



All I want for Christmas is ..... Routine!

Some young people will not be looking forward to Christmas, not just because of the things that we naturally think about, not getting as many or any presents, money being tight, etc. For some of our young people the following will have a huge impact on them –

Routine – out of the window!

Noise levels – much higher, younger siblings all excited.

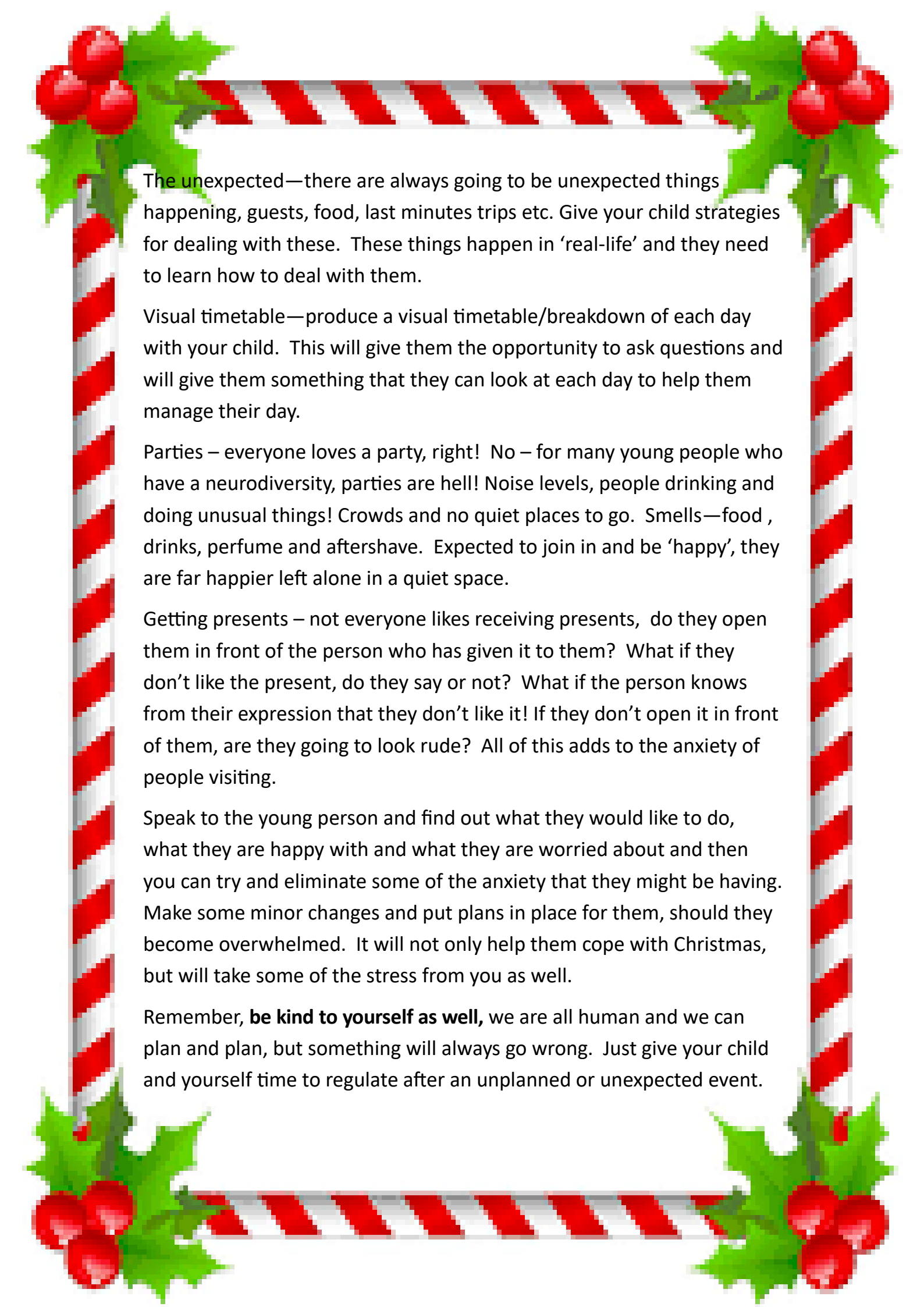
Arguments – parents being together longer, stress tends to lead to arguments, shouting etc.

Expectations—Don't worry about what others might think of as a 'perfect' Christmas, what others might be doing or what you see on TV or social media, might be very different to what your 'perfect' Christmas will look like. Create your own traditions that are neuro friendly. Make time for your child/young person to have time away to regulate, without them feeling guilty, isolated or missing out on things. Make sure that visitors are aware of these plans, that they are not questioned in front of the child/young person.

Friends and family visiting or staying – this adds expectation on them to be social and they will be worried about doing and saying the right thing and if they are going to be able to have some time to be on their own to reset.

If people are staying over, will they have to share their room? Will they get the amount of sleep that they need? When will they get their 'me' time?

Having to visit friends and family – we all know that we see people at Christmas time that we might not spend too much time with at other times in the year. Anxiety can grow around these visits. What do I say? How should I act? Am I going to be able to be left alone?



The unexpected—there are always going to be unexpected things happening, guests, food, last minutes trips etc. Give your child strategies for dealing with these. These things happen in ‘real-life’ and they need to learn how to deal with them.

Visual timetable—produce a visual timetable/breakdown of each day with your child. This will give them the opportunity to ask questions and will give them something that they can look at each day to help them manage their day.

Parties – everyone loves a party, right! No – for many young people who have a neurodiversity, parties are hell! Noise levels, people drinking and doing unusual things! Crowds and no quiet places to go. Smells—food , drinks, perfume and aftershave. Expected to join in and be ‘happy’, they are far happier left alone in a quiet space.

Getting presents – not everyone likes receiving presents, do they open them in front of the person who has given it to them? What if they don’t like the present, do they say or not? What if the person knows from their expression that they don’t like it! If they don’t open it in front of them, are they going to look rude? All of this adds to the anxiety of people visiting.

Speak to the young person and find out what they would like to do, what they are happy with and what they are worried about and then you can try and eliminate some of the anxiety that they might be having. Make some minor changes and put plans in place for them, should they become overwhelmed. It will not only help them cope with Christmas, but will take some of the stress from you as well.

Remember, **be kind to yourself as well**, we are all human and we can plan and plan, but something will always go wrong. Just give your child and yourself time to regulate after an unplanned or unexpected event.