Supporting Neurodivergent Adults Through Seasonal Change

This month at our adult supporters drop in we explored ways to support neurodivergent adults during periods of change, particularly around the festive season. Many adults experience increased stress during this time due to disrupted routines, sensory overwhelm and the pressure of social expectations. Thoughtful preparation and understanding can make this time of year more manageable. Below are three key strategies we discussed.

Tip 1: Help them prepare for change

Preparation is essential when routines shift. Spend time looking ahead at what is coming up and identify possible stress points. Creating a simple agenda for events can reduce uncertainty. This might include noting start times, expected duration and any transitions. Reviewing maps or photos of venues can help reduce anxiety by offering a sense of familiarity before arriving. Building scheduled downtime into the plan gives space for rest and recovery which many neurodivergent adults need in order to cope with a busy period. Whether it is a quiet room, a walk outside or alone time at home, make these breaks a normal and protected part of the plan.

Tip 2: Be aware of the environment and sensory load

Festive events often come with bright lights, noise, crowds and unpredictable sensory experiences. Supporters can help by planning ways to control or reduce sensory load where possible. This might involve carrying items such as ear defenders, sunglasses or fidget tools. Choosing quieter seating areas, requesting softer lighting or stepping outside for a moment can also make a significant difference. Encourage the adult you support to express what sensory adjustments help them feel more regulated. Being proactive about the environment helps maintain comfort and reduces the likelihood of overwhelm.

Tip 3: Create a personalised calm down plan

Even with preparation, changes can still be stressful. A personalised plan for after busy or challenging experiences can support recovery. This could include activities that help the person feel grounded such as time alone, a preferred sensory activity, a predictable routine like a familiar meal or TV show or movement-based regulation such as walking or stretching. Agree on the plan in advance so that it feels safe and dependable. A calm down plan ensures the person has a clear route back to comfort and stability after facing difficult changes.

Supporting neurodivergent adults through the festive season does not require perfection. It requires awareness, communication and a willingness to adapt. These small strategies can help make this period more manageable and more enjoyable.