



CHRISTMAS? CRACKED IT!

TOOLKIT

**Helping you and ALL your family
have a sparkling Christmas**

Shopping, decorations, family gatherings, presents, lots of food – Christmas is exciting but can be a hectic and stressful time of year. If your family includes a young person with additional needs, it can be even more stressful. Contained in this booklet are hints, tips and notes which you may find useful to use in the run-up to Christmas and throughout the celebrations.

You may choose to use just one section or complete the entire booklet. You may even find the print n' cut photos and cards in the Resources section is enough. That's great.

It's your Christmas. Your time with your family.

We really hope this toolkit will help make your Christmas sparkle!

Index & Guide to Completion

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Good Christmas/Bad Christmas: What makes your Christmas good or bad? Sparkle or stink?! What do you absolutely love about Christmas, what you are prepared to compromise on and what might completely spoil it for you? Complete one for each member of your family and be honest! Advocate for your child if they are unable to complete it themselves. If your child is non-verbal, use the tools in the Resources section to help you complete this section.	4
Our Christmas Wish List: What will your family be doing/not doing this year? Read through everyone's comments from Good Christmas/Bad Christmas and fill in page 1 of the Our Christmas Wish List. Decide on things you <i>may</i> do but if you can't think of a good reason why, do you really need to keep them on the list?!	5
Do you have family visiting this year? You might want to complete page 2 and show them this before they arrive.	6
Me @ Christmas: Useful info to know about your child. Visiting family and friends at Christmas can be tricky for some families with SEN children. Complete Me @ Christmas to share with your nearest and dearest whilst in their home.	7
Cracking Choices: Helping your family and friends to recognise when your child needs to take a break. No family has a stress free Christmas. (Be honest, you've taken yourself off to the kitchen to seek 5 minutes peace!). But will your family recognise when your child needs to take a break? Our Cracking Choices tool will help. If nothing else, it will give the enthusiastic "it's playtime!" cousin an insight into how your child is <i>really</i> feeling.	8
RESOURCES	
Talking Mats: Do you have a child who is non-verbal or who needs to see the choices you are giving them? Read about "Talking Mats" and use My Christmas Choices and the cut-out symbols to help your child communicate their thoughts so that you can fill in their Good Christmas/Bad Christmas accurately.	9-11
Visual Timetable: Why not use your Christmas Wish List to make a visual timetable? A reference to show how you expect the time to progress. Use the cut-out symbols to make your own timeline. We've also included:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the all important CHANGE card! Use this card to flag up when there has been a change of plan! a BREAK card when it's time to "give me a break!". NOW and NEXT cards for you to create your own visual timetable. 	12-14
Hints & Tips: You are not alone! Read some quotes from other families on how they make their Christmas sparkle.	15



GOOD CHRISTMAS/BAD CHRISTMAS



To be completed as honestly as possible! One for each family member including children (you may need to advocate for someone. Look at the “Talking Mats” in the [Resources](#) section or call the school for support).



Your name: _____

What makes Christmas Sparkle? eg traditions you can’t live without – turkey lunch, Christmas tree, going to church

YES!

What are you willing to compromise on? eg to eat one more sprout, go for a long walk, watch the Queen’s Speech, play board games

MAYBE

What will spoil Christmas? eg Granny saying “you’re getting bigger” to the young teenage daughter, your child finding it too overwhelming and isolating him/herself from the family

NO!

OUR CHRISTMAS WISH - Page 1



Read everyone's *Good Christmas/Bad Christmas* forms and then complete this for your family.
You could create a Visual Timetable from this Wish List (see [Resources](#)).



IN OUR HOME THIS CHRISTMAS

We will ...

We won't ...

We *may* ...

because:

(only if you decide there is a good reason behind it!)

OUR CHRISTMAS WISH – Page 2



As a Guest/Visitor, we would love it if you could take note of the following this Christmas:

This is important in our house ...

Our Christmas routine is ...

We would love it if you ...

If you are buying presents ...



THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

ME @ CHRISTMAS!

PHOTO



Take this to family and friends you are visiting this year.
"It might be useful if you know this about me!"

Things I love ...

Things I find difficult ...

Please never ...

You will know if I am enjoying something when I ...

You will know when I am unhappy if I ...

THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME!

CRACKING CHOICES

When it becomes too much of a good thing!



If I do this eg scream, rock, get angry	It may mean this eg I have had too much noise, sparkle, flashing lights and voices	You could try this eg give me time in a non-festive calm space. Switch off the twinkling lights, “turn down” voices

We won't do this

RESOURCES

Talking Mats – A quick introduction

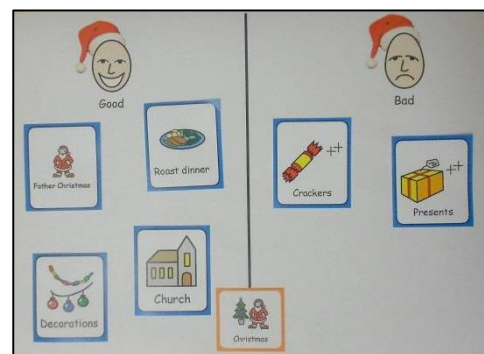


What are Talking Mats?

Talking Mats are a great communication tool to use with lots of our students. Talking Mats help people to give their opinions on a certain topic, without them having to speak to tell us. If you want to find out what your child feels about Christmas, for example, here's how you could use a Talking Mat to help:

How do you use Talking Mats?

1. Find a quiet, calm space.
2. In your pack there is a sheet with smiley and sad Christmas faces. This is your 'mat'. Place the 'mat' down in front of your child.
3. Let them know that the topic you will be asking them about is 'Christmas' – shown by the orange Christmas symbol.
4. Show them the blue Christmas symbols one at a time to check whether it is something they think is good or bad. For example, show them the symbol 'stocking'. If they think stockings are *good*, they should put the symbol under the smiley face. If they think stockings are *bad*, they should put the symbol under the sad face.
5. Repeat this for all the symbols that are relevant to your child and family.
6. Feel free to make your own symbols. All you need is a slip of paper, a pen and a simple line drawing.



Top Tips:

- Use this technique to complete **Good Christmas/Bad Christmas** for your child.
- You can take a photo of the 'mat' afterwards to help you remember your child's answers.
- Talking Mats could help you to check what your child likes about Christmas, so that those things can stay in place where possible. For the things your child thinks are bad, Talking Mats can help to find out why this is. Is there something simple that can change to make this more enjoyable for your child?
- If you want to find out more about why your child likes or doesn't like a certain thing, you can use another Talking Mat. For example, if they showed that 'Presents' are 'bad' on the first mat, use another mat with 'Presents' as the topic. Make some symbols about the different aspects of presents (e.g. wrapping paper, surprise, toys, cello tape) and ask them to sort those symbols in the same way they did on the first mat.
- If you're not sure whether your child knows how to use a Talking Mat, you can go back to basics and ask them about a topic such as 'food', using some homemade symbols of different foods. If you throw in a couple of 'clangers' that you would expect your child to think are 'bad' ('worms', 'dog food' and 'spiders' tend to work well) you can check whether they understand that foods they think are 'bad' should go under the sad face.
- You can change the 'scale' to something other than 'good' and 'bad', if something else makes more sense to your child. For example, you could use 'like' and 'don't like' instead.
- If you want to know more, the Talking Mats website has some useful information <http://www.talkingmats.com/>

MY CHRISTMAS CHOICES



Good



Bad

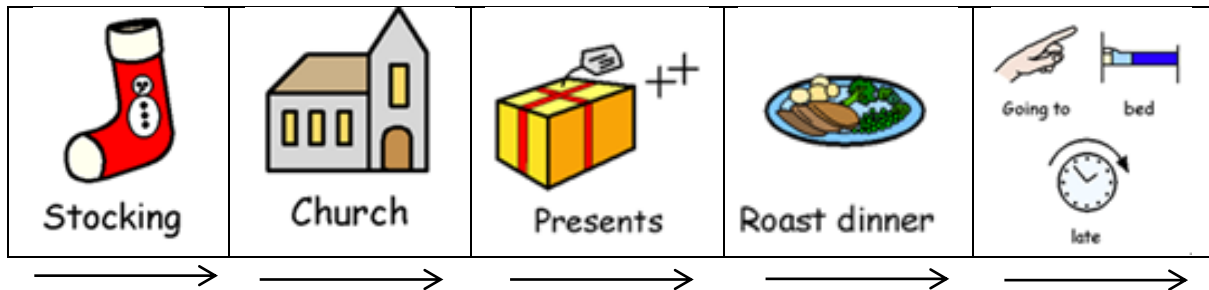


Christmas

VISUAL TIMETABLE



Why not use *Our Christmas Wish List* to make a visual timetable? eg



You will DEFINITELY need this card with a visual timetable:



CHANGE

This one is handy:



BREAK

or this:



I want a break

Try these:



different



change

A simpler visual timetable is:

NOW



surprise

NEXT

Cut out and use the symbols on the next few pages to assist completing **My Christmas Choices** and a Visual Timetable

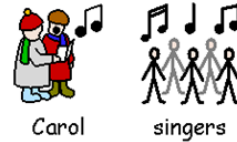




Christmas tree



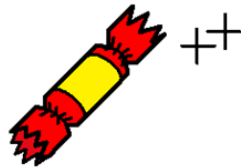
Decorations



Roast dinner



Party hat



Crackers



Father Christmas



Presents



Church



Stocking



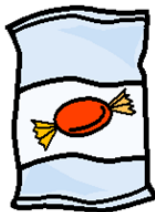
Snow



Elves



Chocolate



Sweets



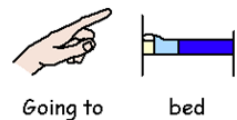
Party poppers



Board games



Waking up



Going to bed



late



Christmas



jumpers



Cake



Yule Log



T.V.



Mince Pies



Fire



Bike



Toys



Gaming



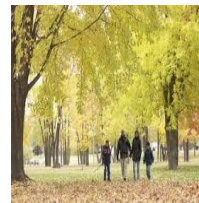
Computer



Shops



Car



Family Walk



Home



HINTS & TIPS

Christmas TV Adverts - don't you just love them?! The perfectly decorated Christmas tree with twinkling lights; Mum, Dad and the Grandparents watching TV by a roaring fire; young children gleefully opening presents and playing with them quietly on the rug. **It's not the reality.** Many families have a completely different Christmas, one that is unique to them. Here's what other parents have to say about their Christmas:

We have Christmas dinner in the evening, keeping to the usual routine.

Mum goes to Midnight Mass alone and everyone is happy to support her to do it.

My child spends the whole day in pyjamas as he doesn't want to go to bed.

Sausage and mash on Christmas Day because that is what the children like – not turkey.

Our son with autism finds Christmas all very overwhelming so we introduce it slowly and in stages. We put the tree up first then build from there over the weeks. We have a Christmas Book we read together every day to help him understand what's happening. Last year he didn't open his presents until a week after Christmas as that's when he was ready for that step.

My Primary aged boy finds all the food on the table overwhelming, so we let him have his Christmas Lunch in the kitchen by himself before everyone else. Then he is free to play whilst the rest of the family eat.



Things you might like to try

- Take the “crack” out of the cracker – literally! Keep the peace with a “no bang” cracker.
- Have a “festive free” space somewhere in the house.
- Try using a “break” card to indicate when someone needs a bit of space and a break from it all.
- Wrap presents in material rather than crunchy, noisy paper ...
- or don't wrap presents at all!
- Or use lots and lots of cellotape to make the present opening last longer and to make it more challenging!
- Pick your battles wisely – who are you doing it for?