’re staying with relatives or friends they may not have the safety items you have put in place at home, like stair gates.
* Try to balance fun time and quiet time. Babies and children can’t always cope with too many new experiences, sensations, noise and activity all at once and may get over stimulated or stressed. This may lead to more tears and babies and children becoming more difficult to manage. Some children cope with lots of stimulation and excitement better than others. It can help over the Christmas period to give your child some time, every day to quietly play or rest.
* Presents. Don’t worry if you can’t afford the latest toys. Your toddler will have as much fun playing with the box and paper anyway! You could set a budget and limit your child to three or four things on their wish list. Don’t expect or force your toddler to share their presents with other children as they aren’t developmentally ready. It will take your toddler time to learn to share and this is normal.
* Avoid threats relating to Santa. It may be tempting to use Santa as a way of encouraging good behaviour or punishing bad behaviour. It is best to avoid doing this. Young children don’t have mature thinking skills and need to be able to link their behaviour directly with the outcome. Talk of Santa and Christmas is too abstract for them and using these threats may make them feel anxious.

### If things get stressful

#### For you

Try to stay calm - counting to ten and taking a few deep breaths might help. If you’re feeling frustrated or angry, put your toddler or baby somewhere safe for a short time (for example, a cot). Take some time out until you feel calmer. Or put your toddler in their push chair and go for a walk to let off steam.

It may also help to talk things over. Family Lives (external link) offers a confidential and free (from landlines and most mobiles) helpline. You can call on 0808 800 2222 for information, advice, guidance and support on any aspect of parenting and family life. The (English language) helpline is open 9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday and 10am – 3pm Saturday and Sunday.

If you are worried about **financial difficulties** there is lots of free and impartial information and advice on the [**Money Made Clear Wales website**](http://www.moneymadeclearwales.org/home.php?page_id=3) (external link).

Sometimes the Christmas period can put stress on **relationships.** There is information and support on relationships on the [**Couple Connection**](http://thecoupleconnection.net/) (external link) or [**Relate**](http://www.relate.org.uk/) (external link) websites. Parents who have separated may face a number of challenges at Christmas. There is information and tips on the [**Parent Connection website**](http://theparentconnection.org.uk/) (external link).

#### For your baby

Try taking your baby somewhere quiet for a while, for example, their cot or out in their pram. Some babies find it soothing to be wrapped or to be carried or rocked in a quiet, dimly lit room.

#### For your Toddler or child

Try to reduce noise and activity levels and give your child a chance to quietly entertain themselves, in their own way and at their pace. Choose a calming activity to do with your child like reading a book, doing a puzzle, having a bath or singing a song. It can help to get out into the fresh air and have a break from the Christmas chaos.