



It's okay to struggle at Christmas

Why am I not as happy as I should be?

*Christmas is supposed to be the "happiest time of the year", but for many this isn't true. Spending time with family, eating lots of festive food and having these pressures on you are incredibly exciting for some, but not all. **Within the senior mental wellbeing group, we have had many discussions in the lead up to Christmas in what we wish we had been told or given to use as healthy coping mechanisms, instead of unhealthy ones. So here it is, the booklet to let you know that you are not alone, we understand.***

Depression During the Holidays

This time of year can be so jolly and cheerful for many people, but if that is not the same for you - that's okay! I know you may feel a pressure to be happy and bubbly around Christmas, but that is exhausting! You do not have to put on a mask to hide the fact you are hurting, it is okay to struggle. Remember to take some time for yourself this Christmas season, take care of your mental health in whatever way works for you, and if you don't know what works for you, here are some suggestions;

Watch a Christmas film - the excitement may strike some excitement within yourself and brighten up the days. **Listen to music**, any kind—this will provide a distraction from the thoughts, or maybe will bring

some comfort and sense of understanding for what you're feeling. **Take a warm bath** with bubbles and candles (if that's your thing) - it can be hard to relax when you're busy but it's extremely important to let go occasionally. **Talk!** - it's okay to talk to whoever you trust, whether that's a family member, a friend, or a helpline (included at the end). Getting whatever is troubling you out of your mind will give you a sense of relief. **Read a book, Colour in/Draw** (templates can be found online).

Don't feel bad for feeling under the weather when it seems everyone else is miles above it. Truth is, they're not, everyone struggles in one way or another - **You're not alone in this.**

Eating Disorders During the Holidays

Christmas is a food centric - holiday. To anyone not struggling with an eating disorder, this may never have occurred to you, but when you think about it more deeply- the emphasis around Christmas dinner, the specialty foods in shops at around this time, the constant barrage of friends, family and adverts telling you how they're going to diet in the new year, when you think about all this you realize how hard it must be for anyone with an issue surrounding food or their body image. Every eating disorder will have different problems and different coping mechanisms, but some that I've found very helpful are:

Surround yourself with healthy relationships towards food.

This could involve spending more time with a certain family member or friend, or even looking at a celebrities Instagram (I find Zoey Deutch and her love of pasta particularly helpful). You should NEVER feel guilty if you have to take a step back from a friendship you're finding to be a trigger for a while, you can't help others if you haven't helped yourself.

Take a break from social media

The constant buzz of social media is exhausting at any time, but at Christmas, it's ramped up, with a continual flow .

The constant buzz of social media is exhausting at any time, but at Christmas, it's ramped up, with a continual flow of food. Taking a break from social media, even just for a couple of days can be extremely helpful.

Get out the house

Going for a walk can be a really good way to clear your head and lift your endorphins, without putting your body under too much strain. If you have had issues with compulsive exercise, this may not be a good idea, but go for a drive, or even just stretching to get the blood flowing can be therapeutic.

Use tips from other sections of this booklet e.g. watch a movie, take a bath, talk to someone. **Bake or cook.** For many, this may be a bad idea, so make sure to know what is best for you, but sometimes trying a simple gingerbread recipe with a safe friend or family member can help you to look more positively towards food.

Anxiety and Christmas

Anxiety can be difficult to cope with at this time of the year, with prelims and assignment deadlines quickly approaching. It is easy to get overwhelmed and feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders, so here are some simple ways to combat the stress and help you feel just that little bit better.

Take a warm bath (add a bath bomb or bubbles if you're feeling fancy), light some candles and put on your favourite movie! If baths aren't your thing, **a shower can do wonders.** Use your favourite body wash and a nice scrub to exfoliate and really pamper yourself. If you're doing one of these things, put your towel or pyjamas on a radiator or in the dryer so it's nice and cozy when you come out, and make sure to apply some moisturizer.

Get some fresh air!

Simply taking a stroll outside or opening your window can help you feel a million times better. Put on your favourite playlist or meet up with a friend to take in your surroundings, getting stuck in the routine of school can stop you from **getting a good** sleep. If you're struggling to concentrate and you seem to be going around in circles, staying up later won't help. Put your phone down, read a book or listen to a podcast and get an early night! Talk to someone. A friend, a teacher, your mum, your pet. Sometimes, saying your worries out loud can help you make sense of them all.

Coping with Loss around the Holidays

Losing someone around this time of year can be extremely hard to cope with. It's hard to get used to them not being there at such a big time of year, but it can also be hard seeing everyone get into the Christmas spirit while you're missing someone who was such an important part of your life. Some ways to cope with loss at Christmas are:

Letting yourself be sad. It's inevitable, but nice things to distract you from this could be to visit somewhere you have good memories together. If you are struggling with school work as I know I do at this time of year, tell your teachers, they will be more understanding than you think. It's human to be low at a time where a significant loss in your life happened, and they can take some of the pressure off that you're maybe feeling with school. I've always found Christmas day especially hard to cope but the best thing I've found is to remember that they would want you to be enjoying your day. But just remember, it's okay to not be okay.

Loneliness Throughout the Holidays

Loneliness can and most likely will impact most people's lives at some point, however it's not a topic that's regularly discussed. There's a huge stigma surrounding this subject as people may believe it shows weakness and creates the title of outcast for

themselves. This should NOT be the case. The impact of loneliness is not just mental, but physical too. The brain seeks further isolation once it begins in order to try and protect itself. A big problem with loneliness is our awareness of it, if an individual doesn't know much about the impact of loneliness then how can they recognise it in themselves and others, and therefore help ease the feeling?

Some ways to help cope with loneliness are **activities**—spend time doing something you enjoy! This can range from joining new clubs to doing some writing, drawing or anything else which lifts your mood. This helps to focus your mind on a more positive place and could even help you to meet new people with similar interests.

Volunteer

this could help you to feel more a part of something, along with doing something that'll help you make an impact on others' lives.

Talk to friends

Strengthening relationships you already have will help others to help you, and you could also find out that they relate to your feelings too. **Self-Care**—sometimes being alone is okay and can be used to focus on yourself. For example, try a relaxation technique—meditate, run a bath, or watching your favourite movie, this can give you some comfort and therefore lift your mood.

*This time of year can be rough. Unfortunately, it's unlikely that these coping mechanisms, tips or tricks will be complete cures for whatever you're feeling, but this is what we've found can act as a good distraction, or something to pull you through the roughest day. It's always important that you talk to someone, preferably an adult such as a teacher (whether that be guidance or not), carer or doctor/therapist. **You're not alone in this, other people feel this too.** Below we've also left some helplines and websites which may help as well, and we hope that you manage to enjoy some points of your holiday.*

Merry Christmas!

HELPLINES AND HELPFUL LINKS

Anxiety

03444 775 774

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Calm (boys/men)

0800 58 58 58

www.thecalmzone.net

Mind (mental health)

0800 123 3393

www.mind.org.uk

No Panic (OCD)

0844 967 4848

Papyrus (suicide prevention)

0800 068 4141

www.papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans

116 123

www.samaritans.org.uk

SANE (those experiencing mental illness and their carers)

0300 304 7000

www.sane.org.uk/support

Cruse Bereavement Care

0844 477 9400

www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Victim Support

0808 168 9111

www.victimsupport.org

Beat (eating disorders)

0808 801 0711

www.b-eat.co.uk

Childline

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk