

CHRISTMAS TIPS

The MATES Helpline is available 24/7 throughout the Christmas and New Year holiday period including all the public holidays.

 **0800 111 315**



Christmas is supposed to be a time of cheer, togetherness, good food, drinks and gifts. But for a lot of people that isn't the reality at all. In fact for many people, this is the toughest time of year, particularly those experiencing:

- Financial problems
- Separation/divorce
- Child custody/access issues
- Depression, anxiety and/or other mental health problem
- Isolation/Loneliness
- Grief

To help get you through this tough time, we have a few tips:

Forget perfection:

Don't expect everything to be perfect just because it's Christmas. Despite the expectation of "merriness" and "togetherness" it is really just another day. Often with all the added stress and pressure it often ends up being less than perfect.

Learn to say NO:

All too often we spend Christmas trying to please others and have a terrible time ourselves as a result. Plan to just do one or two things including something that you and those closest to you enjoy most. Remember it's ok to say "no" and sit some things out. Spreading visits out so they are not all packed into the one day may also help.

Avoid family conflict:

Plan an exit strategy for any family gatherings at which you are likely to get into conflict and try to avoid touchy subjects. If conflict begins to arise have a neutral response ready, like "I can see how you would feel like that", "Sorry to hear you feel like that" & "Let's talk about it another time". Then escape.

Set limits on money:

Christmas shouldn't be all about presents; it's about doing the things we enjoy with the people we care about. Reign in the stress and cost by deciding on a limit you will spend on each person and/or plan a "Secret Santa". You can also plan to do simple things that you and your family enjoy that don't cost a lot of money, like a barbecue by the river.

Don't binge on alcohol:

It might seem easier to try to drown out our stress, anxiety or depression with alcohol, but alcohol itself is a depressant. In the end it makes us feel worse. It can also magnify problems we are having with others, lower our inhibitions, and blow up into full-scale conflicts and other negative situations we regret later. Drink plenty of water, drink lowstrength alcohol, set a limit on how much you will drink, and have an escape plan ready for when you have reached that limit.

Visit a friend who is alone or struggling, or perhaps volunteer:

Start a tradition of doing something for people that are less fortunate. Taking the focus off ourselves and onto those that are doing it tougher than us can make us more grateful for what we have. It can also help to lessen our own negative thoughts.

If alone and /or doing it tough, plan ahead:

Even if you don't feel like celebrating, don't isolate yourself. Plan ahead to spend the day with someone else who is in the same boat as you over Christmas or drop into a Community Christmas Event in your area. If you don't have anyone you can spend time with, plan to look after yourself on the day and embrace the solitude. Treat yourself by doing something you really enjoy, get plenty of rest, eat your favourite food, exercise to release your "feel good" endorphins and distract yourself with some good movies, fishing, music or a book.

If you are grieving:

Whether recent or some time ago, Christmas can be a painful reminder of your loss. Many people feel a range of conflicting emotions like sadness, enjoyment and guilt.

It's OK to take time out and allow yourself to feel. It's also ok to relax and enjoy yourself: it doesn't mean you love or miss the person any less. No matter how you feel, try to surround yourself with people who can support you and share your memories. Other things that may be comforting are finding a quiet place to remember the person, writing the person a letter and/or going to places or doing things that you used to do together.

The MATES helpline is FREE for all construction workers and their immediate families: **0800 111 315**

From all the team at MATES, we wish you a safe and peaceful holiday season!