

The Christmas Survival Guide 2011:

For some Christmas can be the most exciting time of the year, the presents, the shopping, dressing up, the family around the house, the food plus an excuse to stuff yourself.....

But for all the above reasons for some, it is the most stressful time of year.

More couples file for divorce post the Christmas celebrations than at any other time of the year.

More families experience an argument with their 'loved ones', their children and their extended family.

More people load more debt onto their credit cards than at any other time of the year, often this is not paid by the following Christmas.

More pets are taken into rescue centres than at any other time of the year, except the holiday season.

REMEMBER, it is only one day of the year!

This guide is to bring a rational approach and a few helpful tips on how to cope with this time whether it is a stressful or pleasurable experience for you.

Budgeting for Christmas:

1. Work out a rough budget for expected Christmas costs as early as possible. Consider opening a 'Christmas club' account.

Presents:

1. Buy presents only for the children.
2. Set a limit on the cost of presents for each person.
3. Agree on a 'Silent Santa' where everyone draws a name out of a hat and buys a present for only that person.

Shopping:

1. Make a list of the presents you want to buy before you want you go shopping. More money is spent when wandering aimlessly around at the temptations designed to do just that; tempt you.

2. As you buy, cross people off the list to avoid duplications.
3. Shop early to reduce your feelings of panic and anxiety.
4. Buy your presents over the internet, some companies will offer to gift wrap and post directly to the intended person.

Christmas food and cooking:

1. Delegate, there are few medals for martyrdom.
2. Make a detailed shopping list, to reduce costs and only buy what you need, buy 'on-line' and get the store to deliver it at your convenience.
3. Consider having a buffet type meal; ask those people coming to visit to plan a course or a meal, this can enable everyone the chance to bring a 'special' contribution.
4. If planning a lunch at the restaurant book early to reduce the chance that the restaurant may be fully booked.

Relationships:

1. Do not expect miracles, family tensions will escalate at Christmas gatherings.
2. Avoid all known triggers; learn the diplomacy of keeping quiet, it is only for a few days.
3. Practice relaxation techniques, particularly deep breathing exercises which are known to reduce anxiety.
4. Focus on the positive aspects of those around you.
5. Exercise, even small distractions such as a post Christmas lunch will benefit everyone.
6. Do not attempt to reduce stress through self-medication with alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.

Some self-help guidelines:

1. Get enough sleep; sleep deprivation can cause distortions and misinterpretations of the simplest well meaning intentions.
2. However busy you seem, take some time for yourself. Selfish is not bad, to be able to cope explain to those closest to you that you will be taking some specific periods of time for yourself, be it a bath, a walk or just

sitting reading. Be clear about how long you will be taking, be it ten minutes or an hour.

3. Remember everything in moderation, it really is okay to eat that chocolate or that pudding or, to have that cocktail but in excess you are the one who is going to have the struggle to remove the 'damage'.

You are not alone, if, after reading the above you are still struggling, contact your local complimentary health professional, your GP who will be able to help. For deeper issues of anxiety, depression and coping strategies access a reputable psychotherapist who will be happy to offer some short term strategies to get you 'through' Christmas.

Happy Christmas.

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