



Toolkit: Navigating Holidays

Support for managing travel, change, and overstimulation during holiday seasons

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1. Introduction

Holidays can be wonderful, but they can also feel chaotic, unpredictable, and overwhelming, especially for autistic children.

This toolkit is here to help you prepare with confidence, adapt where needed, and enjoy moments of peace amidst the pressure.

Whether you're staying home, visiting family, or going abroad, Barney's Box is by your side, step by step.

2. Why Holidays Can Be Challenging

Holidays bring:

- **Changes to routines**
- **New places, people, and sounds**
- **Sensory overstimulation**
- **High social expectations**

While others may view holidays as relaxing, for autistic children it can feel like everything safe and predictable has been taken away.



Barney's Box Tip: Expect disruption, but plan for comfort.



3. Common Triggers and Stressors

- Unexpected visitors or loud gatherings
- New foods, smells, or textures
- No clear schedule
- Travel delays or queues
- Pressure to “join in” socially
- Tiredness from sensory overload

Recognising these in advance is the first step to reducing stress.

4. Step by Step Holiday Preparation

Step 1: Talk about the plan early	Use visual calendars, social stories, or countdown charts.
Step 2: Preview the environment	Show photos, videos, or walk through new places on Google Street View.
Step 3: Involve your child in packing	Let them choose their own comfort items - this gives control.
Step 4: Keep some routines the same	Stick to familiar mealtimes, bath time, and bedtime as much as possible.
Step 5: Build in recovery time	After each outing or social event, allow for quiet decompression.

5. Strategies for Travel and Outings

- Use noise-cancelling headphones or sunglasses
- Bring familiar snacks and toys
- Create a “travel box” with sensory tools
- Build in buffer time for delays
- Let your child know what to expect:
- “We’ll drive for 2 hours, then stop for lunch. You can play on the iPad.”

If flying or taking trains, check if assistance schemes are available.

6. Managing Sensory Overload

- Avoid peak times in public places
- Choose quieter accommodations
- Use a “chill-out” signal your child can use (a card, gesture or phrase)
- Carry a **calm kit**:
 - Fidget toys
 - Weighted item
 - Scented object
 - Comfort item (blanket, plush toy)

Download our Calm Kit Checklist at barneysbox.co.uk/resources

7. Creating Predictability and Comfort

- Make a “holiday visual timetable” - simple drawings or photos work well
- Practice transitions at home (e.g., “Pretend we’re going to a café”)
- Build in one **anchor activity** per day: something familiar and calming
- Use a “quiet space card” your child can hand to you

This gives them a sense of control in unpredictable environments.



8. Tools & Templates

- Customisable Visual Holiday Planner
- Social Story Template for “Going Somewhere New”
- Sensory Break Cards

(Available from barneysbox.co.uk/resources)

9. Further Support

- [National Autistic Society – Travel Guide](#)
- [Sunflower Lanyard Scheme](#) - UK airports and venues



Barney's Tip: Print and stick planners, checklists and trackers somewhere visible, or use digitally. Choose what feels right.

10. Final Thoughts

Holidays don't have to look like everyone else's. They just have to work for **your family**.

You are allowed to say no. You are allowed to change plans.

You are allowed to protect your child's peace - and your own.

Barney's Box celebrates small wins and quiet moments.

We're with you, wherever you go.

The Barney's Box Team

www.barneysbox.co.uk