

Staying balanced over the Christmas period

Christmas for a lot of people is a time for celebrating with family and friends and a time to relax. However, for some, the holiday season can heighten feelings of isolation or loneliness, and issues relating to financial problems, illness, relationships or loss can intensify stress associated with this time of year.

It is important to take the appropriate steps to ensure that you, as well as your family, friends and colleagues stay “emotionally safe” over this period.

First and foremost, it is important to be aware of your own limits and to recognize the signs of **stress, anxiety or depression**. These can include symptoms such as irritability, tiredness, loss of appetite etc. About 1 in 5 people will experience a mental health problem that requires professional treatment at some time in their life. Many more will experience times of crisis, stress, depression or anxiety. It's important to know that you don't have to face these problems by yourself.

It is good to seek out help. Seeking help can be anything from chatting to a friend to obtaining advice from your GP.

For those who have **lost a loved one**, through death, relationship failure, or relocation, holidays can be especially difficult as they can reawaken the grieving process. It can be an anniversary of a loss, or even the first Christmas without that particular person. There isn't any gauge or measure of how long you will feel pain after a loss. It is important to take time to grieve the loss. It is not healthy for you to ignore these feelings as it will probably prolong the pain. One tip that may help is to dedicate an activity or moment during the holiday season to reflect on the time spent with that particular person.

For those who are already **experiencing financial problems**, Christmas can be an increasingly difficult time. Seeking advice on how to budget over this period can help. Keep in mind that Christmas is about spending time with family and friends, and not necessarily the money associated with it.

Fast Tips for relieving the stress of Christmas:

- Take time out for yourself; do something that makes you feel good
- Look after yourself physically, make sure you get a good night's sleep, eat well and get some exercise. If you look after your body you will feel better too.
- Limit alcohol and other drugs. There can be a temptation to drink too much at Christmas, but alcohol can fuel arguments and cause unwanted behaviours.
- If you are feeling down or stressed, tell someone how you are feeling, e.g. friends, family or colleagues.

- If you are feeling depressed, don't feel afraid of seeking professional help; it takes a lot of courage to ask for help. Call a helpline, talk to your GP or speak to someone at your local church or community group.
- Try to avoid stressful situations or plan ahead to ensure you are prepared for them.
- Understand that it is common for people to feel stressed at this time of year. This could include your family and friends too.
- Know your limits and have a plan for dealing with stressful situations. If you need to calm down, perhaps a walk or some time out on your own will help.
- Try not to expect too much – aiming for the “perfect” Christmas or assuming that everyone one will be on their best behaviour may not be realistic.
- If times are tough financially or for other reasons, make time to sit down as a family and plan a Christmas that is reasonable.
- If things just seem too much, you can talk to a Lifeline telephone counsellor on 13 11 14, 24-hours a day, seven days a week.