



Five top tips

for planning an
autism-friendly
Christmas party



Christmas is always a busy and exciting time of year, and the workplace is no different.

However, for some autistic employees, work Christmas parties can be a source of stress, pressure and anxiety.

These five tips will help ensure that your employee feels as included and comfortable as possible in your festive celebrations.



1. Speak to your employee

First things first, remember that every autistic person is an individual. The best thing you can do to make sure your autistic employee feels welcomed and included in the Christmas party is speak to them about their preferences.



Many autistic people can find work social situations quite overwhelming and may not wish to come at all - if that's the case, don't worry and embrace that decision. However, some

autistic people love the chance to socialise, but might struggle to join in because of anxiety or sensory issues. You might want to ask some questions such as:

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- "Where are your favourite places to eat out?"
- "Do you prefer going to the pub or to a bar?"
- "Do you have any sensory issues that I should know about?"
- and most importantly, "Do you want to be involved in the Christmas party this year?"

2. Dare to be different

Some autistic people find the traditional "meal in a noisy restaurant followed by drinks in a bar" format a little intimidating, as it often requires a lot of small talk and might not be the best sensory environment.



Consider doing something a little different this year - a trip to an Escape Room, a Christmas themed cruise or even a trip to the local ice skating rink followed by some mulled wine at a Christmas market could be great alternatives. You might want to consider doing two parts to the party too - a less traditional idea first, followed by drinks out.



3. Explain any unwritten rules clearly

- “Is it ok to bring a partner?”
- “What’s the dress code?”
- “Do I have to take part in Secret Santa?”
- “Is it OK to have a glass of wine at a 3pm Christmas lunch?”
- “How many drinks can I have from the free bar?”



All of these are questions that can help reduce the anxiety levels of an autistic employee and help them feel more relaxed about joining in. Make sure that you’re clear about any particular plans and make sure that the employee knows exactly what to expect. If you have any “surprise” elements planned, you may wish to

let your autistic employee know a little in advance too.

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4. Offer a buddy

Some employees may find it easier to come along if they feel like they have a buddy.



A buddy can help make sure they’re included in conversations and can help explain any social quirks that don’t make sense. If possible,

it makes sense for the buddy to be someone the employee already knows and gets along with. This person doesn’t need to “babysit” the employee but it can be helpful for some people to know that there’s a certain person to ask if they’re not sure about something.

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5. Provide a clear invite in advance



Make sure that your invite includes clear details of the venue (including a map and pictures if possible), menu options, cost and RSVP requirements.

If some of the event will be paid for by work, explain exactly what will be paid for and what won't be. Give as much detail as possible for the structure of the evening, especially if it will be in two separate parts. You may also wish to note which parts of the evening will be quieter and which parts will be noisier. By providing clear

details beforehand, you are empowering your employee to make an informed decision about whether or not the party is right for them.

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Getting support



Liaise with family and friends to ensure smooth planning across the Christmas period and identifying any help they can potentially offer. Get ideas from other autistic people, and share your tips with them, in our online community.



Further help from our charity:

- [gift ideas](#)
- [preparing for change](#)
- [routines](#)
- [preparing for Christmas: autism resources](#)
- [visual supports](#)
- [communication](#)
- [anxiety in autistic adults](#)
- [organising, sequencing and prioritising](#)
- [obsessions, repetitive behaviour and routines](#)
- [managing money](#)

Useful resources

- [I know what to expect at Christmas & birthdays](#)
- [3 tips for an autism-friendly Christmas](#)



The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427)