

The Agenda

Exercise 3 - Who is coming for Christmas

- Step 1 - What's your starting point - **do on your own**
- Step 2 - Sorting your lists - **do on your own**
- Step 3 - Managing your time - **do together**
- Step 4 - Fitting everyone in - **do together**
- Step 5 - Supporting each other

Agree on the plan for the final Christmas cast list - page 4

Getting in the right mindset for discussion

Your mindset in tackling your Christmas guest list is all important, especially if you're not a person who naturally enjoys writing lists or negotiating agreements and when you may already be 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 of 'What's important about Christmas'. The first FREE download. It's possibly something like this:-

- To make Christmas go as smoothly as possible
- To have the best Christmas ever
- 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 3 Who is coming for Christmas?

This exercise has potential for high emotion and entrenched positions on how we feel about each other's family or friends and even some of our own. It's therefore important to begin by remembering what's important about your Christmas. If you've chosen "Having the best Christmas ever" how does this affect who you share it with? How you feel about them has a major impact on achieving your objective.

First of all you need to maintain the sense of togetherness in your key relationship with each other. Go on have another hug. Hold in mind the positive visions, thoughts and feelings from your earlier discussions. Share in any 'warm fuzzies' from you past together.

Step 1 What's your starting point?

Choose your cast of characters and make a list of the people who you'd like to see and those you think you should see over the Christmas period. I've started one for you on page four.

Example: Father; Mother; Brother; Sister Ann; Sister Elizabeth; Cousin Jane and Bob and their three children; Grandma and Gramps; Auntie Flo; Auntie Mavis & her friend Mary; Dave and Lucy and little John; The guys down the pub; The rugby team; The badminton club; Joe and Ben from work.

I'm not suggesting all these people will descend on you on the one day. It's just important to think about the full cast of characters who could be involved in making this the "Best Christmas ever".

Got the list sorted? Good. Have another hug and a few deep breaths before continuing.

Step 2 Sorting your lists

Ask yourselves the following questions to arrive your lists into priority order:

- **Who needs to be at the top of your list and who can be at the bottom?**
Maybe give them a score out of 10. Where 1 is the last person you want to spend Christmas with and 10 is the person you most want to spend it with. (A hint here for the men, give your partner the highest score!)
- Note who you want to spend time with, who you are seeing out of duty and who you are including because they would otherwise be alone
- Note who you will visit and who you will invite to your home
- Consider how long you want to spend in their company

Exercise 3 cont'd Who is coming for Christmas?

Step 3 Managing your time?

Many of the issues with who you see at Christmas are based on timing. Ask each other the following questions to arrive at some basic 'rules' for deciding who you will see when:

- How much time do you want to spend with other people and how much time do you want to spend quietly on your own?
- How important is it to you to spend time together? Is that all your time or just some of your time?
- What is your holiday period?
- Is your time constrained in anyway - by work or travel commitments for example?

Step 4 Fitting everyone in

Look for creative solutions and think about enlisting support from other people on your lists:

- Who can you leave off the list?
 - Remember this is your Christmas! Be very clear why you are inviting people who neither of you like very much.
 - You may find elderly relatives would actually prefer to spend Christmas on their own, with just a brief visit from you bringing Christmas goodies. Or even a phone call and a posted 'red cross' parcel if they are far away. All this eating drinking and jollity can be very tiring when you get to a certain age. Young children are particularly trying for those with less mobility, less hearing and needs for frequent toilet trips!
- Who can you invite at the same time - who would get on with whom?
- Although you may need to put in the travel time, can you visit several people on your list in one trip?
- Who can you see together and who can you see separately?

Step 5 - Supporting each other

The purpose of this exercise is to give you plenty of opportunity to talk about the impact of other people on you and your 'Best Christmas Ever'. Hopefully you will be able to put off some or all of the people you'd rather not see until another time. If this isn't possible and duty, loyalty or compassion means you will be spending time with people you'd rather not, then remember you're both in this together.

- Find moments to let each other know you appreciate each other - with a stroke, a kiss or a kind word.
- Use positive humour to deflect any difficult moments
- Have some handy distractions available to de-fuse tricky situations - see Exercise 8 in the resource pack for 'coping on the day'.

The Christmas Cast list

Name	Score 1 = low 10 = high	W = want to see D = duty C = compassion O = other	I = invite V = visit	How long?	Together?
Our Family					
Her Family					
His Family					
Her Friends					
His Friends					
Kids Friends					
Other					