



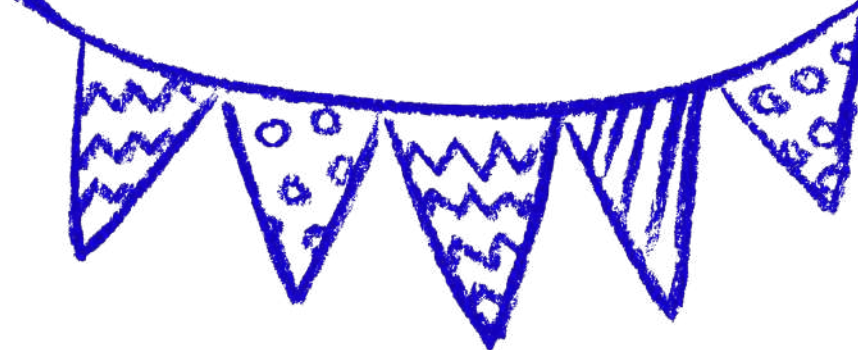
 Mind Solent

Winter wellbeing toolkit



20 ways to cope with the **Winter blues**

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Emotional

- ☐ Make a list of the things of things you are grateful for.
- ☐ Write down any negative thoughts and challenge yourself to come up with realistic, helpful responses.
- ☐ On the hour, every hour, take three deep breaths.
- ☐ Make a list of your strengths and how you plan to use them in the year ahead.
- ☐ Pick out a specific problem you are experiencing and ask someone for help.

Social

- ☐ Wrap up warm and meet a friend in the park for socially-distanced hot chocolates.
- ☐ Send a text to someone you haven't caught up with in ages.
- ☐ Join an online fan group about your favourite TV show and introduce yourself.
- ☐ Share with a friend something helpful you learned recently.
- ☐ Ask someone about their day and listen deeply and fully to their response.

Intellectual

- ☐ Pick out a book of your choice and try to read a chapter a week.
- ☐ Challenge yourself to an afternoon without electronics. No screens until dinner!
- ☐ Pick a historical event that you want to know more about and read its Wikipedia page.
- ☐ Learn an Origami pattern and teach it to a loved one.
- ☐ Pick a language you'd love to speak and learn how to count to 10. Try and use it for your breathing exercises.

Physical

- ☐ Take a 10 minute, socially distanced walk whilst listening to upbeat music, trying to time your steps to the music.
- ☐ Complete a hand scan: Focus on each of your fingers for 10 seconds, wiggling then relaxing them one by one. Clench and unclench your fists, then roll your wrists in each direction.
- ☐ Search your neighbourhood for the best Christmas lights and stay a while to watch them twinkle.
- ☐ Dance to the whole of the next song on the radio.
- ☐ Eat a festive treat mindfully. One by one, notice the texture, taste and smell.

Advice for Parents & Carers

The support of friends, family and carers can play a very important role in helping someone living with a mental health issue during the festive period, but can also feel overwhelming, for you and them.



Make a plan

Make a plan before things get busy and clearly communicate the things that may affect their normal routine.

Remind them of practical things like picking up prescriptions before bank holidays.



Set boundaries

It's easy to lash out when we're feeling overwhelmed, so be clear on unacceptable behaviour.

You don't have to put up with any thing that makes you feel unsafe or seriously affects your own wellbeing.



Give them space

Being sociable or active for a long period of time may make people tired or stressed.

Allow them time alone to re-charge and rest when they need it.



Find balance

It can be tempting to take care of everything for someone who is struggling, but it's important to encourage them to do things for themselves.

Support them to make healthy meals, get fresh air and keep on top of errands, but don't take over.

Coping with Grief & Loss

Christmas can be a painful time, whether it's your first year without someone, you were bereaved long ago or you lost someone before you got to meet them.

Everyone grieves differently

People remember and mourn in different ways. Conflict within a family can sometimes arise when we have expectations of how others should grieve, so try to be sensitive to others' needs and talk openly.

Remember that using alcohol to escape the pain of loss provides only very temporary relief.

Experiencing celebration guilt

Simply maintaining a Christmas routine can be the best tribute you can pay to your loved one, but some find it difficult not to feel guilty about celebrating without them.

It can be helpful to set aside some time to remember someone you've lost, either by 'speaking' to them, visiting their grave or looking back at photos which you treasure. Doing this with the people who share your loss can be something that brings you together, but you are also entitled to do it alone.

This exercise can help you understand how you cope with grief and who you can turn to when it feels too much.

I feel the most upset when I...

Who is here to support me when I feel like this?

What strengths do I have from previous experiences that can help me during this time?

I give myself permission to process what I am feeling by:

During this process I am learning that...

Coping with Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D) is a form of depression where the changing seasons have an effect on your mood and energy levels. Kim from Southampton shares her diagnosis journey and some ideas for coping during the winter months.

“I’ve always suffered with winter blues and struggled as days got shorter, but a few years ago I found it was worse than before. I struggled to get out of bed but also found it hard to sleep, and I had no motivation or energy to do anything. I felt like I was disconnected... simply “meh” all the time.

My family encouraged me to visit my GP, who told me about S.A.D. For me it’s like an endless grey, not just in the weather but also emotionally, and sometimes it’s hard to remember what an easy day feels like.

Medication helps many people to manage the symptoms, but I found that talking it through helped. I self-referred to italk, Solent Mind and Southern Health’s free

talking therapy service and learned some self-help strategies to help me manage how I felt.

What currently helps me is to fill in a diary, only a short sentence or two per day, each night. It allows me to look back at both busy and quiet days and celebrate achievements, even when it feels like nothing at the time.

On a hard day, I know that if I just managed to get out of bed, or showered or did some colouring, I have accomplished something important for my wellbeing.

For me, SAD isn’t going to simply ‘go away’, but I am always eager to find and try out new ways to help me cope.”



Kim’s tips

Be gentle with yourself. Don’t put pressure on yourself to complete a to-do list and adapt your routine as needed instead.

Keep the curtains closed on gloomy days and use lights (I love fairy lights!) to distract you from the weather outside.

Open the windows – fresh air will make you feel less claustrophobic and weighed down.

Try mindful exercises, like listening to the rain when trying to sleep or relax.

HOUSE PLANTS! When everything out of the window looks really dull and colourless, plants, cacti and succulents make indoors feel like a tropical jungle.

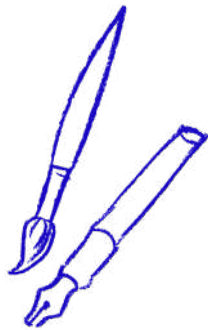
Make your own Winter Self-Care Box



When we're at our worst, it can feel hard to identify the things that can make us feel better.

A Self-Care Box allows you to keep a much needed pick-me-up in one place - perfect for days where working out what to do next feels too tough.

Grab a shoe box



And decorate it creatively with stickers, photographs or paint.

Use your senses



To calm and relax you with a comforting, familiar smell. This might be a candle or a jumper that smells like your favourite person or washing powder.

Drop in distractions



That keep your hands busy, shifts your focus and helps to use up nervous energy. Tangle toys, modelling clay or fidget spinners are perfect.



Add some T.L.C

With items to make you feel fresh and nourished, like a hand cream or lip balm.



Feeling puzzled?

As well as providing a welcome distraction, a puzzle, jigsaw or crossword will give you something you can achieve or solve. It's a useful way to build your confidence before looking inwards at the things that may be worrying you.

See it to believe it



Write out and drop in some positive affirmations: statements and beliefs that can ground you and help you speak to yourself kindly.

It's okay not to be okay



Having a cry allows us to be in touch with how we're feeling in that moment and accept it so we can move forwards. Give yourself permission to not be strong and let it out.



Include a mindful moment

by dropping in some sachets of your favourite hot drink.

Try this 'Hot Chocolate Breath' technique!

1. Hold your mug with both hands and close your eyes
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose to smell the chocolate for four seconds
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for four seconds, cooling it enough to sip
4. Repeat three times

You can repeat these steps every time you need to feel calm... even when you don't have a hot drink handy!

Take control with The Worry Tree

We often have worries that seem to pull focus away from our day to day life. You may feel out of control, or feel like you need to keep worrying because it feels useful – or that bad things might happen if you stop.

There are always practical steps we can take that will make us feel more in control of our worries. This worry tree may help you get to the bottom of those intrusive thoughts that pull focus away from day to day life.

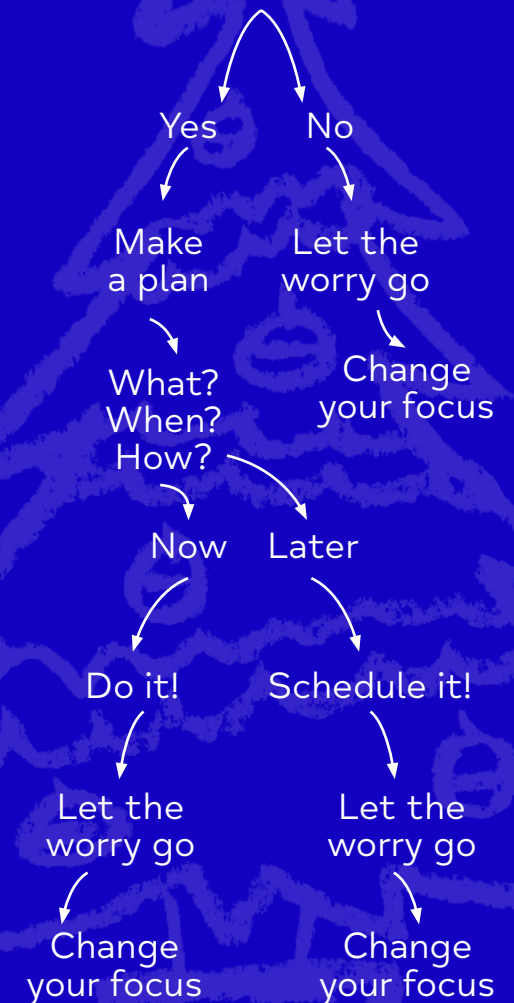
It's helpful to think about the kind of worry you have, as they can normally be separated into two categories: hypothetical situations and current problems.

Hypothetical situations are those “what if...?” thoughts about some terrible event that might happen. “My partner is late home from work - what if they’ve had an accident?” or “The ozone layer has holes - what if the end of the world happens soon?”. These thoughts are usually followed by imagining what would happen in those worst-case scenarios.

These kind of worries can cause us a lot of anxiety, when there is perhaps little or nothing we can do about that situation.

Current problems are those worries that relate to a real situation, that we CAN do something about. In which case, we can decide what to do, when and how - which will be much more helpful than just continually worrying about it. After using the tree, try writing down the worry and its outcome. If you feel the worry creeping back in, you can remind yourself of the decision you made, and bring your focus back to the present.

What am I worrying about and can I do anything about it?



Money & Mental Health

Looking after our finances sometimes causes an endless cycle: poor mental health can make managing money harder, and worrying about money can make your mental health worse.

The festive period can put extra pressure on us to find happiness through spending money, sometimes even pushing us to spend beyond our means. We asked money and mental health expert Ann Carver to share her top tips.

Recognise that spending can be addictive

If you feel like you're spending too much time in the shops, it can be helpful to take a step back and figure out the reason why. "I wish shopping bags had warning signs because when I was feeling depressed, I went shopping to cheer myself up!" says Ann. "The feel good buzz of shopping wore off quickly, but the happiness of finally addressing my behaviour lasted a lot longer."

What you can do now:

If you're worried about controlling your spending, tell someone you trust so they can support you throughout the winter break.

What you can plan:

Talk to friends and family about your triggers and warning signs so they can help you.



“Don’t feel pressured to have the same Christmas you see on telly. Do what you want, not what is expected of you.”

Ann Carver is a motivational speaker who shares her lived experiences across the country.



Stick to a routine

Ann advises “Stick to a routine with your Christmas spending to make sure you don’t get carried away.” This is especially important if you experience periods of mania or hypomania that lead you to make impulsive decisions.

What you can do now:

Try giving your bank cards to someone else or putting them somewhere difficult to access.

What you can plan:

Plan and display a simple budget that ensures you still have enough money to spend on essentials that keep you well like food, heating or prescription charges.

Lighten Up!

Instead of looking for opportunities to spend money, take some time to look around and properly connect with the beauty of the season.

Ann says: “The more I ‘lighten up’, the more I enjoy Christmas. When you see Christmas tree lights and the decorations around the town, take time to stop, look, smile and be mindful.”



Enjoy the holidays with people, not your wallet

Although the Coronavirus pandemic makes connecting with others a little more difficult, there’s still plenty of digital and small, Covid-safe opportunities to spend time with others and avoid spending through loneliness or boredom.

What you can do now:

Use your postcode to search for local Covid-safe community activities through

www.communitychristmas.org.uk

What you can plan:

According to local social distancing measures, meet a friend outdoors from a safe distance. Use food from home to make a packed lunch and find somewhere beautiful to sit and enjoy it. This will reduce the temptation to buy expensive snacks and fast food.

“The feel good buzz of shopping wore off quickly, but the happiness of finally addressing my behaviour lasted a lot longer.”

Resist parenting pressure

Christmas can be difficult for parents who feel pressured to give their children everything. Ann says, “Get in the habit of taking back control of what you want to buy for your children, and resist having to keep up with the trend.”

It’s important to remember that the size of a present does not represent how much we care about someone. We can show our love and support through the time we spend with them and the memories we make.



It’s okay not to like Christmas!

Finally, a simple reminder: it’s perfectly fine to not take part in the festivities and costly activities if it’s better for your mental health.

“It’s okay to keep your head down” says Ann. “Don’t feel compelled to have the same Christmas you see on the telly. Do what you want, not what is expected of you.”



Don’t ignore debt

If you are experiencing issues with money, facing Christmas may make you feel worried and low. It’s important to open up, talk about your concerns, get support and start the new year in a positive way.

If you get too anxious to read letters or listen to voicemails, ask someone you trust to check them out first and calmly discuss what to do next.

Have a confidential chat with a professional. Citizens Advice Service, Money Advice Service and the Debt Support Trust can help you move forward.

Talk to your GP: they may be able to provide information that ensures that creditors take your mental health problems into account.

What to do if I need Urgent Help

I'm experiencing a crisis

Mental health support is available 24/7, 365 days a year via the **NHS 111 helpline**. Specialised NHS mental health nurses can give you support and advice 24/7 by **dialling 111**.

If you or the person you're concerned about is already in contact with NHS mental health services, then you should have a care plan which outlines what to do in a crisis.

I've run out of medication

If you are local, call your GP surgery and note down the out-of-hours instructions on their answerphone.

If you are away for Christmas, search for a NHS walk-in centre to see a GP or nurse. If you are unable to locate a centre, **call 111**.

If you have tried all of the above and it's an emergency, find your nearest hospital and go to A&E.

I need to talk to someone

Samaritans

Emotional support and a listening ear: 24/7, every day.

Call 116 123

Shout

If you would prefer not to talk but want some mental health support, you could text **SHOUT** to **85258**.

Shout offers a confidential 24/7 text service providing support if you are in crisis and need immediate help.

Kooth

If you are aged between 11 and 24, Kooth offers emotional and mental health support with a free, safe and anonymous online chat and emotional wellbeing service.

You need to **sign up to Kooth** to use it but the service is anonymous.

If you or someone else is at **immediate risk of harming themselves or others**, please ring **999**.

[See more helplines >](#)



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a mental health problem has somewhere
to turn for advice and support.**

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