

# Christmas Survival Guide

What does Christmas mean for you? Is it the religious aspects? Perhaps it's a chance to reunite with family and friends? Is having the time off, a chance for a rest? Maybe it is a blend of all these.

Christmas is so often portrayed in the world as an idyllic, near perfect picture postcard; a bit like the pictures on a Christmas card itself. This can be pressure to 'live up' to what Christmas 'should be'. This can be even more so for someone who already finds this time of year difficult.

It is a time when you may spend more time than usual with people you would not usually spend time with. This could be extended family and friends or also your immediate family.

As well as all of this, perhaps Christmas for you might bring up some anxieties, reminders from Christmas past, maybe it reminds you of loved ones who are no longer here?

We present a brief list of ways that you might find useful to help you 'survive' this time of year.

## *Tip 1: Self Compassion*

Self compassion is treating ourselves with the same kindness, care and understanding that we would offer to others when they suffer, fail, or they feel inadequate. Many find it difficult to be compassionate to themselves. Why? Perhaps we fear that being too kind to ourselves, is in some way selfish or self centred, and this will make us feel self-indulgent.

Here's another way to look at it: We give to others, both our time and energy and at Christmas we give gifts. Maybe this Christmas you can give yourself the gift of self compassion?

## *Tip 2: Expectations*

Christmas is an extremely loaded time of year where our emotions can be magnified. There is an unspoken pressure to be happy. This is not always possible or realistic. Perhaps accepting that Christmas comes and goes, like any occasion. Also to realise that it does not have to be perfect but having an OK or good enough Christmas is alright too?

## *Tip 3: Boundaries*

One of the most exhausting stress loops starts with saying 'yes' when we feel like saying 'no' - again maybe for fear of appearing selfish or letting down someone. But sometimes we need to say no because we simply cannot take on anymore. The first step to learning what a 'no' and a 'yes' feels like is to know how it feels in your body. Your head might say 'yes' when your gut or heart is really saying 'no!!

Saying no when you really feel that this is the right decision for you is the first step in creating your boundary with others, that space that you do not want anyone to encroach on - a bit like personal space. This might be relevant when at Christmas you might spend more time than usual with people you would not usually spend time with. A useful phrase to keep in mind is that "People do things that annoy me, not to annoy me" - those things that others do aren't necessarily directed to annoy you, but they still do!

## *Tip 4: Grounding & Breathing*

If you find yourself becoming stressed or overwhelmed, BREATHE. Take some time to be alone and breathe. Yoga is a great way to connect to your breath. Just lying on the floor and feeling your body in contact with the floor is helpful. This pose is good if you're finding yourself in a place where you have many thoughts swirling around in your head.



If this is not for you, perhaps some mindful breathing might be? Breathing is something that we do all of the time – yet we are often not aware of how it feels in the moment. By bringing our focus intentionally to our breath we can ground ourselves in what is happening right now. There's a link to some breathing exercises in the Helpful Links section.

### *Tip 5: Honouring the Loss at Christmas*

Christmas is a time that can evoke painful feelings of grief and loss for those who are no longer with us. It is OK to grieve at Christmas and honour those we have lost. Grief is not linear and everyone grieves differently. So, remember those who are no longer with us and give space to your feelings.

Sometimes Christmas can invoke memories of the past, like Christmas songs which might bring up these memories. Being aware of what situations and reminders activate you in this way can be good so that you are not surprised by them. If this is just too overwhelming for you or you are not ready this year, it is OK to remember that just like everything, "this Christmas too shall pass".

### *Tip 6: Drinking and Eating Sensibly*

At Christmas there tends to be more food and alcoholic drinks available than at other times. This might pose a greater challenge for you than usually. Like in other situations perhaps be aware of what is not right for you, or what activates this consumption. Check out the Helpful Links at the end for some eating and drinking advice.

### *Tip 7: Consumerism/Presents*

Nowadays, Christmas starts in October. Christmas is about giving and receiving yet it can be easy to get swept up into the consumerism that surrounds Christmas. Perhaps setting a boundary about what you can give? Are you able to set a price limit per gift? Is there an opportunity to do a Kris Kindle in a group? These are all important factors to consider to set your own boundaries wisely, yet still enjoy the meaning of Christmas.

### *Tip 8: Enjoy, whatever that means!*

...and it means something different to each one of us! We hope that you can experience whatever Christmas means for you, as best you can. Our gift to you is that this might be easier for you having read our Survival Guide.

#### **About Paul Hogan**

Paul is a Humanistic and Integrative Counsellor and Psychotherapist. Dream work and mindfulness are a core element of how Paul works. Paul helps people with a range of issues including anger, fear, panic, flashbacks and nightmares.

Contact:

089 4759635

[www.paulhogantherapy.ie](http://www.paulhogantherapy.ie)

[@paulhogantherapy](https://www.instagram.com/paulhogantherapy)

[info@paulhogantherapy.ie](mailto:info@paulhogantherapy.ie)



#### **About Deirdre Madden**

Deirdre is a Humanistic and Integrative Counsellor and Psychotherapist. Jungian and Body Psychotherapy are her particular interest areas and her practice is informed by yoga, mindfulness with a strong emphasis on the integration of mind and body.

Contact:

087 3819427

[www.deirdremaddentherapy.com](http://www.deirdremaddentherapy.com)

[deirdremaddentherapy@gmail.com](mailto:deirdremaddentherapy@gmail.com)

[@dmadden\\_therapy](https://www.instagram.com/dmadden_therapy)



Helpful Links:

[Drink Aware](#) [Safe Food](#) [Belong To](#) [BodyWhys](#) [Niteline](#) [Pleasetalk](#) [Aware](#) [Reach Out](#) [Samaritans](#)  
[See Change](#) [Women's Aid](#) [Amen](#) [Pieta House](#) [Mindful Breathing](#)