

Bill of Rights for Autistic Adults During the Holiday Season by Chris Mitchell

Bill of Rights for Autistic Adults During the Holiday Season

By the Confident Autistic (Chris Mitchell)

The holiday season is often very busy, hectic, and full of expectations placed on us Autistic adults by ourselves and others.

It is a time of the year full of sights, sounds, smells, tastes and more than can lead to sensory overload which can cause meltdowns, shutdowns and may contribute to Autistic burnout.

During the holiday season it is important for us to remember that every Autistic adult has rights.

As an Autistic adult, regardless of if you have received a late diagnosis of Autism or not, regardless of if you self-identify as Autistic or not and regardless of if you suspect you are Autistic or not, here are your bill or rights as an Autistic adult during the holiday season.

Chris Mitchell, aka the confident autistic, is an Autistic adult, late diagnosed, a multi-certified life coach and an advocate for Autistic adults who is on a mission to empower you to Embrace Autism Confidently.

For more information about Chris, visit TheConfidentAutistic.com. At the website you can learn more about his coaching program and more!

1. I have a right to rest

I recognize that it is normal to need to rest at times during this time of the year and I give myself permission to rest when I need it.

2. I have a right to eat safe food

I know that the holiday season can be an endless buffet of food. I know that there are dishes that other people want me to try at restaurants, at office potlucks or when I am a guest in someone's home. These new foods, or familiar foods that someone prepares differently, may be a trigger for me. I have the right to only eat my safe foods. When offered new foods to try, I give myself permission to stick with my safe foods.

3. I have a right to be alone

I give myself permission to be alone when I need to be alone because I have the right to take a break from others during any holiday activity.

4. I have a right to a clear schedule of what is happening

I know that when I am in an environment that is hectic or chaotic with many things going on around me and me not knowing what to expect and when to expect it, I feel more anxious and stressed than normal. I must remember that I have the right to know what to expect at holiday gatherings and events and I give myself permission to ask for details, before the event, that will help me manage my anxiety and stress levels during the holidays.

5. I have a right to have boundaries

I give myself permission to maintain the boundaries I have set for myself, and my space, outside of the holiday season. I also give myself permission to set additional boundaries, as needed, during this holiday season.

6. I have a right to stim

I give myself permission to stim, regardless of where I am at and who I am with, to help me stay regulated during the holidays and/or prevent meltdowns and shutdowns.

7. I have a right to use disability aids

I give myself permission to use any disability aids, without feeling embarrassed, that are necessary for me to interact with others during the holiday season.

8. I have a right to watch instead of joining in

If an activity, event or conversation is overwhelming for me, I give myself permission to watch instead of joining in without judging myself negatively for making this decision.

9. I have a right to wear clothes I feel comfortable in

Although there may be both formal and informal dress codes for holiday gatherings, I give myself permission to wear clothing that I feel comfortable wearing,

10. I have a right to open presents alone

I know that I may feel uncomfortable with everyone watching me open gifts and/or I feel very anxious with the perceived expectations I fear others have in how I respond to their gifts, therefore I give myself permission to open gifts when I am alone.

11. I have a right to receive clear instructions

Unlike my Allistic peers, I know that not everything comes naturally to me, and I fully accept that about myself as an Autistic adult. Therefore, I give myself permission to request clear instructions before any holiday activity. This could include clear directions to the location of a gathering, or clear directions/expectations others have of all guests before an holiday event.

12. I have a right to feel anxious

I know that anxiety is common for many Autistic adults, including myself. I also know the holiday season can increase my anxiety levels. I give myself permission to experience the feeling of anxiety this holiday season.

13. I have a right to engage in my special interests

I give myself permission to engage in my special interests during the holiday season, especially if my engagement with my special interests helps me self-regulate.

14. I have a right to watch the same film repeatedly

I give myself permission to watch the same movie, TV special or listen to the same song repeatedly during the holiday season without judging myself for my decision.

15. I have a right to turn off bright Christmas lights

I give myself permission to turn down or off bright Christmas lights, especially if it is triggering visual sensory overload.

16. I have a right to move around

I give myself permission to get up and move around when I need to as it may help me manage my stress levels, anxiety and self-regulation during this season.

17. I have a right to skip the small talk

I give myself permission to skip participation in the small talk that is going on around me during the holiday season. With this permission I give myself permission not to judge myself for not participating in small talk and I give myself permission to ignore anyone judgement of me because I did not engage in small talk with them or others.

18. I have a right to ask for no surprises

Although the holiday season is seen by many as a magical season of surprises, I give myself permission to request others not to surprise me during the holiday season. This permission may include not having plans unexpectedly changed on me at the last minute (aka I would like to be given as much advanced notice of plan changes as possible)

19. I have a right to keep routines

As I know that my routines are important to me as I feel more comfortable when things are predictable, I give myself permission to keep my routines and make only necessary adaptations to my routines when absolutely necessary during this season.

20. I have a right to take breaks

I give myself permission to take breaks from the activities of the season when I need a break.

21. I have a right to keep Christmas decorations to one room only

Although many believe our homes during the holiday season should look like Christmas exploded everywhere inside and out, I give myself permission to keep Christmas and other holiday decorations to a minimum, and that may look like I only decorated sparsely in one room, and I will not allow myself or others to judge me for my decorating decision.

22. I have a right to let go of social expectations

Although there are a lot of social expectations placed on me by others and myself during this holiday season, I give myself permission to let go of any and all social expectations that are just too much for me.

23. I have a right not wrap presents

I give myself permission to give presents to others without wrapping them as wrapping gifts may cause me sensory overload issues.

24. I have a right to unmask autistic traits

I give myself permission to be unmasked during the holiday season and at all seasonal gatherings. I give myself these permissions because I know how exhausting and harmful continuous masking is for those of us on the spectrum. I also give myself permission to unmask without feeling embarrassed and without fear of being judged by others.

25. I have a right to cancel plans

I give myself permission to cancel plans when I am feeling too tired or overwhelmed by the activities of the season. However, with this permission I give myself, I also accept the responsibility of notifying others of my decision as soon as I have made my decision so others can adjust their plans accordingly.

I also give myself permission, when sharing my cancelation with others, to reveal only as much as I am comfortable revealing with other parties that I am an Autistic adult.

26. I have a right to break Christmas traditions

I give myself permission not only to break Christmas traditions, but to adapt those traditions to meet my sensory and/or Autistic needs. I also give myself permission to create new traditions that better suits me as an Autistic adult.

27. I have a right to struggle to regulate emotions

I give myself permission, by saying it is ok, to struggle to regulate my emotions. I do this because I know the holidays are full of strong emotions within myself and from others, and these emotions can often overwhelm me, and sometimes they overwhelm me so much that I cannot even identify the emotion.

I also promise myself that I will not allow myself or others to judge me when I struggle regulating my emotions.

28. I have a right to ask for help

I give myself permission to ask for help during this holiday season with anything that is a challenge for me as an Autistic adult.

I promise myself that I will not allow myself or others to judge me when I ask for help. I also promise myself that if I am turned down for help from someone, I will not give up, I will seek out others to help me.

29. I have a right to struggle with communication

I give myself permission to struggle with communication with others during the holidays as well as I will forgive myself when communicating with others is difficult.

30. I have a right not to celebrate

I give myself permission not to celebrate any or all aspects of the holidays if I so desire without judgement from myself or others.