



What's Important About Christmas?

Exercises for you to work through

The Agenda

Exercise 1- What's important to you about Christmas?

Step 1 - Rediscovering your own values about Christmas - **do on your own**

Step 2 - Understanding your partner's values about Christmas - **do together**

Step 3 - Negotiating a way through those areas where you currently disagree - **do together**

Exercise 2 - Creating a Shared Vision for Christmas

Step 1 - Discovering your personal metaphors - **do together**

Step 2 - Sharing the insights you gain from your metaphors - **do together**

Summarise your results - to use later

Getting in the right mindset for discussion

Your mindset in tackling your Christmas planning is all important, especially if you're not a person who naturally enjoys writing lists or negotiating agreements and when you are already pressed for time. Every time you start, take a moment to remind yourself of your purpose. You'll be clearer about this after Exercises 1 and 2. For now, use something like:

- To have the best Christmas ever
- To make Christmas go as smoothly as possible
- To avoid nagging or being nagged
- To avoid rows
- To be clear about what we both want for Christmas

Checklist of things to help your discussions go smoothly

- Make a date with each other to have this meeting (preferably before Christmas!)
- Choose a comfy place where you both feel at ease.
- Eliminate or minimise outside distractions: phone - door bell - kids - pets - etc.
- Check you have the papers that go with these exercises
- Have pens and paper handy or a laptop if you like.
- Agree a time limit for this first meeting. One hour is plenty. Go for less if you can.
- Check out if there is anything pressing either of you must do soon: something on TV - bath kids - make tea/lunch/dinner/breakfast - meet friends
- Agree to continue this discussion at another time once this first one is over
- Have a hug and a kiss before you start and at the end
- If at any time you feel tensions rising, take several deep breaths and make sure you are looking upwards and not down to the table or floor. If that doesn't reduce the tension, agree a bit of time out and when you will start again.

Exercise 1 What's important to you about Christmas?

This exercise guides you to explore your values about Christmas - that is the things that are important to you about Christmas and which prompt the decisions you make. Living in line with your values reduces stress and internal conflict. Of course we find that much easier to do when we live on our own. When we share our lives with someone else, we can lose sight of our own values - or be unaware of how our partner's values differ.

Step 1 Rediscovering your own values about Christmas

Take a little quiet time and work on this on your own. Have pen and paper handy - it's important to write your answers down, so you can share what you discover later.

Ask yourself: **"What's important to me about Christmas?"**
Keep going until you really cannot think of anything else.

Look at each of your answers in turn and ask:
"Is there anything else about ..."

For example, you might have said that one of the things that's important to you about Christmas is 'Having Mum to Christmas lunch.' When you ask yourself if there is anything else about that, you might answer 'I can't bear the thought of her being alone'

Work out your priorities - not everything will be the most important thing on your list - so put them in order of importance. If you have a problem deciding on some items, compare two items and ask yourself: **"Is A more or less important than B"**

Step 2 Understanding your partner's values about Christmas

We generally choose life partners whose values are similar to our own. However, the little differences between us, that mark out our individuality, are also the factors that may lead to disagreement. Before you share your findings, pay attention to how you approach this discussion. Use the ideas on page 1 and as you share what's important to each of you about Christmas, be sure to listen attentively to your partner's thoughts.

Approach any areas you disagree with carefully by asking for more information. **"Is there anything else about ...?"** is a good question, whereas **"Why?"** can seem like a challenge.

Step 3 Negotiating a way through those areas where you disagree

Fortunately our values are not carved in stone and when we find out more about the reasons behind our different points of view, it's often possible to reach common ground. For those areas where you need to reach a compromise, take note of how important the item is. It's easier to be generous about things that are lower down your list of priorities. Be as creative as you can in thinking up ways to avoid conflict.

Exercise 2 Creating a Shared Vision for Christmas

This is a fun exercise that helps you find your metaphor for Christmas.
We often describe our experiences in metaphorical terms:

"It's like hitting my head against a brick wall"
"A door opened for me"

If we pay attention to our metaphors we can gain insights into what we really want in life or find solutions to problems that aren't immediately apparent when we worry at a problem with our conscious mind. Metaphors are especially useful for dealing with future events, that aren't yet known.

Use Page 1 to make sure you are in a good frame of mind for this exercise.

Step 1 Discovering your personal metaphors

The best way to start is by asking each other some 'good' questions. It's very important to listen to the answers. Here's how your conversation will go. One of you is A, the other one B.

A: "If this Christmas is going to be just the way you want it to be, it will be .. like .. what?"
Listen carefully to the answer. Make notes if it helps. Give B plenty of time to explore this. Nod encouragement when B stops and looks at you, let them continue exploring their inner world until B seems to have finished.

A: "And is there anything else about all that?"
Listen carefully until they seem to have finished.

A: "What would make it even better?"
Listen carefully until they seem to have finished.

A: "And is there anything else about all that?"
Listen carefully until they have completely finished.

It's now A's turn and B needs to ask A the same questions and listen just as carefully.

Step 2 Sharing the insights you gain from your metaphors

Take time over this part; make it a meeting all on its own if you like.

Looking at your notes find those areas you agree on immediately.

A: Choose some of B's answers that really appeal to you

B: Do the same for A's answers

This is unlikely to be a conversation you have had before and it will flush out for both of you the sort of Christmas that will best suit you and your family. You may well find some new and exciting ways to celebrate the holiday, you may incorporate bits of Christmas past from each of you.

Avoid any Christmas memories that were dreadful or traumatic. Don't be tempted to argue about any differences. Don't make comments or disparaging remarks about your partner's ideas. This discussion is designed to tease out what each of you *really wants* to have happen at Christmas. Remember you are looking for positive ways to make Christmas special.

Summary of Results for
Exercises 1 and 2

Name	Top 5 priorities for Christmas	
Name	When your Christmas is just the way you want it to be, it's like	
Name	Top 5 priorities for Christmas	
Name	When your Christmas is just the way you want it to be, it's like	