



YOUR GUIDE TO SURVIVING CHRISTMAS

Tips for looking after your relationships and
mental health this holiday season.



Season's greetings

Christmas can be a difficult time for many. Whilst it can be a wonderful time to come together with friends and family it can also be a demanding time, adding pressure to ourselves and our relationships to meet certain expectations.

Over the last year we have all been affected by the increase in the cost of living, which has added financial pressure for many. As Christmas is often a time when money is spent on food and presents, I encourage you to take the opportunity to focus on what is really important to you this time of year.

Spending time with the people you care about and doing what you enjoy can create a break from day-to-day stressors without the added financial burden.

This guide is designed to support you through challenges in the lead up to Christmas and help you manage expectations and improve your enjoyment over this holiday period.

Whether you are spending this time with loved ones, or spending it alone, the Guide to Surviving Christmas is here to help you with relatable tips to reduce emotional distress and navigate difficult situations during this time.

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Dealing with grief and loss

Holidays can be especially hard when you are feeling a sense of loss.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You're coming up to your first Christmas without a family member who's passed away.

Scenario 2:

This is the first Christmas since you have separated.

Scenario 3:

You can't spend this Christmas the way you normally would.





Dealing with grief and loss

1. Contact **support services** or **family/friends** if your grief is getting too hard to handle on your own.
2. **Local support groups** often have gatherings for people who do not have family or friends around to celebrate Christmas with.
3. Contact your **local community centre** and seek support and company over the festive season if you feel up to it.
4. Reconnect with your **memories** by doing something that you used to do together, like **writing a letter** to the lost person or revisiting that favourite spot you shared.
5. Give yourself permission to **grieve** and remember that people show grief in different ways.



Separated or blended families

Managing holiday arrangements across multiple families or locations can be difficult.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You will be juggling celebrations with multiple families.

Scenario 2:

You won't be celebrating Christmas with your children, or with the usual family traditions.

Scenario 3:

You have separated and are concerned your children could change their affection for you.





Separated or blended families

1. Allow kids to feel **free to have fun** without having to worry about adult issues or conflicts.
2. Try to make **peace with your past** so it doesn't mess up the present situation. Appreciate that now is not always the best time to sort out long-standing grievances.
3. Create new **traditions** that suit you and your changed family.
4. Tell the kids, "I am **looking forward** to seeing you" rather than, "I miss you so much".
5. Remember that parents who are **cooperative** in making joint arrangements for their children take the burden off the children. If necessary, **stagger the celebrations** so that children can spend time with both parents.



Managing family expectations

People have different values, interests, and incomes, which can make organising Christmas messy when people are expecting different things.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You are expected to attend multiple celebrations and you don't know how to say no.

Scenario 2:

You don't want to do what the rest of your family is doing.

Scenario 3:

You have a limited budget and can't afford to buy presents for everyone.





Managing family expectations

1. Let people **know your limits** when it comes to attending gatherings or getting things done. It's **ok to say no** and enjoy the things you do commit to, rather than being over-stretched and too busy to enjoy it.
2. Don't expect to have it all together. Christmas can be a chaotic time and things can go wrong. Try to keep things in **perspective** and remember **having fun** is better than perfection.
3. If money is tight suggest limiting gifts to a certain amount, partake in **secret santa**, or better yet **make your gift** instead! Get creative and give the wallet a rest (it's had a big year too).
4. A **sense of humour** goes a long way! We all have our annoying habits and quirks but it's up to you whether you choose to react to them or **let it go** and make the most of being together.
5. Sometimes **no plans are better than too many plans!** If it's too difficult to organise something with family or friends, choose a place and ask everyone to bring a plate – sometimes the **simple options** are the best ones!

Managing kids' expectations

It's not easy explaining to children that they can't always get what they want or have things work out as they hope.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You want your child to understand there is more to Christmas than presents.

Scenario 2:

You can't spend all day with your children as you have other things to get done on the day. How do you keep everyone happy?

Scenario 3:

You feel you can't afford to buy the gift your child wants.





Managing kids' expectations

1. Make the focus **spending time** with each other, creating family traditions, and making memories more than it is about getting presents.
2. **Be honest with children** about what you can and can't do with them on the day. They will appreciate your honesty and they will **feel less anxious** knowing what to expect.
3. **Don't make promises** to children if you have no intention of keeping them or are unable to keep them.
4. Allow children to **play and have fun**. It's likely they will get tired and need to rest just like any other day. Making sure you have allowed time for them to take time when they need it will make it a less stressful day for everyone.
5. **Role model fun** and **good communication** for your children. Try not to burden them with adult concerns like partner or parenting issues.



Managing family conflict

Family and friends don't always get along! All families experience tension to some degree. Part of the reason why the holidays can be so stressful is the expectation of a harmonious family gathering.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You know old grudges will resurface and you don't want there to be an argument.

Scenario 2:

You know you will have to spend time with someone who you don't get along with.

Scenario 3:

You're having relationship difficulties with your partner and you don't want to live it out in front of everyone.





Managing family conflict

1. **Make an effort** to interact with people you do get along with. If there are people there you don't get along with – **be pleasant** but know you don't have to go out of your way to spend time with them.
2. Everyone is under pressure and stress this time of year and arguments can easily erupt. Try to **keep emotions in check** and remember it's a time for celebration.
3. **Avoid topics** you know will end up in arguments. It's healthy to have different points of view but hashing them out over Christmas lunch is not the place to do it.
4. Be careful **not to over-indulge in alcohol or drugs**. Mixing difficult relationships and alcohol almost guarantees conflict.
5. Don't take other people's issues on board or return to past conflicts. It is best to **avoid known triggers**.



Looking after yourself

Holidays can trigger a range of emotions – sadness, stress, excitement and more. Taking care of yourself during the busy season can help make sure these emotions don't become overwhelming.

Can you relate to one of these scenarios?

Scenario 1:

You don't have anyone to spend Christmas with.

Scenario 2:

You know Christmas celebrations stress you out.

Scenario 3:

You have overcommitted yourself and don't want to underperform.





Looking after yourself

1. **Plan something special** for yourself or contact a friend and set a date to catch up outside of the Christmas rush.
2. If you are feeling lonely, **volunteer** to help serve Christmas Day lunch with a charitable organisation.
3. Attend **community celebrations** such as your local Carols by Candlelight.
4. Make a list of things you are **thankful** for and all of the **positive things** in your life.
5. Keep things **simple and prepare** in advance. It doesn't have to be a time of big celebration; it can be a time to do things you enjoy without the pressure of needing to do anything else.



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towards a thriving future**

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