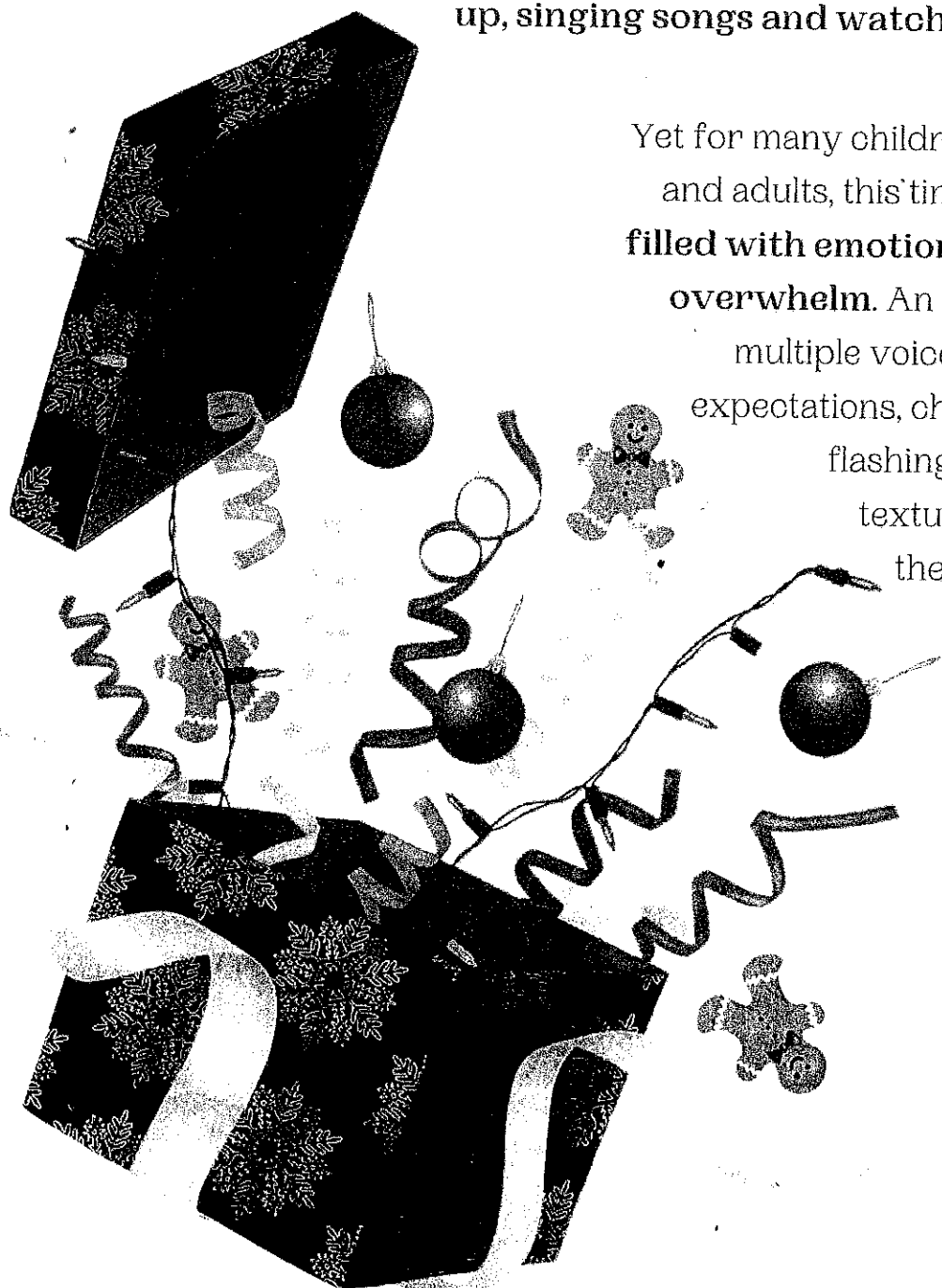


# Managing The Christmas Sensory Overload!

It's that time of year which for some of us is exciting: meeting and catching up with friends and family, putting up glittery decorations and sparkly lights, giving and receiving shiny gifts, parties, dressing up, singing songs and watching TV specials!



Yet for many children, young people and adults, this time of year can be filled with **emotional and sensory overwhelm**. An increase in noise, multiple voices, crowds, social expectations, changes in routine, flashing lights, different textures brought into the house, loud and busy music and surprise gifts.

So, what can we do to ensure a more joyful, or tolerable time for **ALL** the family?



Some events, activities and get-togethers may:

- Go on for a long time
- Be big in location and/or excitement levels
- Be loud or have lots of different noise levels
- Have many people, both known and strangers
- Have multiple activities
- Be very bright and/or visually busy

If you have any family, friends, teachers and colleagues who want to offer sensitive, understanding and loving relationships, then they are amazing allies, especially at Christmas time!

Think together about any possible adaptations. Can any of the above factors be adjusted to support sensory overwhelm? Are there any compromises to make it more tolerable?

- Can you arrive at the start or at the end of an event or activity, when the music and the flashing lights are off?
- Can the music be turned down and the lights set to be on constantly, rather than flashing?
- Can participation time be shortened, e.g. a child does one song in a carol service and can then leave feeling successful rather than overwhelmed or can you leave a party after an hour, without it being announced?
- Is there a space where there is minimal sensory input so regulation breaks can be taken?
- Is there any way to have less people, or a time when you know less people will be there?
- Could the venue be your own house or somewhere familiar?
- Can you bring things with you that are helpful, e.g. your own food, a blanket, a pair of small discreet noise-cancelling headphones

**Remember it is also ok to say no!** If there is just one trip out too many, then don't go. It doesn't make you a bad parent/friend/family member to say "I/we need to take a break". Communicate with a child's school. Do they have to take part in EVERYTHING?



This time of year is generally busier with more people going out, shops are busier, lights are flashing and reflecting off of decorations, loud music and Christmas songs are played everywhere!

Some practical ideas might be:

- Wearing a hoodie so ears can be subtly covered
- Listening to your own music with headphones
- Using noise-cancelling headphones
- Avoid having multiple devices playing at the same time
- Switching fairy lights to not flash
- Use less decorations on the tree

To help regulation it may be helpful to incorporate some heavy work based-activities into the routine such as:

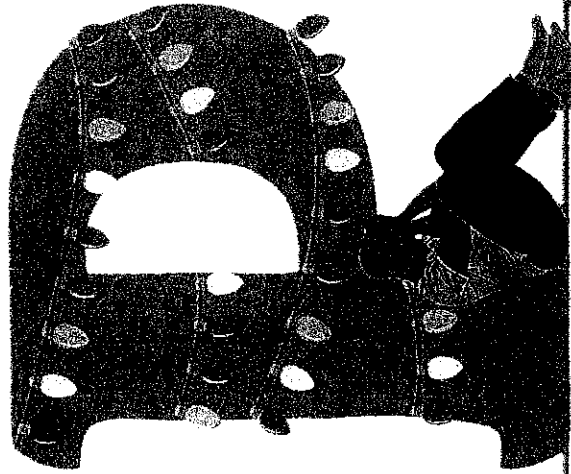
- Incorporate more walks outside in nature into the daily routine
- Do jobs in the garden or park: carrying logs, raking leaves
- Carrying the Hoover upstairs or downstairs
- Hoovering, cleaning

Or add some organising activities which help with the body and mind:

- Going for scavenger hunts – can you find something shiny, round, prickly, red?...
- Setting the table, sorting out cutlery, arranging dishes
- Sorting out gifts by size, colour or family members
- Do some mindful colouring, word searches, spot the difference or jigsaws

# The Power of PACE at Christmas Time

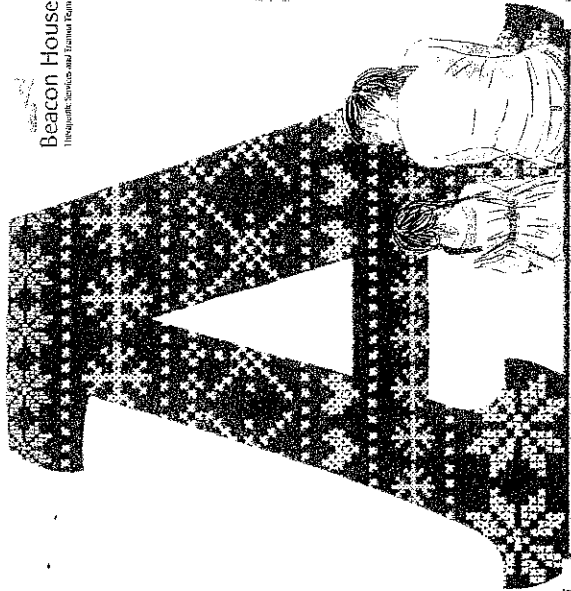
There are a lot of feelings flying around at Christmas time for children and adults alike. Finding the right balance for YOU is something to work towards. PACE - Playfulness. Acceptance. Curiosity. Empathy



**Playfulness** isn't the same as playing but is enjoying time with someone else or yourself in an unconditional way.

This can look like a 5 minute sofa snuggle with someone, walking hand in hand, swapping cringey cracker joke or even taking yourself off for a cry on your own if that's where you're at and trying to leave behind any guilt about it.

It's about showing a real interest in someone, or yourself, and finding something you really enjoy about them - or you. Even if that's 2 minutes alone with yourself outside the front door!

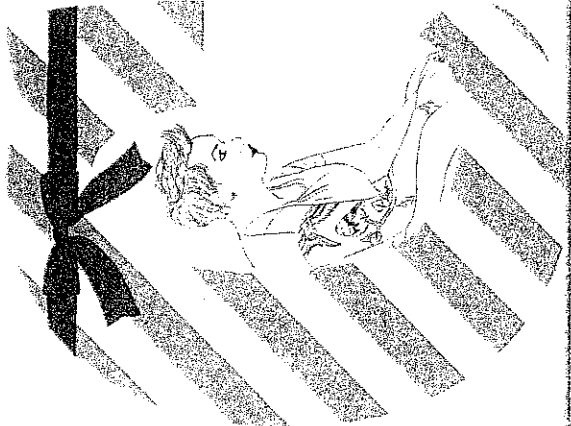


Beacon House  
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**Acceptance** means sitting with strong emotions or perspective of another and knowing that you might not be able to take these away. There may be no words of advice to give, strategies to implement or thoughts to share, only comfort by offering your safe presence.

It is allowing uncomfortable sensations and emotions to be in your own body without judgement. Accepting their existence.

For an example of this and Empathy, watch the YouTube clip called 'Brené Brown on Empathy' or find inspiration from the song 'Hold Space' by Ward Thomas.

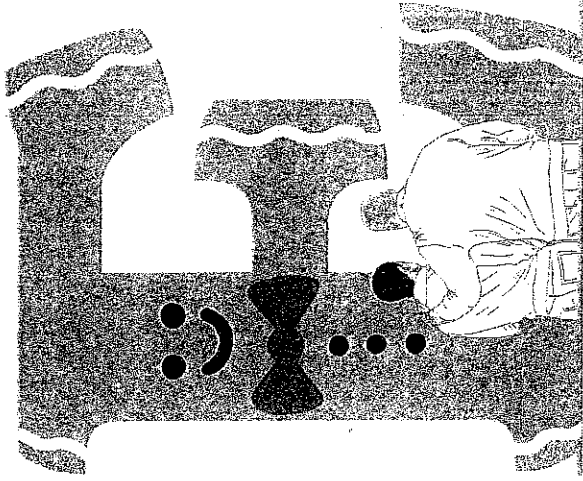


**Curiosity** isn't about asking "why?" even when this is exactly what we want to know! It's about wondering what is going on inside for someone or oneself.

It's about taking the risk of being wrong "Can I share my ideas with you... I wonder if... I might be wrong, so tell me if I am, but here are my thoughts..."

A way of letting someone know that your mind is on their mind and genuinely interested in anything at all that's going on in there without judgement.

It is practising this same non-judgemental curiosity within ourselves.



**Empathy** can take a lot of energy at Christmas. Sitting with the disappointment of a child who hasn't got the gift they hoped for "I can see the sadness in your eyes that it's not what you wanted" or accepting our own disappointment that the time hasn't felt very festive "I am where I am and things are how they are and I'm going to do my best to feel okay with that".

A top tip is try to move away from reassurance or denial of feelings - others or your own. Naming what is happening for ourselves or another helps us in our offering of empathy.

**To PACE oneself: "To do something at a speed that is steady and that allows one to continue without becoming too tired."**