



Heart & soul

Cate Mackenzie, our resident love coach, helps readers open their hearts to relationships they never thought possible



Have a very merry Christmas

The festive season doesn't have to be a time of stress or sadness if you know how to approach it...

Christmas – it's a time of joy, right? Yet, I do feel it's become a bit like Valentine's Day, in that there's so much pressure put on us.

Although it's meant to be a time of love, warmth and togetherness, that's not the case for everyone.

If you loved Christmas while growing up, this time of year may still be something that makes you feel good. But if the festive season brings back bad memories of alcohol-fuelled arguments between members of your family, it can be difficult.

People who don't have anyone to share the festivities with may be left feeling lonely and sad, while others could feel obligated to spend Christmas with ageing relatives as 'it could be their last'.

And then there are some who feel pressured into playing host

by inviting everyone to their house to celebrate.

Whatever your story and situation, it's important to take some time out to think through how to make this period nurturing, supportive and

'It should be a pleasant time of year, rather than stressful or damaging'

pleasant for you, as opposed to stressful or damaging.

To give you an example, let me look to my own family. My parents are divorced and my dad now has a stepfamily, but every year he and my stepmother host a Christmas celebration for me and my sisters, our husbands, children and my mum (luckily, they all get on!), for a weekend before 25 December.

This means we all get to have a Christmas together that feels loving and connected, but are free to choose what we do on the

actual day without anyone missing out or feeling guilty or worrying that we've let anyone down.

Also, we've agreed that we'll only give presents to the children, which takes the stress out of having to buy so many gifts.

Another lovely thing to do is to reflect on the year that's gone and look towards the one to come.

To help you do this, look at the 12 days of Christmas as the 12 months of the following year, then pause each day to think about what you'd like to see happen in each of those months and make notes.

I want to share my three tips to help you have a happy, harmonious and restorative time at Christmas. I know they may just sound like common sense, but sometimes the obvious doesn't occur to us when we have so much to organise. Here's to a merry Christmas everyone!

How to have a stress-free festive season

If you are in a relationship, put your heads together as early as possible in the year, to figure out what you both want to do for Christmas and create a plan of action so you can see how you can make it happen.

If you are going to take time off over Christmas, try to think about getting away for a few days. You can still be part of a bigger family Christmas, but let your relatives know what you want to do. This way you can help them plan a gathering involving everyone as soon as you can, or they can make other plans.

Be kind to yourself and others. Avoid arguments and stress by talking things through and trying to find solutions, but don't sacrifice yourself. Make sure you share all the planning with friends and family, so they understand how much needs to be done before Christmas rolls around. And don't be afraid to speak up when you think you're going to need help or aren't happy with the decisions being made.

By spreading the stress and worry of the festive season among everyone, you can take the burden off yourself. ■



Know how to keep things merry and bright at Christmas

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? Cate Mackenzie is a love coach and couples counsellor with more than 20 years' experience. For more information about her work, visit catemackenzie.com