

CHANGES MODULE 22: Coping at Christmas



Christmas and New Year can be difficult times for many people. There are often family members brought together, which can add to the tension that exists around the pursuit of the Perfect Family Christmas. For people who are on their own, the time of year can be intensely lonely as their situation appears in stark contrast to the connected people celebrating publicly.

Here are some tips to help you make it through the season:

- Remember that **there are no rules** about how you must spend Christmas Day.

If you prefer to spend the day eating cheese on toast and watching your favourite box set, that's ok. If your family has expectations of you that you don't want to fulfil, perhaps think about going away for Christmas or to a friend's house. You could even volunteer at a Christmas Kitchen.

- If you find yourself on your own and don't want to be, look out for opportunities to join up with others for a more social day. Very often local churches or charities will put on a meal for people who would otherwise be lonely.
- Keep a list of **phone numbers** you could call if you find yourself struggling. You may know someone you could contact, but many

helplines stay open over the festive period.

- Try not to put too much importance on the day itself. If you don't feel up to cooking a big dinner on Christmas Day or visiting relatives, perhaps do it another time. Spend Christmas Day being more gentle on yourself.
- Plan ahead. Shop online if you find crowds difficult. Buy or make Christmas food treats in advance and freeze them if possible. If you need medication make sure you request it well in advance.
- Don't expect everything to be perfect. Very few people actually experience the perfect day depicted in the media.
- Take time out if you need it. Perhaps take a stroll for some fresh air or maybe pop outside and call a friend to wish them a happy Christmas.

- Remember there's no way to 'fail' at Christmas. Try not to worry about how much you feel you should spend on presents or food. Christmas will still happen without luxuries.
- You don't have to do it all and you are not solely responsible for making sure everyone has a good time. If you're sharing Christmas with others, be clear about who is doing what. If you're hosting then ask for help.
- For some people, the idea of facing another year feeling the way they do can feel very daunting. If possible tell somebody how you feel. There's no need to celebrate if you don't feel like it. Perhaps have an early night or spend a quiet evening with friends.

Discussion

What things do you do to manage your mental health at Christmas time?

Further Resources

Samaritans - phone 116 123 / email jo@samaritans.org (response time 24 hours)

Marmalade Trust - organising meals / events over Christmas | 07566 244788