

Surviving Christmas.

Christmas is Santa and presents and family and fun! Right?

Or a holy time of celebrating the Saviour's birth, together with family who are totally into peace and joy! Does that fit?

Christmas is wonderful when you and the ones you love share a rich, intimate and peaceful time of family togetherness. Gathering the clan can be a chance to catch up on news, care for the elderly, introduce your great-aunt to her new nephew, break out that good china and create happy memories.

If that is your experience of Christmas, you might find it useful to read on. Perhaps there is someone in your street, your family, your social network who fits the profile below. And then there is an opportunity for you to open your home and your heart to others.

Perhaps the tinsel has begun to lose its sparkle, and the carols are only functioning at half speed in your heart/ your family/your community. Or maybe Christmas is a time of loneliness, feelings of abandonment, or financial stress or grief from recent losses..... If there has been a family break-up, Christmas can be very hard.

Here's some ideas to get you through:

If you are alone and you want company:

- Plan ahead. Don't wait until the last moment. Look after your lonesome self. Take charge of your loneliness and talk gently to it. Cheer yourself along as you make plans. Shed tears if you need, and reach out.
- Plan an event that fits with your budget and cares for others. (It could be a picnic or a shared lunch at home) This puts your focus on others who are also alone. Some people do work for a charity before or during Christmas Day.
- Go to community events, such as Carols by Candlelight. If you can, invite some friends to go with you. They may be really keen.
- Accept any offers of hospitality from others. Usually you will give them joy, and help them have a more festive day.
- Perhaps you find meaning in Christmas as a time of renewal of faith, and hope. Some people find that church meets their needs at this time.
- Baby-sit a puppy from your local pet store. That'll keep you busy and you'll have lots of attention.

If things are difficult with your family/or painful emotions are coming up at Christmas:

- Allow yourself time to grieve. Give yourself a warm bath, or a gentle walk.
- Avoid too much alcohol: it may lead to more negative feelings, and leave you even more miserable
- Set boundaries with family members who are abusive, or overly demanding. “Not now”, “not yet”, “not this year” are all ways of saying “NO” if you are not ready to say no.
- Look out for others who will understand, and plan to spend time with safe people. Find the balance between having time to feel, and getting out and being alive.
- Breathe. Be outside for some time each day. Journal, writing your thoughts and feelings on paper.

If Christmas is financially stressful for you, or you are overwhelmed by to-do lists:

- Start shopping/planning for presents in January at the sales.
- Don't be shy at bargain/op shops or even garage sales: you'd be surprised at the number of new things you can buy there!
- Re-use gift boxes, ribbons and paper: old-fashioned, but environmentally friendly! Store in well-labelled boxes. You can even make fabric draw-string Christmas bags that can go around and around the family again.
- Wrap gifts well in advance so you are not so exhausted in the last week. (You need to keep detailed lists of what is wrapped for whom, as well as attaching tags firmly to the gifts)
- If you are the host for the big day, set the table early in the afternoon the day before Christmas if you have the space to do so. Then put your feet up, have a cuppa and take time to reflect on what this season means for you.

Most of all, take care of you, and drive safely!