

Christmas concerns

We all know that Christmas can be a time of stress because we are trying to meet deadlines and the ideals of the happy Christmas images around us.

For many, the biggest stress is the finance required to create the kind of happy and bountiful Christmas we might want, and this can lead to arguments between partners.

Both are probably trying to juggle the competing demands of work, kids, school finishing and seeing extended family at Christmas, so it doesn't take much for tension to spill over.

Arguments are a normal part of any relationship, but when they lead to violence the stakes have suddenly escalated.

If you are in a family where violence is a possibility, Christmas can be the season where its special stresses may end in violence.

This can mean people are constantly walking on eggshells and just don't know how to handle the situation when things get difficult.

Even normally peaceful families can find there is an extra element that has the capacity to turn Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde - alcohol.

In mild doses it helps people to relax and socialise, but having a glass (or several) too much may lead to violence.

If your family tends to face high-conflict situations, rather than abusive ones, it's important to try not to let things build up, and to talk about them before the anxiety and stress go beyond the point of no return.

Sometimes just lowering your expectations of yourself and others can be enough to remove the stress that may lead to conflict. A bit of "chill time" may prevent a sudden eruption of stress and tension.

If you are in a family where there is a concern that there might be a violent Christmas, the first thing you must do is tell someone at the first sign.

Police are familiar with the issue and will respond appropriately.

Never believe that this is a once-only situation and accept an apology and assume it will never happen again. Violence usually escalates. It shouldn't be kept secret – violent partners need to take responsibility for their behaviour and get some help.

Organisations such as Relationships Australia Victoria can help if violence is becoming an issue, and the Domestic Violence Helpline is available 24 hours a day on **1800 656 463**

Survival tips

- **Resolve issues before they escalate to boiling point, and lower the alcohol intake.**
- **Lower your expectations of what you can handle at Christmas and build in some "chill time"**
- **If violence occurs, get help immediately. Call the police or the Domestic Violence Helpline on 1800 656 463**