



acacia EAP
employee assistance program

Christmas Season.

Acacia EAP





CHRISTMAS PERIOD PREPARATION TIPS FROM ACACIA CONNECTION

Despite the usual depictions of the festive season, Christmas can be a very stressful time of year. For many this time of year is a maze of complex social interactions with family or relatives, some of whom you may rather not see.

There may be expectations, or at least perceived expectations, to create a 'wonderful Christmas' complete with the perfect gift and perhaps the most important meal of the year.

Some people rate Christmas as being more stressful than divorce or being robbed. Here are some tips to make your Christmas as stress-free as possible:

PLAN AHEAD

List what you need and get it sorted early. Think:

- Shopping;
- Food;
- Decorations;
- venue and seating plans or travel arrangements;
- cooking that can be done early.

Make the list as detailed as possible, include people's phone numbers or email addresses so that contacting is easy.

Prioritise items on your list. Think:

- can they be done now?
- If not now, when?
- and are they essential?

Allow plenty of time as tasks often take about 1/3 longer than we think they will! Do not overestimate how much you can achieve on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Delegate certain tasks to other family members to reduce your workload.

Keep your list for next year; it'll need tweaking and updating but will give you a good starting point for next year.



SHOPPING

- Set a budget and stick to it;
- Consider starting a Christmas savings account early and contribute small amounts regularly. If not this year than plan for next year;
- Avoid using credit as they are easy to lose track of, gather interest and can leave you paying for gifts long after Christmas Day;
- Shop online from the comfort of your own home as you'll not only save time and be less stressed but will probably save money too. Always make sure you buy from reputable online retailers and check that they can deliver before the big day;
- Check with others to see if gifts are even necessary. You may be surprised to learn that others are relieved at not having to buy gifts.



CARDS

Start writing your Christmas cards early too!

Many people receive and send lots of cards at Christmas time so start in mid-November, if you can. Write a few cards each day.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP

Perhaps the most useful mantra of all at Christmas time, regardless of what you are talking about – spending, food, drinking etc. Know when to stop.

Decide when you will stop your Christmas preparations and start to relax and enjoy the holiday. Work towards and try to stick to this goal, even if it is in the late afternoon on Christmas Eve. Remember that Christmas is your holiday too.

ON THE DAY

Keep Calm.

Play relaxing music, Take a relaxing bath to unwind, walk the dog.

Seating

If you have strained relationships with anyone coming to dinner, avoid sitting opposite them and instead seat them to one side and opposite somebody with whom they get along with better. Invite a few more people along if you can as it can help dilute any stress caused by challenging relatives or guests.



Avoid Caffeine

When your body is under stress it produces cortisol - preparing it for 'fight or flight' situations. Caffeine does too. Offering decaffeinated coffee and tea, or herbal tea alternatives can help keep the stress levels down.

Breathe

When we're stressed our heart beat increases and our breathing shallows, it's all part of the fight or flight reaction. Work on reversing this process and take time to breathe deeply.

Exhale first and then breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose, and then breathe slowly out through your mouth, repeat 10 times to instantly help reduce stressful feelings.

Have an Escape Plan

It's a good idea to have some pre-planned excuses to escape from proceedings if they get too stressful.



Be imaginative and use things such as leaving the room to make a phone-call to a friend or perhaps checking on a neighbour. Just by having planned a couple of escape routes you'll probably feel less stressed anyway but actually leaving the situation, even for 10 minutes, will help clear your mind and relax you.

Get Moving

Christmas is, for many, a time of excessive eating and drinking and exercise can be easily overlooked. Exercise is a great way to reduce stress as it burns off the 'fight or flight' hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline and helps produce mood-enhancing endorphins. Try going for a walk after dinner as the fresh air and exercise will lift your mood and make you feel better.



Manage Alcohol

Most de-stressing articles will tell you to avoid alcohol altogether but, let's be realistic, it is Christmas. However, do avoid excessive alcohol as it dehydrates your body and makes your liver work overtime to process it. It is also a depressant so whilst it may create feelings of relaxation in the moment, it creates a dip in mood shortly after and certainly the following day.

If you need EAP support over the Christmas/New Year period we will be here every day, we never close – call us on 1300 364 273, anytime.