

# JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

## Avoiding burnout over the holidays

I'd love to wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season ... but for lots of people Thanksgiving and Christmas can have extra stresses that lead to shutdowns and burnouts:

- There's lots of new sensory input that can cause distress or overload. (*Flashing lights, Christmas music, extra shopping, decorations...*)
- There's less time for transitions between social activities. For example visiting family members one after another, or going to a Christmas party with colleagues straight after work.
- As alcohol consumption increases, so clear and detailed instructions decrease. (*"Can you help with dinner?"* doesn't give you any clarity on what you should actually be doing to help.)
- Structure and routine is thrown out the window. *"Breakfast is at lunchtime today!" ... "Dinner is whenever it's ready!"*
- If you're staying in an unfamiliar house, or your house has guests, there may not be anywhere quiet you can go to regulate your senses.
- You might feel pressure to react in a socially required way to all of this, or receive complaints that *"you don't seem to be enjoying yourself"*.
- Other folk may enjoy taking time off work and making up each day as you go along ... but for neurodivergent folk this can be their idea of a nightmare.

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Here are some ideas that I'll be trying this year - sharing in case they help you:

- If sensory overload is a problem carry earplugs/ headphones and dark glasses with you, (or make sure they are within reach).
- Where things are within your control, try speaking up and saying what you want. (*"I'd like to open my presents over several days rather than all at once"* or *"Please can you let me know before you pop a cork?"*)
- If you struggle to speak up for yourself, remember that your needs are as important as other people's. Imagine if one of your friends or guests needed the same accommodations as you, how would you speak up for them?
- Try to build in moments of calm. Even if you have to go from one set of relatives to another - can you stop on the way for a coffee and some quiet time?
- If someone gives you an unclear request (*"Can you help out on Thursday?"*) you are allowed to ask *"how would you like me to help?"* Uncertainty causes stress, so getting as much clarity as possible will help reduce that.
- Try to build in structure and routine for yourself - even if it seems lost for everyone else.
- Be aware of energy expenditure. If particular activities are going to exhaust you, can you book quiet days either side to recharge?
- If you're travelling, try to take things with you that will help you regulate your senses. That might be your favourite pair of slippers, a weighted blanket, or a sleep spray. I was very sceptical about "sleep sprays" until we were given one

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at a hotel. Now I spray the room where I'm going to sleep as part of a routine and it really does help my brain to switch off.

- Remember: when you ask to do things differently, you are not being selfish. You are doing this to keep yourself sustainable so that you can get to the end of the holidays and still be functioning.

I wish you all the best for the Holidays, with all the self-care that you need to get through.

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