

Dealing with Negative Christmas Emotions

Christmas is dubbed “the happiest time of the year”, but for some this saying strays a little from the truth. Every year, the festive season throws up stressors that most of us would rather avoid.

Family conflict, loneliness, and coping with loss are all brought to the fore every December, and these emotional stressors can really ruin what is supposed to be a happy time. Despite the onslaught of added pressures and negative emotions that can come with Christmas, there's a variety of measures you can implement to protect your mental health.

COPING WITH FAMILY CONFLICTS

The saying goes, “You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family”. If your family is more ‘Married with Children’ than ‘The Brady Bunch’, take comfort in the fact that you're not alone. But, if you're worried about conflict this December, here are some ideas:

- If certain family members have been bickering or arguing through the year, their conflict is not going to vanish because of the holidays. Be mindful and don't set high expectations... and perhaps sit them at the opposite ends of the table!
- Avoid triggers, for example, stay away from discussing divisive matters like politics or past arguments. If these discussions begin, use distractions to change the subject.

Also, remember that it's healthy to agree to disagree.

- Get everyone involved in activities after the meal, such as playing sports or watching old family movies. Providing diversions allows people to take a break from each other.
- If possible, have a relaxation room with a bed/ lounge and soft music playing - it can be a space to chill out or have a nap.

REMEMBERING LOVED ONES

The emotional impact of missing loved ones who have passed away or are ill is difficult. You will be missing this person deeply and will be wishing for the ability to spend this time together.

- Share your emotions and talk about your feelings with family and friends. Sometimes sharing happy stories and memories can assist you with getting through the pain of missing loved ones.
- Set aside some time for yourself to reflect on your loss, on recalling memories of your loved one, to look at photos or videos of the person you are missing. Rekindling these memories can help you to feel closer to your loved ones when they are not with you.



LONELINESS

While Christmas is synonymous with bringing people together, some people will remain separated from their family for various reasons, while others simply have no family. Feeling alone at this time of year doesn't have to be an awful event.

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- Embrace solitude. It's a great time to re-connect with yourself. Make time to cook your favourite foods, create a list of your favourite movies to watch during the period. Watching The Grinch and eating a toasted sandwich on Christmas Day is a wonderful thing to do. Above all, show self-love.
- Turn to others. If someone invites you to their family Christmas lunch, don't feel uncomfortable – accept the kind gesture. Or, you could volunteer for the homeless, foster some puppies/kittens, or even join an online forum and organise a group picnic or BBQ.

If family concerns or loneliness are causing you stress, remember that you can talk to a Converge expert.

You can reach our counsellors any time by calling **1300 687 327**. You can also find out more about the how Converge can help you at www.convergeinternational.com.au.

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