



From a parent's perspective

“When my autistic son was younger, he found change around certain times of the year challenging, these included Christmas, firework night and Halloween. I am going to focus on Halloween as that is up and coming. You cannot ignore these times in society, these holidays are celebrated everywhere!

We would decorate the house on the day, and this decoration would be taken down also on the same evening, so that he knew the day of Halloween was finished. We would encourage our son to join in with decorating. This might include watching the family decorate, sticking things to the wall or making related items, e.g. spiders, ghosts, or a witch's hat. At times we would decorate biscuits or make cakes.

We would carve a pumpkin, this may be drawing something on the outside of the pumpkin or removing the seeds. The first few years we did this our son would not want to remove the seeds or carve into the pumpkin. Year on year we would keep Halloween very similar and carving the pumpkin is now one of his favourite activities. Sometimes it takes time for people to gradually get used to the sensory aspect of activities, like slimy pumpkin insides...

We had many fancy dress items that we had collected over the years. Our son would either choose to dress up, try many on or choose not to wear anything related to Halloween; we would keep this very casual.

Our son would not enjoy people coming to the house ringing the doorbell dressed up and receiving sweets. We would put a nicely worded sign up on the door with a few sweets for them to take and would top these up through the evening so not to make our son anxious. We would also explain to our immediate neighbours who had young children why we didn't have people knocking on our door.

We would hide our son's favourite sweets around the house, say 'ready, steady, go' and he would go looking for these. We would help him if he needed encouragement to do this. So he still enjoyed himself but celebrated the event in a different way to others.

As we took down all the decorations after he had gone to bed, the next morning everything would be back to how it normally was. He accepted this and this would help him feel safe; each year, knowing the safe routine, he would progress further into the holiday spirit.”

*Go Your
own way*



HALLOWEEN

Enjoying Halloween: Alternative Ways to Have Fun Without Trick-or-Treating

Halloween can be an exciting time, but for some, traditional trick-or-treating may feel overwhelming or stressful.

There are plenty of other ways to enjoy the spooky season:

1. Halloween Treasure Hunt



Create a simple treasure hunt at home or in your garden. Hide Halloween-themed treats or toys and let your child find them at their own pace. You can use pictures or written clues, depending on what your child enjoys.

2. Pumpkin Decorating



Instead of carving pumpkins, try painting or decorating them with stickers, markers, or craft supplies. This can be less messy and more accessible for children who may be sensitive to textures.

3. Spooky Movie Night



Choose some gentle, fun Halloween films and have a cosy movie night with themed snacks. You can control the volume, lighting, and environment, making it a comfortable experience for everyone.

4. Dress-Up Play at Home

Let your child pick out a costume—or simply wear their favourite clothes! Have a mini fashion show or take photos in a safe, familiar space.



5. Sensory Activities



Try making Halloween-themed sensory bins or playdough. Fill a container with rice dyed orange and black, or create “a witch’s potion” with water, food colouring, and safe objects to stir. See the next page for more ideas...



Halloween Activities

ideas for themed
play and regulation

Deep Breathing Pumpkin

TRACE THE RIDGES OF THE PUMPKIN.
TRACE UP & BREATHE IN.
TRACE DOWN & BREATHE OUT.



THE OT TOOLBOX.COM

check out [The OT Toolbox](https://www.theottoolbox.com/) for some nice ideas...

PUMPKIN FEELINGS ACTIVITY



<https://littlebinsforlittlehands.com/spooky-halloween-sensory-play/>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T95TH6U17Rs>

Preparing For An Autism-Friendly Fireworks Night

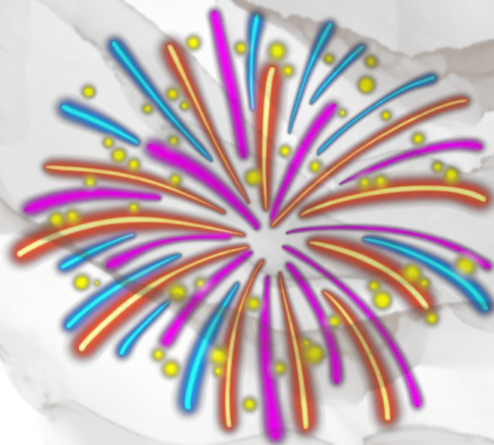
October 2025

Every autistic person is different and some may love celebrating Fireworks Night, whilst for others it may be more of a challenge. The key to a successful Fireworks Night will be a little planning and preparation to support autistic young people through an event that has the potential to be unsettling.

Autistic young people may experience sensory processing differences that can make Fireworks Night particularly challenging.

Reasons Fireworks Night May Be Overwhelming:

- Loud, unpredictable noises
- Bright, flashing lights
- Crowds and social demands
- Changes to routine
- Unfamiliar smells



Preparation Strategies

Before the Event

- Create a visual schedule: Use pictures to show what will happen during Fireworks Night
- Watch videos: Show short clips of fireworks with sound to familiarize young people with what to expect – see some suggested viewing at the end of this article.
- Practice coping techniques: Teach deep breathing and counting exercises
- Social stories: Create personalized stories explaining what Fireworks Night is and what will happen
- Visit locations in advance: If possible, visit viewing locations during daylight hours

Sensory Support

- Noise reduction: Provide noise-cancelling headphones or ear defenders
- Comfort items: Encourage bringing favorite comfort objects
- Safe spaces: Identify quiet areas to retreat to if things become overwhelming
- Weighted items: Consider weighted blankets or vests for calming sensory input
- Sunglasses: Offer sunglasses to reduce visual stimulation from bright lights

On the Night

- Viewing options: Consider watching from a distance, through a window, or via livestream
- Timing awareness: Let young people know exactly when fireworks will start and end
- Exit plan: Have a clear plan for leaving if it becomes too overwhelming
- Support person: Assign a dedicated adult to support each autistic young person
- Familiar foods: Bring preferred snacks to provide comfort and routine

Alternative Celebrations

If attending fireworks displays is too challenging, consider these alternatives:

- Daytime celebrations: Focus on other Bonfire Night activities during daylight hours
- Indoor viewing: Watch fireworks displays from your windows, or on the television with controlled volume
- Create a sensory-friendly display: Use glow sticks, sparklers (with supervision), or light projectors
- Craft activities: Make firework-themed art using paint splatter techniques or coloured tissue paper

Supporting Families

Families can prepare by:

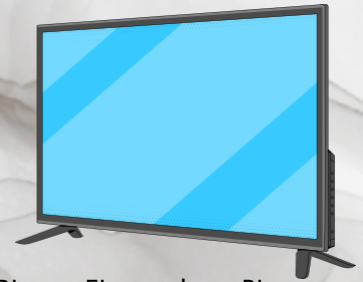
- Discussing plans well in advance
- Creating a personalized "Fireworks Night toolkit" with comfort items
- Practicing coping strategies at home
- Being flexible and having backup plans
- Celebrating their child's achievements, however small

Remember

Every autistic young person is different. What works for one may not work for another. The key is to prepare thoroughly, remain flexible, and prioritize the young person's wellbeing over participation in traditional celebrations.

Additional Information and Resources

Programmes which may be appropriate to share to help prepare young people for what fireworks night may be like:



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmH4FxQlboxw> CBeebies programme Bing – Fireworks – Bing eagerly anticipates watching the fireworks with his friend Sula. She comes prepared with ear muffs but Bing doesn't have any. Flop makes him some so he can enjoy the remaining fireworks and he learns that whilst he can't stop the bangs, he can quieten them so he enjoys it still.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3fLgs79dxQ> – Woolly and Tig – Bonfire Night episode – Tig goes to a friend's house and does lots of fun fireworks activities like painting before watching fireworks in the evening in the park at the back of their house. Tig likes the activities but is scared of fireworks. She hides to avoid them, but then, once she shares her fear, everyone reassures her that they can still enjoy them from inside the house. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3fLgs79dxQ> – Newsround article including a 2 minute video.
- **Bonfire Night: How to enjoy fireworks with autism**
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m001189h/my-first-festivals-series-2-7-bonfire-night> – A CBeebies programme – **My First Festival** follows 7 year-old Connie attending her first fireworks display with her parents. There is some preparation with her before they go which may be helpful to apply with your own children.



Further online reading and support:

- <https://family-action.org.uk/self-help/supporting-neurodivergent-children-on-bonfire-night/>
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/news/our-top-tips-use-your-senses-for-an-autism-friendl>
- <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/understanding-autism/health-and-wellbeing/everyday-life/fireworks-events>

A note on building up tolerance or resilience...

Sometimes, if certain sounds, smells or other sensations become more familiar or more understood, they can be more easily tolerated and they become less distressing to autistic people.

However, it is good to remember that:

1) autistic people's capacity and ability to cope with things can fluctuate; just because they tolerated it yesterday, or last week, or last year, doesn't automatically mean they can do it today

2) we need to be careful we are not teaching autistic people to ignore their body's emotional reactions - we could be pushing them towards masking

For example, you see your autistic child's reaction to the fireworks: they flinch, they scrunch up their face, they put their hands over their ears, they may close their eyes. If we say something like, 'you're ok, you're ok, it's not scary, you're fine...' we may be telling them something that is completely the opposite to how they are feeling. They



don't feel fine! They feel alarmed, worried, stressed, shocked, in pain, perhaps.

So it is very confusing to feel one way and be told you actually feel another, and it teaches people to ignore their own instincts. We might praise them for then 'pushing on through' and ignoring their own emotional state, and so then they learn to mask their true feelings.

Masking can lead to poorer mental and physical health, more emotional dysregulation, and sometimes burnout.

Instead, try validating what you see or what they're telling you: 'Yes, it is very loud and sudden and it makes you feel scared because you don't know when it's coming. Let's use our strategies to help you feel more comfortable.'



The B&NES Specialist Autism Support Service (SASS) is a team of specialist practitioners aiming to empower education colleagues, families and young people across B&NES to access the most appropriate support and information.

Our range of Padlets



with supporting
resources and
information

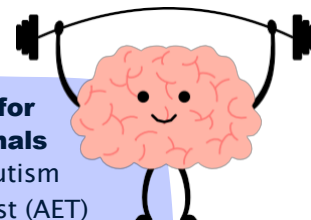
www.padlet.com/SASSBathnes

Our SASS Helpline

every Wednesday
morning
9am–12pm
01761 412198

Training for professionals

including Autism
Education Trust (AET)
training; so that staff
supporting your child can
access updated support
and information



Parent/Carer Coffee Mornings

led by SASS team members
at Longfellow's Cafe, BA3 3AL

– see the dates [here](#)



Universal Level Support available through SASS for families

this support can *always* be
accessed, even if a referral for
targeted/specialist support
for a young person has not
been accepted*

Regular newsletters

including best practice
updates, new resources...
and more

[https://padlet.com/SASS
Bathnes/newsletter](https://padlet.com/SASSBathnes/newsletter)



Sharing of resources

including our [SASS
Specialist Guide for
Education Settings](#)



SASS Choir

whole family
welcome!

See our
flyer [here](#)



Supportive School / Setting Audits

Using the AET
Standards Framework
see our audit
resources [here](#)



Training for parents/carers

including
[Cygnet](#) training –

our training overviews
can be found [here](#)



*Our universal offer is available to those with a B&NES home address, between the ages of 0–18, or those residing in B&NES with an EHCP aged between 18–25. It is available to all professionals working in B&NES. No autism diagnosis is required to access our coffee mornings, SASS Choir or our parent workshops on supporting diagnosis/autistic identity. We will not request confirmation of diagnosis when you initially call our Wednesday helpline.



For information about training and events, and one-page profiles of the team members,
please visit: <https://padlet.com/SASSBathnes/Updates>



Where support to implement best practice regarding autism and SEND is required,
please also consider contacting the **Inclusion and SEND Advice Service:**
<https://www.bathnes.gov.uk/inclusion-and-send-advice-service>



SASS Events 2025-26

EVENT	WHEN?	WHERE?	WHAT IS IT?
SASS Coffee Mornings 	6 x Wednesdays 9.00-11.30am 10 th September 12 th November 14 th January 4 th March 25 th April 10 th May	Longfellow's Cafe, Longfellow Road, Radstock BA3 3AL	SASS Coffee mornings are a non-judgmental space for parents, grandparents and carers of autistic young people (either diagnosed, waiting for diagnosis, or self-identifying as autistic) to get together and ask questions or share experiences. The gatherings are hosted by SASS team members who will bring resources and themes to talk about, as well as signposting to useful information, with regular guests such as the Parent Carer Forum, SENDIAS and Bright Start Children's centre. No need to book, please just turn up. Your first drink is free!
SASS Community Choir 	6x Wednesdays 4.00-5.00pm 15 th October 1 st December 28 th January 11 th March 6 th May 24 th June	Fosse Way School, Longfellow Road, Radstock BA3 3AL (waiting area available from 3.30pm with refreshments, for those coming straight from school)	The SASS Community Choir is led by the fabulous nm Parker, supported by the SASS team. This is a choir for autistic* young people and their families including siblings, parents/carers and grandparents. Music provides a unique way to connect with others, with singing having many health and wellbeing benefits, so join us to enjoy some singing together within a fun, friendly and supportive environment. Parents/carers will also have the opportunity to meet with members of the SASS team for general advice and support during the session. No need to book ahead; just turn up. <i>*whether you are diagnosed, waiting for diagnosis, or self-identify as autistic.</i>

Free to parents and carers of autistic children - or children on the diagnostic pathway - living in B&NES.



SASS Events 2025-26 continued...

EVENT	WHEN?	WHERE?	WHAT IS IT?
Understanding autistic identity - Year 6 and upwards 	Tuesday, December 2nd 1001m - 12.15pm led by Beci Burr and Jess Clark	Fosse Way School, Longfellow Road, Radstock BA3 3AI	A range of information to support parent carers of autistic children and young people - as well as those awaiting diagnosis or who identify as autistic - to feel more confident discussing both the strengths of their autistic young person, and also the life challenges which may present This will include looking at common questions which your young person, or other family members, may ask you, with discussions around ways to reply which are neuro-affirming.
Supporting your child understand their autistic identity - Early years and Primary 	Thursday, December 4th 10am - 12.15pm led by Sarah Keelty and Jazz Nash	Fosse Way School, Longfellow Road, Radstock BA3 3AL	We explore books, online resources and neurodivergent role models to support your young person with developing a positive sense of self. Wherever you are in your understanding of autistic identity, the trainers will set up a non-judgemental and safe space to explore ideas.. To book, please email sass@fossewayschool.com or call 01761 4121198 - Extension SASS

Free to parents and carers of autistic children - or children on the diagnostic pathway - living in B&NES.