



GUIDE TO Surviving Christmas



To you.
From:

 **interrelate**[®]
relationship experts since 1926

Season's Greetings



Christmas is often a time of mixed emotions and heightened expectations. Whilst the opportunity to come together with family and friends is usually welcomed (especially following a year like we've just had), it can also be a time of stress, loneliness, and disappointment.

The pressure of feeling like you need to get everything right for this one day, or that you need to do anything at all, can lead to increased emotions and conflict over the Christmas period.

This guide is designed to support you through the challenges that can arise in the lead up to Christmas and help you to manage expectations so that you can make the most of this time.

Whether you are able to spend this time with loved ones, or spending it alone, the guide to surviving Christmas has tips to help you to enjoy and celebrate the festive season.

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Christmas after COVID-19

It's important to remember that there are added stresses and anxieties arising from this past year. As most of us come out of several months in lockdown, and with many still unable to see friends and family interstate, it is only normal that we will experience mixed feelings in the lead up to, and during, this festive season.

The prospect of socialising again, attending large crowds and gatherings, or not being able to join any of these, can leave us feeling overwhelmed.

Here are a few things to keep in mind as we head into Christmas after COVID-19:

- Be kind to yourself and one another, it has been a challenging year for everyone.
- Manage your expectations, don't over commit or expect everything to go as planned.
- Consider what is most important to you and focus on connecting with that.

Experiencing social anxiety and fatigue are very normal after prolonged periods of isolation and social distancing, don't overdo it. Be honest about your limits and voicing



these to others – they will appreciate your honesty and will be more comfortable in doing the same.

Follow health advice and public orders. It may seem obvious, but the excitement of Christmas and getting together again can make it easier to ignore the rules. It is important to remember that we are still in a pandemic, and we have a social responsibility to act accordingly.

Get creative! If you cannot connect with loved ones as you would like to, take some time to consider how else you can connect with them over this time, and what virtual activities you could engage in, i.e., trivia, online games, virtual meals, or slide show.

If you cannot connect with others or do not feel you are ready to make sure you do something nice for yourself that you enjoy. Spend some time thinking about what you would like to achieve in the year ahead and what you need to do to make this happen.

Keep reading for more tips on how to manage family, your expectations, and look after yourself this Christmas.

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 your parents separated.

Scenario 3:

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



5 tips for 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.

Want some more tips or just to talk?

Call Interrelate on 1300 i relate (1300 473 528) or see Page 18 for more tips and guidance.

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 in your usual family traditional way.

Scenario 3:

You have separated and are concerned that the separation from your children could change their affection for you.



5 tips for 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.

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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.



5 tips for managing family expectations

1. Let family know what you can do and what your limitations are, as overstretching yourself and family can create conflict.
2. It is important to keep perspective and acknowledge that Christmas can be a difficult time. Don't expect to have it all together and that it will be perfect. Remember that having fun is better than perfection.
3. Expect to be surprised by strange habits and the funny ways of other people rather than being shocked by them. A sense of humour can be a coping mechanism.
4. Even if you don't want to be there, make an effort to enjoy the day. Christmas only comes once a year.
5. When invited to a Christmas gathering, find out if you can bring a plate of food to help the host.

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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.



5 tips for managing kids' expectations

1. Let children know about family and other arrangements because not keeping them in the loop can increase anxiety.
2. Spend time on fun family traditions as these can create bigger memories than an expensive present.
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 be children and expect that they will get tired and cranky and will want to play with their new toys.
5. Be a good role model for your children and don't burden them with adult concerns.

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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.



5 tips for managing family conflict

1. Always be gracious in receiving a gift (even if it's not what you had hoped for, or do not like it).
2. Be aware that Christmas is a busy time and that everyone is under some pressure and stress, so arguments can easily erupt. Try to keep emotions in check at a time for celebration, harmony and happiness for children.
3. Avoid topics that you know will end up in arguments. Use distraction and quickly move onto something else to talk about.
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.

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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.



5 tips for looking after yourself

1. Plan something special to treat yourself or contact a friend and set a date, time and place 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 – slow and steady wins the race.

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Looking for more tips?

Since 1926, Interrelate has specialised in supporting parents and children to strengthen family relationships. We provide affordable services including family dispute resolution, case management, counselling, services for carers, children's contact services, specialised mental health support and relationship education to the largest relationship services client group in NSW.

Last year Interrelate assisted more than 78,024 people through our network of centres and school based programs to strengthen their relationships. Our working relationship with over 560 schools enabled us to deliver our respectful relationships, sexuality and bullying awareness education programs to 52,103 students and families.

Dealing with grief and loss

Ask us about having a chat in a counselling session or attending a program that will help you understand and express your grief



Separated or blended families

Ask us about our services to help blended families and families during and after separation, which includes support for:

- parents to work out what's best for their kids
- parents to build stronger connections with their kids
- parents who are in conflict over the kids
- people to rebuild their lives after separation or divorce

Managing family expectations

Ask us about increasing your communication skills and self-esteem to help you say what you're feeling.

Managing kids' expectations

Ask us about the parenting groups we run to help you learn new skills for relating to and disciplining your kids.

Managing family conflict

Ask us about family dispute resolution or having a chat in counselling to help you learn new strategies for dealing with conflict.

Looking after yourself

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram to stay in touch with our Self-care Sunday series plus other tips and strategies for looking after yourself.

Want to get in touch?

Call Interrelate on:
1300 i relate (1300 473 528)

Go to: www.interrelate.org.au

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