

Handling Christmas Day Stress

Christmas - the season of goodwill and peace to all people on earth. That's the hope of most of us, but unless you are lucky enough to live in a "perfect" family where life is continual sweetness and light, you might need to do a little planning to ensure a happy Christmas Day for everyone.

We live in a society where there is a lot of cultural pressure to connect with as many family members as possible in one short day. Many of us live in separated or blended families, and unless the various family elements are prepared to apply some common sense, our children may spend half of their Christmas Day stuck in a car being ferried across town from one parent to another.

However, there are some straightforward measures you can follow that can decrease the stress level. The trick is to regard Christmas as more than a one-day festival – why shouldn't it start on Christmas Eve and continue through to Boxing Day? Spread the celebrations around, and the children can be with one part of the family on Christmas Eve, another on Christmas Day, and see even more people on Boxing Day.

If your family is one of all different political hues and views on life congregating around the one table, you may need a little forethought to avoid the conversation straying into dangerous areas, especially if tongues are loosened by alcohol. Talk among your like-minded relatives about where the conversational hot spots are, and if family members are heading there, have a strategy which will deflect the conversation onto safer areas.

Alcohol consumption is another area of personal responsibility – it's all too easy to over-imbibe when Christmas can start at 12 noon and end late at night. So watch the amount of alcohol you drink and perhaps space it out with a glass of water between each drink, or give yourself an alcohol-free couple of hours where you just drink water. It's too late in the sober light of the next day to retract things you say or do simply because you didn't bother to monitor your alcohol intake.

If you are in the sad position of this being the first Christmas without a loved one, talk amongst yourselves about how you want to handle it – whether you want to acknowledge their memory in some way, or if it's still just too painful. Every family is different, so it should be talked about rather than ignored.

Our final tip is not to try for the perfect Christmas celebration - just go for the 'good enough' Christmas Day. We don't have to be 'perfect' parents to be successful, and the same goes for Christmas Day.

Happy Christmas to all!

Survival tips

- **Don't cram too much in on Christmas Day – spread celebrations from Christmas Eve through to Boxing Day**
- **Think about strategies to deflect conversations when they get to danger areas**
- **Watch how much you drink, and slow it down with a good water intake**