



Personal Tool *Managing Festive Expectations*

Across Australia and New Zealand, it is normal for our reflection of Christmas to be different to that of the Northern Hemisphere. We swap snow for sun and surf and in some families (although for many others this tradition still exists) turkey makes way for prawns. For many decades, many people have talked nostalgically about being in the Northern Hemisphere for Christmas. This year, a year like no other, the Christmas story may be very different for those in the Antipodes.

Christmas is not celebrated by everyone and therefore means something different, depending on what you believe in. We respectfully acknowledge that there are individuals who chose to be on their own and others do not – similarly many people this year due to border closures and restrictions on travel will be spending the lead up and the day very differently to what they had planned.

Expectations that are set by us or others can be problematic as a day (or in this case one meal) has a lot of pressure on it “to go well”. This is probably because when completing a search on Christmas words such as joy, celebration and hope are common words. Psychologists have long been asking and getting their clients to plan for the time when special occasions are changed (like after a pandemic) and we must look deeper to find joy. Psychologists have been explaining to clients that life is not about milestones or gaining perfection – but being present in the moment and investing in our own happiness 365 days of the year (not just Christmas Day).

Perhaps this year, it is important to reflect upon ceremonies and personal traditions that make sense to you. These are as simple or as complicated as you want them to be. They could be important to mark the passing of the year but create lasting memories and, to create a sense of celebration. Without rituals time can feel like a flat circle.

Rituals and traditions also:

- Mark the end of one thing and the beginning of another – in this case the end of 2020 and the start of a whole new year.
- Help us to structure the social world around acknowledging work and personal relationships and connecting with them.
- Help to make sense of the changes that have occurred by giving many people reasons, purpose, and motivations to connect with family and friends.
- Encourages many to finish goals and intentions for the year and create space for new ones.
- Creates a feeling of rhythm in life that seasons change and therefore illustrating that nothing is permanent and this strange year that we have experienced can be boxed up into one space in time.



In 2020 these rituals may be more important to implement than they were in 2019 and yet, may be harder to do so because of the stress, change and uncertainty of 2020. Of course, it may be tougher to muster the energy to make it all happen and assistance with that could come from asking for help. Rituals provide a sense of comfort and meaning especially important when there is anxiety and uncertainty. For those who are exhausted, wired, or tired, look at ways to make small things happen. This could mean being open to the idea that there is a smaller, lighter version of Christmas lunch. It also means simplifying, streamlining, and delegating out the tasks to make the day happen straightforwardly and easily. If the responsibility of pulling together the holiday spirit fall upon your shoulders, do not let the stress get the better of you. Read on for different ideas, tricks, and tips.

- Plan out the Christmas lunch menu. How can you divide it out into three parts (entrée, main and dessert) and delegate that to different parties. When a person RSVP's, perhaps say that it this year everyone is bringing something or cooking a part of the meal. Give choice and be flexible and if something fits, just go with it! Try and be open to different approaches and appreciate the effort. If attending lunch, be proactive and ask what would work and use the same flexible approach to making it work.
- It has been estimated that it takes 8 full days to prepare for Christmas. This includes cleaning, cooking, wrapping, and sending Christmas cards. The suggestion here is that this time is seen as an investing in the family, home life or extended relationships. Remember to delegate and outsource when you can and think of it as every job counts. Five minutes saved is over half an hour in the week.

Connecting with family and friends is a warm reminder that although the person may be far away, they not are not forgotten. If you cannot see them then suggest a video catch up or make a plan for the future. Sending a Christmas card, handwritten, and individually tailored with a message to a person in your life lets them see your effort and care. Sending care also allows for:

- A clean out of your address book – update the details of the people that you love and make sure that you remember whom your social supports. Look at people whom you can connect with throughout the year.
- Update your family photo- this includes the new pets, partners to adult children and extended family. It creates memories and helps to curate the changes in your life.
- Express gratitude and be clear as to what you are thankful. In a year like this one, it may be difficult to find the parts that you are grateful for, but it may be simply that you have a home and employment.

If Christmas, the end of the year or perhaps the vast amount of change that has occurred in 2020 has bought up any issues of stress, anxiety or grief, be sure to reach out to our mental health professionals here at AccessEAP. We are here to assist. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

