

MAKE CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Even the happiest time of the year can be a lonely one *By Verena Zimmermann*

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"Merry Christmas" is what we can read on every Christmas card,

banner or even chocolate in the shops at this time of the year, but in reality Christmas isn't such a merry time for a lot of people. For many, Christmas is a distressing or melancholy season rather than a cheerful occasion to celebrate. Life coach Linda Nicholson explains why Christmas can be more blue than white and gives tips on how to overcome the Christmas blues.

"For many people Christmas and New Year can be 'emotive times' depending on where they are at in their life. For anyone who has had a recent bereavement, Christmas can be a reminder of past times with their loved one. Christmas is also evocative for many people of their own childhood experiences of this holiday, reminding them of both happy and sad times."

During this period, our emotions tend to boil over. But it's not only our emotions that are hard to control: with all the tempting gifts and decorations to buy, it's difficult to control how much you can really afford to spend on your shopping.

"Money worries frequently surface over the holiday season as overspending and impulse buying can lead to increased debt," says Linda. "The current economic climate is also impacting many people as they adapt to a new financial reality.

following redundancies, pay cuts, etc.

"Set aside some time today to look at your finances. Be honest with yourself and know well in advance what you can afford to spend and stick to your budget. Planning your shopping well in advance will also make impulse buying less likely."

Other expenses could result from going out with friends as Christmas tends to be a busy socialising time.

"Increasing your social life over the holiday season does not mean your spending has to increase. You could for example choose inexpensive ways to socialise such as having an American pot luck dinner with friends where everyone brings a dish to share or organise a DVD or games evening at your home."

Despite any problems Christmas might entail, we can still appreciate it as the happy season it is meant to be by incorporating what the Linda Nicholson calls 'attitude of gratitude'.

"There may be less money to go around, maybe you're grateful that your children or grandchildren are healthy and safe wherever they are or that you had a great chat with your friend on the phone this morning.

"Start to become more aware of your thoughts, words and actions this holiday season. Choose positive thoughts, self-dialogue and people as much as possible. Remember that 'happiness is a state of mind' and therefore we can all create it for ourselves."

Another thing that you can create for yourself is a stress-less Christmas. Especially for us mothers out there Christmas often means juggling buying gifts, decorating the house, cooking a three-course Christmas dinner, entertaining family and friends, but Christmas doesn't have to be like that.

"Planning ahead can eliminate a lot of unnecessary stress," says Linda.

"Creating your shopping list well in advance can help you to know exactly what you want when you reach the shops. Think about buying some gifts online and avoid busy shopping times like weekends and evenings.

Also consider leaving young children with a babysitter rather than take them shopping and always build in some treats for you such as meeting a friend for coffee in the middle of shopping."

For the nerve-wracking Christmas dinner she also has a simple, but effective solution: "Perhaps this year you would prefer if someone else did the cooking or maybe there is no need to cook a traditional Christmas dinner and you might be happy with something simpler. Consider making a reservation today with a hotel or restaurant and enjoy a stress free Christmas Day."

But what about our lovely relatives? Christmas is a time when families come together. That's wonderful – but only at first sight, because often enough these family gatherings result in old family

“ Spending a lot of time in one house can feel very intense – so get out!

issues coming up again and arguments over the dinner table.

"As the pressure of Christmas starts to build around us, we sometimes forget that we have choices in every area of our life. Just because we have always spent Christmas Day with our husband's family doesn't mean we 'have' to do so every year.

"If you choose to be with family, remember that spending a lot of time indoors with everyone in one house can feel very intense. You might take your children out to the park to play or just kick a ball around the garden. They need a break too from the intense family dynamics around them."

And if you have the feeling that the situation is slowly, but surely getting out of control, there's only one thing to do: "Leave the situation before rowing starts. If rowing starts, remember to take a deep breath, count to 10 and leave the situation taking your children with you."

Other people have the opposite problem: they don't have any contact with their family anymore or had recent bereavements and therefore suffer from loneliness around the Christmas period.

If you're familiar with this feeling of loneliness, don't curl up under your blanket and isolate yourself from society. If you feel blue during the festive season, it's up to you to change that!

"If you would like to be around other people during the holidays, invite friends and family to join you rather than wait for them to invite you.

This is also a great time of year to get in touch with friends or family members you have lost touch with. Why not give them a call and let them know you've been thinking about them?" says Linda.

To sum it up: it's up to you to decide how, where and with whom you would like to spend the few days. Christmas can be anything you want it to be.

"Hollywood has created the myth of the perfect family which is impossible to live up to, as it is a fantasy.

"Forget about this utopia and instead, be clear on what you want. Once you know this, you can communicate clearly with your partner and family and find a compromise that works for everyone!" **WW**

Linda Nicholson
Personal, Financial and Career Coach
'Oscailt', 8 Pembroke Road, Dublin 4
Tel: 087 2189924
Email: linda.nicholson.lc@gmail.com
Web: www.lindamnicholson.com