

Looking after your mental health during the festive season

The festive period can be a tough time of year for some people. From navigating difficult family situations to experiencing grief or loneliness, there are reasons why the period can impact mental health. We have some tips on how to look after yourself and others.

Looking after yourself

- **Do what is best for you.** Take the time to rest and relax if that is what you need. If you don't want to engage with the festivities, set boundaries early and let others know so they don't pressure you to take part.
- **Take a social media break.** Comparing our lives with others can make us feel lonely and isn't helpful for our mental wellbeing. If you can't take a social media break, try to remember that social media portrays an idealistic snapshot of others' lives and often doesn't represent the whole picture.
- **Remember you might feel lonely even when surrounded by people.** You may feel at times misunderstood or not cared for. If this is the case, try to establish what you need to support you throughout the season. If being around certain people during the festive season is harmful for your mental health, you should try to put your mental health first.

74% of people surveyed on Clic experience loneliness and isolation even when surrounded by people during the festive period.

If you're experiencing loneliness and don't know where to turn, think about some other activities you can focus on throughout the festive season. For example:

- **Explore somewhere new or spend time outdoors.** Changing your surroundings can be really refreshing. Going for a walk outside or taking up some exercise can really help lift our mood. Make it more enjoyable by listening to music, audiobooks, or podcasts.
- **Plan how you are going to spend your time.** Structure can help us pass the time during difficult periods, especially if our regular daily routine is disrupted.
- **Connect with people.** It could be a group of like-minded people, hobby related or a charitable cause such as helping out at a local soup kitchen.
- **Connect with others online.** There are numerous online communities you can join such as hobby clubs, music enthusiasts, etc. You can also join Clic, Mental Health UK's safe online community where you can share your thoughts and experiences and get mutual support from others who understand.
- **Find and explore something new.** Taking on something new can be really enjoyable and rewarding, such as a new hobby, TV series, book, or anything else that might help lift your spirits and help pass the time.

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Top tips for supporting others during this season

Do

- **Let them know they're not alone:** and that you're there to listen if they need you. Sometimes this might be all they need.
- **Understand that Christmas and the festive season mean different things to everyone.** Their views may not align with yours, especially if they have experienced trauma or loss. It is important to respect and understand them.
- **Listen to what they say.** It is important for everyone to feel heard and to have their feelings acknowledged.
- **Ask what you can do to support them.** Everyone has different ways of coping, so ask them what would support them at this time.
- **Look after yourself.** Supporting someone else can be difficult. You will experience a range of emotions yourself and it is okay to reach out for support yourself and share how this might be affecting you. Your wellbeing matters too.

Don't

- **Don't make assumptions.** It can be tempting to assume you know why the festive period is difficult for others, but none of us know how others really feel on the inside.
- **Don't belittle or dismiss anyone's feelings.** Avoid saying statements like: "be happy," "everyone else is enjoying themselves" or "count yourself lucky, lots have it much worse." However well intended you might be, you could invalidate the feelings of the other person and make them feel worse.
- **Don't force people to take part in festive activities.** You might think the person would eventually enjoy themselves but it's important to respect their decision. Try not to take it personally if they don't join in. There are many different reasons, including cultural and religious ones, why people might not take part.

Get Support

The Mental Health UK website has a wealth of information and resources you can use to manage your own mental health and support others with theirs.

www.mentalhealth-uk.org

Visit Clic, our online community where you can speak safely and openly about how you're feeling and get mutual support from people who understand.

www.clic-uk.org

If you or someone you know is in urgent need of lifesaving help, please call **999** or go to your nearest **Accident & Emergency (A&E)** department. For non-emergency medical help call **111**.