



Helping yourself to stay well this Christmas

For those of us struggling with mental health, the season of Christmas can become an especially difficult time of year. For many, Christmas provides a reminder of people, places and things that we may have lost, find upsetting or are too hard to cope with. For others, Christmas is a time without family or friends to turn to and it represents a period of being alone, and can be dreaded by those of us who have been bereaved or feel that we have no-one around us. Some even feel at their lowest ebb at Christmastime, and end up in crisis because they do not know where else to turn for support.

This toolkit is designed to help you feel supported this Christmas. To help you cope with the difficult days, to stay well, to keep safe, and to know where to turn in a crisis.

What's free?

Christmas Eve

Free Carol Service at your local Church, visit:

www.achurchnearyou.com

Christmas Day

Free Christmas Lunch at the Crown and Anchor Pub, BR1 3HJ. Email:

martinlloyd1@hotmail.com to book your place!

Boxing Day

Free Bromley Ramblers Walk
www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/walkfinder/Bromley-ramblers-walking-for-health

Friday 28th Dec

Free Community Lunch at Living Well, Holy Trinity Church in Penge, SE20 7LX, from 13:00pm.

New Year's Eve

Lunch with Friends at Bromley United Reformed Church, 20 Widmore Road, BR1 1RY.

Combat Loneliness

1. **Reach out to someone:**

This could be your neighbour, an old friend or distant relative. You could give them a call, write them a letter, knock on their door, invite them round for a cup of tea, or to watch a film.

2. **Join in:**

Knowing what you can access at Christmas may feel daunting, but you are not alone. Thinking about ways to meet new people in the local community could give you a sense of belonging. Consider volunteering at a soup kitchen, attending a carol service, or make a shoe box for a local charity.

3. **Make a plan:**

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day can be amongst the hardest of the season. Consider where you will be on these days and what you may be doing. If you know you will be at home, think about what things make you feel good. If you are worried about being alone on Christmas, consider joining a Community Lunch or becoming a guest at someone's table. Plan ahead, let others know how you feel so you can be supported.



Keeping myself well

Christmas can be a nice time of year. The season of Christmas can provide an opportunity to do something for yourself and for others. It is important to allow yourself the space to enjoy it by making time to relax, have fun, spend time with others that matter and do things that make you feel good e.g. eating chocolate, socialising and staying up later, to help you wind down and plan for the New Year.

However, it can be difficult as our normal routines can be thrown up in the air and we can feel out of sorts. For some of us, there is the additional pressure that what we value to be important at Christmas may not feel good enough. It is only natural to compare ourselves to others either on social media, through television adverts and those around us, and this may leave us feeling downtrodden or need to reach some form of perfection with the way we act, the gifts we buy, the things we post online, the clothes we wear, the food we've cooked, the company we keep.

Knowing what our personal values are at Christmastime and what truly matters to us, is important to keep us feeling grounded and able to appreciate the season.

Help yourself this Christmas by:

1. Being mindful that having a healthy daily routine can help maintain a stable mood, resilience and wellbeing is important, but allow yourself the flexibility also. Be mindful by: reflecting on what you eat, drink, the amount of time you give to yourself and having healthy sleep.
2. While it may be difficult to maintain your usual activities or exercise routines, find a way to keep active over the festive season by trying something new (e.g. ice skating) and getting outdoors to enjoy the winter air (e.g. wintery walks with friends and loved ones).
3. Christmas can be a dreaded time of year for people who have been bereaved. Giving yourself a dedicated space to reflect on those that have passed will allow you to grieve safely this Christmas e.g. making a memory box, writing a letter or sending a Christmas card, arranging a special day or activity in memory of a loved one. On Christmas day you could wear a special object or raise a glass as a toast to them. For more support visit, **Cruse:** www.cruse.org.uk
4. Enjoying the festive season with friends and loved ones can be something we look forward to, it can be satisfying, can boost our self-esteem and sense of belonging and can help us to maintain positive relationships. However, keeping up with the social pressure to attend a range of social events, work parties, meet-ups with old friends, ad-hoc family events, can all become costly, be overwhelming and feel stressful as this limits time for ourselves and those closest to us. Be mindful about not overstretching yourself and being selective in your social commitments.
5. Christmas can be an expensive time of year and we all feel encouraged to spend a little more than normal. Knowing your financial limits and setting yourself a Christmas budget will help you to feel on top of the season and may reduce stress and anxiety from overspending. If you need support or are struggling with the management of money this Christmas reach out to **Step Change** (<https://www.stepchange.org/>).



6. Spending time with our closest friends and family is described as what matters at Christmas. However, for many of us it can be intensive, consuming and may make us feel trapped or without other options. Quality time with friends and family can be hugely valuable for us, but it is important to be sensitive to your own personal limits. To help yourself enjoy this time, think about what it is that you want most from your contact and time shared with loved ones. If it helps, think about useful activities you can do that so that it feels relaxed, focused and satisfying. For example: doing an activity together, pray together, watch a film, or chat over tea and cake, laugh or play a game.
7. Making time to enjoy your own company is equally as important as socialising at Christmas. The days of Christmas can feel hectic with entertaining, cooking, travelling, shopping and keeping up appearances etc. To help yourself this busy festive season, give yourself time each day to sit down, unwind, relax and self-care. For example, by having a mindful shower, meditating, painting your nails or giving yourself a massage.
8. If you are in a relationship, the challenges of Christmas can cause strain between you as a couple. Finding quality time for one another and being considerate of each other's needs is important, as it provides a space to become closer and improve the bond between you (e.g. small gestures such as holding hands or touching one another, hugging, being intimate with one another, and sharing feelings about the other person i.e. how much you love them or their qualities, and enjoy spending time with them). Finding time throughout the day to enjoy each other can be tough over Christmas, by using everyday moments as an opportunity to connect could be valuable (e.g. doing things together such as: cooking, doing chores, wrapping presents, sharing the driving, talking about the things that you have achieved in the year or enjoyed, reflecting on goals you want to set together for the New Year, or going to bed at the same time and doing so especially after an argument).

Some ideas of things you could do this Christmas:

Creative

- Make a shoe-box for the local church
- Make your own Christmas cards, crackers, or decorations, look online for inspiration!
- Get crafty with D.I.Y presents
- Bake festive gifts or treats to share with friends, loved ones and neighbors
- Visit a local Xmas craft fair

Social

- Make new friends this season becoming part of a church, choir or other social group e.g. at your local village hall, or a carol service
- Volunteer your time to help someone else in need this Christmas i.e. a local soup kitchen, or support a local charity at a Christmas event.
- Call someone you care about.
- Invite someone round for a Christmas drink.

Active

- Take a wintery walk with friends or family
- Try something new like ice skating, or build a snowman
- Get outdoors with the family e.g. play a ball game, use bikes or go to the local park
- Bundle everyone in the car and take a road trip to see the Christmas lights on display around town – enjoy Christmas music and hot chocolate as you go!





My Wellbeing Workbook

This workbook is a dedicated place for you to plan how you will make Christmas an enjoyable time for yourself and your family.

My Name:

My value this Christmas is.....

This Christmas I....

Want to...

E.g. see family, watch films, read, bake, go on a long walk, give back to others, socialise.

.....

Will spend time with....

E.g. my partner, my best friend, my parents, my children, my siblings etc.

.....

Will make time for myself by...

E.g. meditating, painting my nails, going for a massage, shopping, having a sleep etc.

.....

Ensure I have quality time with loved ones by...

E.g. by inviting people over, by attending a family event, writing a quiz, organising a game.

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Will try something new by...

E.g. trying a new activity such as ice skating, cooking a different dish, learning a craft, making my own cards.

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Am thankful for...

E.g. use this space to reflect on the year, what you have and those around you. Ask yourself what it means to you and your family.

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Where to go to access services that will support you

The Samaritans

This is a national charity providing emotional, listening support to any person, at any age, who feels alone, down or in crisis at any time of day or night. You can reach them 24/7, including Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. You are not alone.

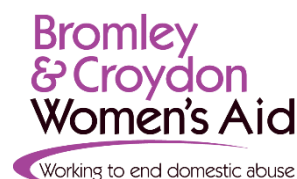


Freephone: 116 123 to talk to someone right now

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Bromley and Croydon - Women's Aid

This is a charity established to provide emotional support, information, advice and advocacy for any woman at risk of harm or victimisation as a result of domestic abuse, assault or harassment. The service will be open throughout the Christmas season.



Domestic Abuse Helpline (24/7): 0808 2000 247 (Freephone)

Website: <http://www.bcwa.org.uk/>

The Silver Line

This is a listening service set up to provide emotional information, advice and support to any person over 55 who needs to talk to someone. The service is available 24/7 all 365 days of the year.



Freephone: 0800 4 70 80 90

Website: www.thesilverline.org.uk

The Mix

This is a charity providing emotional support and advice to any young person up to the age of 25. They offer online counselling, telephone counselling, web chats and forums, as well as support and advice resources on their website.



Freephone: 0808 808 4994

Website: www.themix.org.uk

Crisis Text Line: Text 'THEMIX' to 85258

Knowing what to do in a crisis

No.	How I am thinking / feeling at the moment	Risk Level	The actions I need to take
1	<p>Thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am so overwhelmed - Nobody understands me - I hate myself <p>Feeling: Anxious, panicked, worried, confused, upset.</p>	I am experiencing suicidal thoughts but I do not wish to complete suicide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a safe space to remove yourself from areas / objects of danger. • Find somewhere quiet and cool where you can sit for a moment. • Try to breathe slowly (in for four / out for four), do this until you feel calmer: if it helps, try downloading the Fear Tools Anxiety App, or the Stay Alive App to keep yourself safe. • If you need to write things down to help yourself reflect then do so. If a negative thought, comes to mind try to give yourself a positive counter statement e.g. I don't want to be here (NT), then say my friends and my family want and need me here (PCS). • Connect with someone over the phone, visit a neighbour or make yourself a cup of tea and watch a programme, or get some fresh air by going for a walk. • Let family and friends know how you are feeling and seek their support. • Download Elefriends to speak with others about how your feeling and combat loneliness
2	<p>Thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People would be better off without me - I feel suicidal <p>Feelings: Angry, hopeless, resentful, isolated.</p>	I have intention and means to complete suicide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are experiencing suicidal feelings and feel that you need more support, connect with your GP and ask for an urgent referral to the Community Mental Health Team. Or connect with your support worker at Oxleas Foundation. • If you feel in crisis and not able to calm yourself on your own or wait for GP support, ring the Samaritans on 116 123 who will provide listening and emotional support. • If you cannot get through to the Samaritans as quickly as you need to, try to stay calm and contact: Support Line UK on: 01708 765 200 or visit their website for practical support: www.supportline.org.uk. • Contact the Oxleas Urgent Advice Line on: 0800 330 8590 for immediate, practical advice on how to cope in a mental health crisis.
3	<p>Thoughts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I don't want to be here anymore - I want to complete suicide <p>Feelings: Numbness, fatigue, delusion.</p>	I have intention, means, a plan and timeframes in which I want to complete suicide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you feel at risk to yourself, likely to cause harm or complete suicide phone 999 for an Ambulance immediately, or contact the Oxleas Urgent Advice Line on: 0800 330 8590 for immediate, practical advice on how to cope in a mental health crisis. • If you feel you cannot do this, you need to take yourself or get a neighbour to take you to A&E immediately at: Princess Royal University Hospital and the team there will be able to support you.



What to do when....

I want to self-harm

Follow this guide step by step to help yourself move from a state of panic or distress, to a state of calm.



1. **Visualise the stop sign**
2. **Breathe, slowly count back from 10**
3. **Keep yourself safe**
Put any objects down and move self out of the situation.
4. **Distract yourself**
listening to a nice song, use a red pen to draw on self, squeeze or rub an ice cube on your arm, snap elastic band on your wrist, pop balloons, play a game on your phone or... add your own here...

5. **Focus on time**
Keep yourself safe for ten minutes, then for a further 15 minutes, then 20 minutes etc. until the urge to harm yourself has passed.

You can also call the self-injury helpline on [0808 800 8088](tel:0808 800 8088)

For a list of distraction and displacement techniques go to <http://www.nshn.co.uk/downloads/Distractions.pdf>

Moving forwards you can access this workbook published by the national self-harm network to support you to explore and understand self-harm. <http://studymore.org.uk/hylw.pdf>



What to do when...

I am having a panic attack

Follow this guide step by step to help yourself move from a state of panic or distress, to a state of calm.



1. Visualise or look at the stop sign

2. Breathe slowly

Remember your lungs need oxygen to help you calm down, breathe slowly in for four and out for four. Do this for at least 5 minutes and longer if you need to.

3. Reassure yourself positively

A panic attack is an exaggeration of your body's response to fear, and your body is reacting by releasing hormones to help you cope. Reassuring yourself by speaking out loud can be helpful to reduce anxious symptoms. Repeat to yourself: "this feeling is only temporary, I am OK, I will be OK, this will soon end, I am safe."

4. Ground yourself

Focus on one object you can see in front of you, observe every detail. Think about the way it looks, smells or feels. Focus on the object and think about how it makes you feel, and how your body responds when you engage with that object. Do this for 5-10 minutes, changing the object if it helps you. Use natural oil if it helps.

5. Focus on time

This feeling will last between 5 and 20 minutes and your symptoms will usually peak within 10 minutes. Focus on making it through 10 minutes, and when you reach 10, try another 10, keep going until the wave of anxiety has passed.

If you need help with breathing, download Fear Tools Anxiety App to help you.

If you need more support when experiencing a panic attack visit: www.nopanic.org.uk

If you want to learn ways to prevent and manage anxious symptoms visit: www.moodgym.com/au