

# Merry Christmas

## Christmas Activity Pack 2023

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## All I want for Christmas is my mental health







Christmas is that time of year that brings magic and peace to all, or does it?

I have always loved Christmas—the lights, the traditions, giving, receiving, and precious family time spent at home. This all sounds wonderful, but unfortunately, Christmas can be anything but magical, with pressures and expectations threatening to overwhelm you.



With some shops opening their Christmas aisles as early as September, the 'offers' not long behind. Perfection is personified in every 30-second advert in between every program on TV from early November. Happy families, great food, flowing drinks, lavishly wrapped gifts under the flawless luxurious trees, children laughing and sharing, and the well-behaved dog sitting quietly in the corner are flaunted across our screens. We all want to create the magical Christmas for everyone, but that can mean anxiety-inducing pressures, oppressive internal and external expectations. What is the reality of Christmas? In September, the kids start to see signs of Christmas, reminded of Santa's generosity, and the gift requests start rolling in. Lists change every week with the offer of the week. You try to manage expectations as you start to think about what Christmas is going to cost, and the requests add up.

Distraction from Christmas comes in the form of Halloween and half-term in October, and you stretch the distraction into November with fireworks, sparklers, hot dogs, and talk of Guy Fawkes. By mid-November, Christmas adverts are in full swing, the children are reminded of Santa's generosity once again, and the requests start up again. You try to manage expectations again, not realizing that maybe you need to manage your own as ideas of achieving the perfect Christmas swirl around your head.

**MERRY  
XMAS**


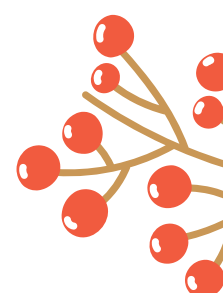


You dream of smiling, grateful children on Christmas day as they open their lovingly bought gifts, and bang the dream disappears as your children are overwhelmed, over-excited, and are fighting amongst themselves for the tenth time before 10 am on a busy Saturday. Adults tell you not to buy for them and focus on the kids, but you know that last time you adhered to that request, you were reminded of the wonderful present your sister bought your mother for six months.




Your planned shopping trip arrives, the kids are supposed to be in school, and then one of them takes ill, and your shopping day is postponed. You play nursemaid to a questionably ill child who seems perfectly well by 9:45 am as he stuffs himself with a second breakfast and is hopping around the furniture, quick to prove his sickness with a 'poorly face' when questioned.

Just over four weeks to go, and you haven't managed to start your shopping yet. The kids' excitement grows with the arrival of the naughty little elves you mistakenly invited into your house, bringing the advent calendars, and the official countdown begins.




So far, you are holding everything together with a laugh and reassurance there is plenty of time to get everything. The children write their official letters to Santa, and one last change of plan for Christmas day: the family is coming to you. The worries snake around your head as the pressure is turned up.



The elves are up to their usual trickery, inconveniencing your morning routine as you have to climb over their spa days, and the kids' wake-up time gets earlier to check on the elvish adventures. The excitement is building every day, the scraps and fights are getting more frequent, and your patience is wearing thin as the feeling of failure grips you, way before the day arrives.



**MERRY  
XMAS**

A festive border surrounds the text, featuring a gingerbread man in a top hat holding a candy cane, holly leaves with red berries, a purple gift box with a teal ribbon, a red star, a pink and white striped candy cane, a pink and white patterned stocking, and a pink and white patterned hat.

By this point, you are on track to finish shopping, but the doubts are creeping in as to just how perfect it will be, with Auntie Jen's famous drunken outbursts, your mum's criticisms, your dad making excuses for mum, kids not being happy with their gifts—it all feels too much as your head races with doubts, self-criticism, and the fight to achieve perfection. The requests keep coming from family with no offer to help, and you're feeling exhausted and that you could have a break from Christmas for this year.

Christmas Eve activities go well, still, your mind is not quiet, and every disappointment is magnified and felt intensely. You put your best foot forward and get everything done for Christmas day. The kids are happy, you catch snippets of criticism, and you keep going, all so you don't have to listen to too much of it, in case it reinforces what you're already thinking. The day is successful for everyone except you, as you lay in bed on Christmas night, listing the things you should have done better, missing the happiness in your children, the satisfaction in your partner, the joys of the day, as your self-punishment takes over. Your mind and head are still going.

People will offer suggestions of you should..., you should, you should, and it's just more pressure to do what others think is right, but there is no one way to do Christmas, only the best way for you. If creating the best Christmas you can is important to you, then looking after yourself is equally as important.

**MERRY  
XMAS**

A festive decorative border surrounds the text. It includes a gingerbread man in a top hat holding a candy cane, holly leaves with red berries, a purple gift box with a teal ribbon, a pink and white striped stocking, a pink knit hat with a green pom-pom, a red star, a green Christmas tree made of dashed lines, a red and white striped candy cane, and a purple gift box with a teal ribbon. The text 'MERRY XMAS' is written in large, bold, red letters on the left side.

## Plan early

Planning doesn't bring everyone joy, and I'm not a planner by nature, but I remember the year I started planning from the previous Christmas. It was the first Christmas that I wasn't rushing in December, felt financially secure, and reduced the stress. So if planning earlier (doesn't have to be a year ahead) can help you in any way to reduce stress, it could be saving monthly, buying one gift/wrapping paper/accessories a month, or getting support from family members with planning the day.

## Manage expectations

Be realistic from the inside out. Start with your own expectations; you may not realize exactly what you would like for Christmas to be. Be realistic, taking into account who is involved in your Christmas. For example, if you have a grunting teenager who has stopped taking part in family activities, this won't necessarily change because it is Christmas. Or if you have family members coming to you for Christmas who complain about everything, it's not personal.

Manage your children's/family's expectations, be honest with them about what you can afford, what Christmas is about, and what you want from them.

## Set realistic financial limits

I understand it can be guilt-inducing to say to your child they can't have that £1800 phone that all their friends are talking about having. But if you're struggling to pay for it before or after, that can cause long-term acute stress. I see a lot of first-time parents buying thousands of pounds worth of gifts before the child understands, and what usually happens is every year tops the last year, meaning more and more expense in a time when wages are not rising, uncertain times.



## Put yourself first occasionally and take time out

This one almost seems impossible at Christmas time with all the commitments, but it's probably the time when you need it most. Time out doesn't have to be long, just quality time to be out of your busy head and busy life to relax and focus on your own needs.

## Be kind to yourself

Increasing positive self-talk and reminders of how well you're doing reduce the room and time for self-criticism, self-punishment, and berating. We have a habit of noticing our mistakes and failures, raking ourselves over the coals, and feeling lousy but missing all the great things we are achieving.

Practice gratitude

It can be hard to recognize the good things in your life once your mind starts a life of its own. Searching for the things to be grateful for is empowering, satisfying, and adds to your happiness.

## Distract and refocus

You may think that you are distracted enough with all the extra things you are doing. However, doing the things that make you happy and help you gain the space to refocus are a great benefit. It doesn't all have to be about your family, children, or Christmas. Some time can be set aside for you to take time out to distract and refocus.

## Catch your busy mind and break the patterns

The stress of Christmas may have triggered those negative thought patterns, e.g., 'I can't cope,' 'It won't be perfect,' 'I can't do this' type thoughts that exacerbate stress and anxiety. Being able to recognize the thought patterns and disrupt the patterns, one simple disruption technique is saying to yourself "I'm having those thoughts," you disrupt the thought pattern and enable yourself to do something else more productive and even be kinder to yourself.

MERRY  
XMAS



## Set your boundaries stick to them

Setting boundaries takes practice if you've never done it before. Boundaries are your way of communicating to others how you want to be treated. Be clear in your mind about what behaviors you are willing to give and accept, e.g., no criticism. Some boundaries need to be communicated to others but not all. No criticism would need to be communicated to the person or to all attending your house. If you decide that you are not going to put up with someone taking over the cooking, you have to be clear and consistent in your behavior and insistence that you're happy to do it.

A free Resource for parents wanting to be more intentional in 2023


<https://www.susannahconway.com/unravel>

## Tips for managing expectations

- Talk to your children and manage expectations
- Decide what you want for your family this Christmas - what memories, emotions, experiences do you want them to experience.
- Turn off the TV and all the adverts
- Drop the comparisons and focus on your own Christmas.
- Get the kids involved in planning, give them a task to organise an activity

**MERRY  
XMAS**





**Free online activities** - *\*always check online activities* before allowing your children to watch or use online resources and supervise at all time

**Norad Santa tracker:** <https://www.noradsanta.org/en>

**Google Santa tracker:** <https://santatracker.google.com>


**Free email from santa** Santa Email - Santa Tracker


<https://santatracker.net/santa-email>

### **Christmas eve / day surprises**

- **Read** 'Twas Night before Christmas or another Christmas book(s)
- Free printable - <https://jollyfestive.com/night-before-christmas-free-printable-poem/>
- **Wrap the door** to the room that Santa delivers presents to, the children will love breaking through the door to get to their presents. **\*MOST IMPORTANT:** don't forget to leave the door open.
- **Use the naughty Elves-** if you have elves, I'm sure they could be a little bit naughty and hide the children's presents around the room or house, make it fun to find them
- **Create a Christmas character stack** – put their presents in 3 different size boxes and wrap in the relevant colours (white – snowman, black, red and white for Santa) stack to make a snowman/ Santa so children have those boxes to open before opening their presents
- Create a **new family tradition**

**\*\*You are responsible for supervising all activities online or otherwise. All information contained in this pack are suggestions not recommendations.**

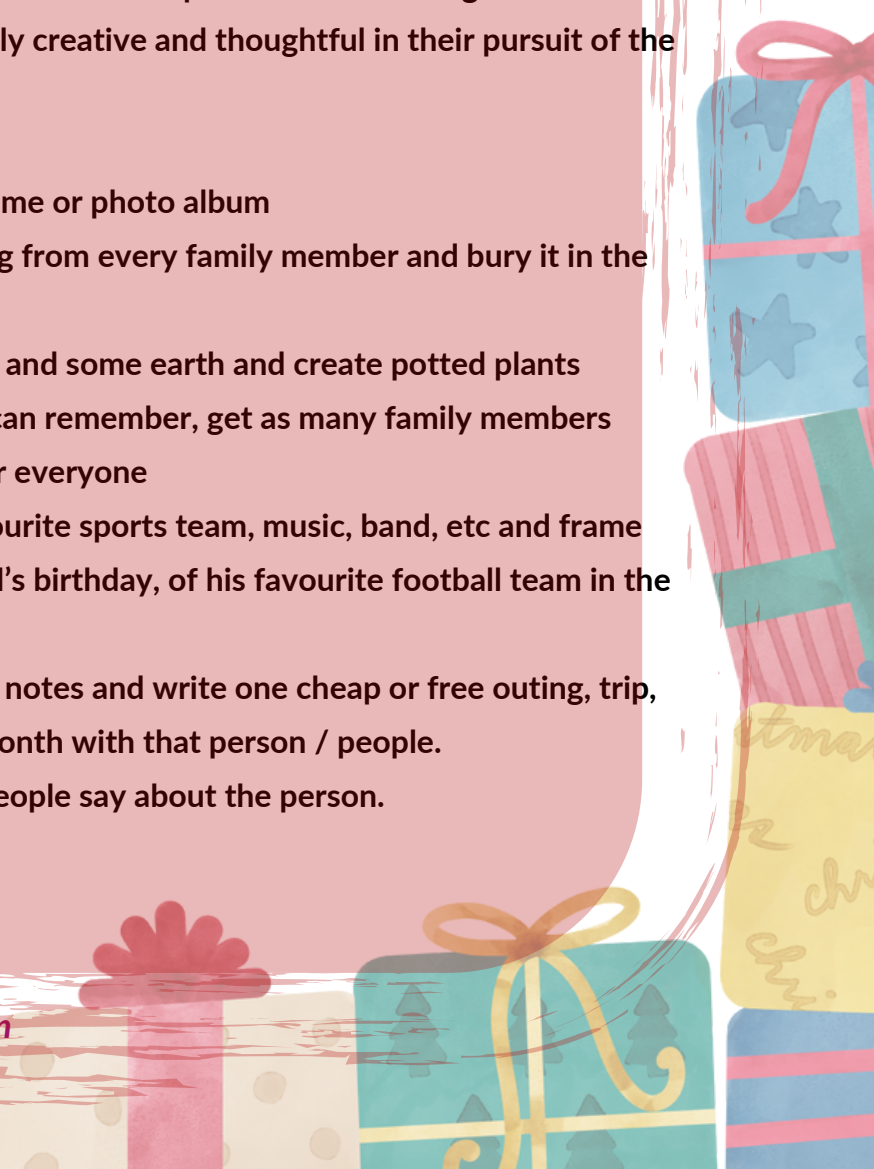




## Cheap or Free present ideas

- Create vouchers for 3 or 4 experiences through the year, set money aside to pay for that each month. You'll give yourself time to save for each one.
- Go to local parks / country parks for walks, bike rides, runs, skips
- Create a Voucher book from parents to children e.g. clean their room, do their homework once, do their chores for a day/week, take them to a free park of their choice, organise a tea party, etc
- Secret Santa for family members, it reduces the amount of people you have to buy for and the cost. We have different rules every year. You can limit the amount spent. You can insist on charity shop buys. You can assign how many presents to be bought out of the money. You can choose for all presents to be a certain colour. You can decide on all presents starting with the same initial as the person you are buying for. You can add your own rules. Recycle old gifts that haven't been opened. Make a DIY gift. The children have loved this and gotten really creative and thoughtful in their pursuit of the ideal gifts.
- Painted rocks
- Print off photos and make your own frame or photo album
- Create time capsule and put in one thing from every family member and bury it in the garden
- Plants – buy a pack of seeds, small pots and some earth and create potted plants
- Create a family tree as far back as you can remember, get as many family members involved in the search and make one for everyone
- Print off historical information of a favourite sports team, music, band, etc and frame them. We did this for my children's dad's birthday, of his favourite football team in the year that he was born. He loved it.
- 12 dates of 2024 – get 12 envelopes or notes and write one cheap or free outing, trip, walk, castle, museum etc to do every month with that person / people.
- Create a framed poster of nice things people say about the person.
- Book / podcast / album exchange
- Make a calendar


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## Christmas eve activities for all ages

- Create a Elves station on a table in your house:
- Wrap presents for family members together
- Cornflour - add 1 cup of cornflour and 1 cup of water with a drop of food colouring, it will be hard and liquid at the same time. My kids love this game, \*make sure to cover surfaces and clothes
- Bake cookies / cupcakes
- Colouring
- Make your own Christmas decorations
- Make a snow globe
- Make Hot chocolate
- Make reindeer food with oats and edible glitter
- Go for a walk or drive to search for Christmas lights in your locality
- Make your t-shirt /top christmassy – take an old T-shirt and add glitter glue, draw baubles, Christmas tree, etc
- Play snap / card games
- Make a high tea with little sandwiches, crisps, cookies, fruit, etc
- Make up a song, poem, game, etc.
- Watch a Christmas movie
- Put some Christmas music on and play musical statues, have a disco, redecorate your tree
- Who is knocking at the door to come into the house – it's a game I made up on one of our long trips (there is a song, feel free to make up your own). The person who is on thinks of a person, character, animal, thing, etc and the other players have to ask questions to guess the answer:
- For example: Is it tall? Is it hairy? Does it have long legs? Is it an animal? You can adapt by limiting overall questions, questions per person, etc.
- Treasure hunt (at home, walk or in the car)
- Scavenger hunt (at home, walk or in the car)
- Paper / plastic cup bowling - stack the cups in a pyramid shape, circular shape, etc as high as you like and use a small ball (bouncy ball, tennis ball, paper ball, my children also used their heads) to knock down the building.



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- **Christmas eve activities for 8+ (suggested age range)**
  - **DIY murder mystery game: find free printables on the internet**
  - **Christmas themed: (you can create your own or free printables from the internet)**
  - **Quiz**
  - **Crosswords**
  - **Wordsearches**
  - **Cut, colour and stick – Christmas characters printed online**
  - **Make a story: agree on the characters, place, time. Each person writes a piece of a story, beginning, adventure, end, or write one sentence and fold the paper down and pass it on to the next player.**
  - **Charades – you will need pen and paper / post it notes. One person writes the name of a book, film, play, TV programme, sports, etc on a small piece of paper / post it note, folds them up and pops them in a bowl. The selected person picks from the pile of papers and acts out the name written on their paper. Instructions for the game can be found**
  - **<https://childhood101.com/play-charades/#:~:text=How%20to%20Play%20Charades%3A%20Basic,to%20guess%20the%20title%2Fphrase>**
  - **Post it notes on the head – write the name of a person, character, animal, etc on the post it note. Everyone takes one and sticks it on their forehead without looking at the name. they have to ask the other players questions to figure out who it is.**



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- Boy girl, food, place, etc - You will need pens and paper. Across the top of your paper write Boy, Girl, Food, Place, Car, Sport, etc (make up your own). One person says alphabet, shout out A then quietly in their head. A second person says stop and whatever letter they stop on, you have to guess the names of all the things at the top of the page: for example:

BOY	GIRL	PLACE	ANIMAL	CAR	SPORT
FRED	FRANCIS	FRANCE	FROG	FORD	FOOTBALL
CARL	CORAL	CARDIFF	CAT	CITROEN	CRICKET

- Words that sound the same but mean different things. Each person picks a word that sound the same but means something differnt e.g pear and pair - they have to say them, spell them, and explain the difference. My kids loved this game and we still play in their teens.
- Nature bingo: create bingo cards with pictures and words of things that your child can find in your locality, park, etc. take them for a walk to find as many as they can on their card.
- Christmas bingo: (check out the internet for free printables) Create bingo cards with Christmas pictures on, make sure each card is different. Create bigger pictures from the cards, fold them and put them in a bowl and draw one at a time out of the bowl and call the picture. Each player marks off the pictures on their cards until they have a line and then a full house.
- Create a cinema with sofas, cushions, popcorn, Christmas chocolates and have Christmas movie time
- Create a wish list for next year and create an action plan to achieve those wishes

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## Paid activities

(check you your local shops, shopping centres, garden centres, tree farms, etc.)

- Visit Santa's grotto / Santa on a train
- Have a visit form Santa, Grinch, Elf etc to your house
- Have breakfast, lunch or dinner with Santa
- Ice skating at your local ice skating rink, winter wonderland, holiday park, etc
- Theatre / Pantomime / cNema
- Local nature reserve / country park santa trails (make your own)
- Go out for Christmas meal
- Shopping trip
- Skiing, sledding , tobogganing at your local ski centre
- Create a family / individual Christmad eve box
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*It was always my intention to make memories with my children and I hope that you can use our traditions, games and ideas to make memories of your own.*

*From our family to yours*

*Merry Christmas*

I'm Hayley T Wheeler, In 2015 it became more important than ever to make memories with my children as my depression was at its worst. Some of these games gave my children comfort and created memories while I was struggling, it is my pleasure to share these with you. if you are struggling, you don't have to do it alone, come and join me on social media or get in touch below.

Book a free call and  
get your 2024 off to  
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