



Amaranth Foundation

Christmas can be tough...

Christmas can be a stressful and depressing time for many people. Financial and time pressures, isolation, family tensions, separation and divorce, bereavement, becoming a step-family, or just reflecting on another year gone by can all undermine the Christmas spirit.

Significant occasions, such as birthdays and Christmas, are always difficult for a bereaved family. Suggestions include:

- Deciding to ignore Christmas altogether could exacerbate your grief. However, depending on your family's needs, you may wish to try something different this year – for example, if you've always had lunch at home, consider having it at a restaurant instead. Alternatively, sticking to your family's traditions may be more helpful. The important thing is to discuss your preferences as a family.
- Expect and appreciate that people show their grief in different ways. One person may want to reminisce, while another may prefer to remain tight-lipped.
- If you feel you can, talk together about your loved one. Sharing memories and tears can help you come to terms with Christmas without them.
- You may like to spend some time alone so you can think about your loved one. Talking out loud to them or writing them a letter can be helpful.
- Don't feel guilty if you find yourself having a good time – sharing a few laughs with family or friends doesn't mean you don't love or miss that special person.
- Ask friends for their support. If they don't know how to help you, tell them. It might be beneficial to talk to someone neutral such as a bereavement counsellor.

Some people find themselves alone at Christmas time. This may be due to relocation to a city far from relatives, a marital break-up, or family estrangement. The emphasis on family, friends and shared good

times during the 'festive season' can make these people feel depressed and unloved. Suggestions include:

- If separated by distance, keep in constant touch by phone, mail and email.
- Christmas shopping for loved ones can help you feel connected, even though you may be half a world away. Make sure you post your gifts in early December to avoid the Christmas mail rush.
- Make plans for Christmas Day. If you have no one to share the day with, consider volunteering for charity work – for example, you could help organisations such as The Salvation Army give Christmas lunch to people in need.
- Attend community celebrations such as Carols by Candlelight and neighbourhood picnics.

Use the strength of your feelings to change your situation. If you are estranged from loved ones, perhaps you could attempt to reconcile with relatives and old friends (if possible), or else take steps to widen your social network.

All families experience tension to some degree. Part of the reason why Christmas time can be so stressful is the unrealistic expectation of coming together as a happy family on this one day of the year.

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Christmas_can_be_stressful

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Being “Mindful” could help

When you're mindful, you get to experience living life in the moment. There are a lot of different strategies you can use to build how mindful you are.

When you're mindful, you're able to pay attention to the present moment, and not get swept up thinking about the past or worrying about the future. It means you get to enjoy every little moment of life as it happens, and the impact of this on your mental and physical health is really positive.

There are a lot of different things you can do to help yourself be more mindful. Some of these things are easy and you can incorporate them into everyday life, others require a bit more time and some training.

Mindfulness meditation

There are two types of mindfulness meditation:

- **Concentrative meditation** – which focuses your attention on breathing, an image, or a sound, so that you can calm your mind and minimise thoughts
- **Mindfulness meditation** – which involves trying to make you aware of sensations, feelings, thoughts and images that you experience from moment to moment. It also tries to reduce how much you judge these moment to moment experiences – the point is to ‘notice, and let it be’.

In mindfulness meditation you learn to remain aware of what is happening and what you're feeling in that moment, whether you like it, dislike it, or are confused about it. You increase your tolerance for seeing the unpleasant - neither identifying with it, nor running from it. As you become more and more familiar with the usual patterns in your mind, mindfulness allows you to *choose* what your mind focuses on by interrupting its habits (e.g. to put yourself down).

Other ways to build mindfulness

- **Savouring.** Take time to enjoy and appreciate an activity you are doing. It could be any experience - food, conversa-

tion, checking out a good view. The point of it is to pay really close attention to the details – be aware of smells, tastes, sights, sounds, and things you can feel.

- **Mindful breathing.** Take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. When you're mindful of your breathing you need to pay attention to what breathing feels like, what happens to different parts of your body, and the sound of your breath. If your mind wanders off, it's not something to worry about. Just bring your attention back to your breathing when you can.

- **Mental photography.** Try taking mental photos of interesting things you find as you are out and about. To take a mindful photo, think about what details you'd like to capture in a shot.

Look at the world through a new lens. Imagine you are seeing everything for the first time and pay attention to little things that wouldn't normally get noticed.

Becoming more mindful involves retraining your brain, so it's something that does take a bit of time. It can be quite difficult to focus for long without your thoughts wandering off somewhere else, and it's also difficult not to get frustrated when that happens.

However, the key here is really perseverance. The more you practice mindfulness, the better you will become. Most people really struggle at first. When you're building how mindful you are using a particular strategy, get into the habit of practicing every day –even if it's just for a few minutes. Eventually, you should start to improve.

If you're really struggling with a particular strategy, try a different one. Everyone's different, and some strategies may be easier for you than others – the point is to try a few out and find one that works for you.

<http://au.reachout.com/How-to-be-more-mindful>

Everyone will have a different way of coping, but however you react to Christmas, it's important that you look after yourself and have your own way of getting through the times when you're feeling really low.

<http://au.reachout.com/Managing-grief-at-Christmas>

Christmas by any other name...

In addition to "Christmas", the holiday has been known by various other names throughout its history.

The Anglo-Saxons referred to the feast as "midwinter", and more rarely as ... "Nativity", meaning "birth".

In Old English, *Gēola* ("Yule") referred to the period corresponding to January and December; the cognate Old

Norse *Jól* was later the name of a pagan Scandinavian holiday which merged with Christmas around 1000.

"Noel" (or "Nowell") entered English in the late 14th century and is from the Old French *noël* or *naël*, itself ultimately from the Latin *nātālis (diēs)*, "(day) of birth".

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>

Grief isn't something to get over

Grief just doesn't just come knocking when someone dies. It comes in everyday forms, like when we've lost something or someone who is important to us. Grief and managing grief could happen with the end of a relationship or friendship, even moving away.

<http://au.reachout.com/Tough-Times/Loss-and-grief/Other-loss-and-grief>

The emotion of grief may be triggered by the loss of a loved one or the result of a life circumstance. Many people believe that if you have effectively mourned a loss you will then achieve closure. The notion that one mourns a loss and then gets over it, to the extent that emotions about the loss are not triggered in the future, is a myth.

You never get over loss. As time passes, the intensity of feelings about the loss will lessen, you might also find ways to sooth or distract yourself, or you can partially bury grief-related feelings by creating new memories. But you are not going to get over it because that's impossible: you cannot erase emotional memory. Besides, it's not about achieving closure. Instead you have to figure out what you are going to do when your emotional memories are later triggered.

Emotions that have to do with loss are triggered throughout our lives and you will live with them. Usually they are in the form of anniversary reactions, such as the birthday or death day of the lost loved one or any significant holiday in which you might want to be with the person who is gone. Reminders, such as visiting a place you've been with the person you lost, will trigger a similar response.

One of the reasons that grief happens to be triggered by external reminders, such as in anniversary reactions, is because grief is an emotion that sends a vague alert to help you to remember, rather than to forget. Even so, what most people do with grief is attempt to forget--to get over it--which is quite contrary to the purpose of the emotion. Rather than try to forget, one must attempt to remember and cooperate with what your emotion is trying to convey.

There are many ways to remember. You can remember what you learned from the person you lost, remember what you enjoyed, and you can cry if you feel like crying. Even if your grief is about a relationship gone bad, there is always something that you can learn by remembering it.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201105/grief-isnt-something-get-over>

Some Christmas strategies

For those still mourning the loss of a spouse, child, parent or other loved one, that first holiday season can be an emotionally trying time. Between the memories that are stirred up by the festivities and the expectations to be jolly and full of holiday spirit, the season can mean slipping back into grief and depression for those still coping with loss.

While grief counsellors and therapists agree that there's no right or wrong way to celebrate that first holiday after the death of a loved one, there are ways to ease the pain of the holiday, and things that friends and family can do to help those in mourning.

Family Support vs. Time Alone

"If a person says to their family, 'I just need to be by myself,' often some family members will say that that's bad and they can't be left alone. But if [you] feel in your gut and your heart that that's what you need for your coping, then you follow your gut. Everybody needs space differently, and I wouldn't say that it's necessarily a sign of someone not coping to want to be alone," says Amy Sales, a social worker and author of "Walking on Eggshells," a guide for caregivers of those with life-limiting illnesses.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/MindMoodResourceCenter/surviving-holidays-grief-loss-loved/story?id=12425095>

Christmas may have been a time you spent with someone you have lost, so it's completely normal to feel sad that they're not with you. It may help to take some time out, allow yourself to be sad, and think of the person you love. Some suggestions of things you can do include:

- find a quiet spot to remember all the good things about the person
- go and do something that you used to do together
- write a letter to the person
- revisit that favourite spot you had
- share some of the memories.

You might find it difficult to celebrate when you're missing someone you love. Many people report experiencing a range of conflicting/different feelings such as sadness, guilt, or excitement. However, getting together with family and close friends may be a chance to remember the good times. It's important to know that it's ok to relax and have a laugh - having fun is not a sign that you miss a person you have lost any less. Be prepared and remember that this could be a tough time for you, so it's a good idea to be mindful that you might need to treat yourself with a bit of care. If possible, make some time each day to treat yourself to something you enjoy doing.

<http://au.reachout.com/Managing-grief-at-Christmas>

“HOW PEOPLE *Live* MATTERS”

... it really does.

AMARANTH FOUNDATION

23 Riesling St
Corowa NSW 2646

Phone: 02 6033 1738
Mobile: 0408 388 533
Fax: 02 6033 3507

info@amaranth.org.au

We are on the web:
www.amaranth.org.au

Follow us on Facebook
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Christmas worldwide

Christmas Day is celebrated as a major festival and public holiday in countries around the world, including many whose populations are mostly non-Christian.

In some non-Christian countries, periods of former colonial rule introduced the celebration (e.g. Hong Kong); in others, Christian minorities or foreign cultural influences have led populations to observe the holiday. Countries such as Japan, where Christmas is popular despite there being only a small number of Christians, have adopted many of the secular aspects of Christmas, such as gift-giving, decorations, and Christmas trees.

Christmas celebrations around the world can vary markedly in form, reflecting differing cultural and national traditions. Family reunions and the exchange of gifts are a widespread feature of the season. Gift giving takes place on Christmas Day in most countries. Others practice gift giving on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day, and January 6, Epiphany.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>

The holiest of all holidays are those
kept by ourselves in silence and apart;
the secret anniversaries of the heart.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Cheat's Fruit Mince Tarts

Ingredients

- 60g unsalted butter, chilled, chopped
- 3 tbs (1/4 cup) caster sugar
- 1/2 cup (55g) ground almonds
- 1/2 cup (75g) plain flour
- 36 ready-made mini pastry tart shells
- 410g jar fruit mince
- Icing sugar, to dust

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Place butter, sugar, almonds and flour in a bowl and rub in the butter with your fingers until you have a coarse crumble topping. Fill each shell with some fruit mince and sprinkle crumble mixture on top. Bake for 5-7 minutes until golden. Dust with icing sugar just before serving.

<http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/4678/cheats+fruit+mince+tarts>



Little Mince Tarts

Ingredients

- Melted butter, to grease
- 2 sheets (25 x 25cm) frozen ready-rolled puff pastry, just thawed
- 200g (1/2 cup) bought fruit mince
- Icing sugar, to dust

Preheat oven to 200°C.

Brush twenty-four 40ml (2-tablespoon) capacity mini muffin pans with melted butter to grease.

Use a round 6.5cm-diameter pastry cutter to cut 12 discs from each pastry sheet. Press 1 pastry disc into each pan. Spoon the fruit mince evenly among the pans.

Bake in oven for 10-12 minutes or until light golden. Set aside in the pans to cool completely. Transfer to a serving platter.

Dust with icing sugar to serve.

<http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/18703/little+mince+tarts>

