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# HAVE A MEANINGFUL *Christmas*

Stay true to your values, embrace the perfectly imperfect, and let go of comparison, for a festive season that will fill up your cup with joy, writes Caroline Butterwick





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## Expert advice



*Dr Tara Quinn-Cirillo is a psychologist specialising in adversity. She has 20 years' experience in mental health, disability, and behaviour. [drtara.co.uk](http://drtara.co.uk)*



*Michaela Thomas is a clinical psychologist and the author of *The Lasting Connection* (Little, Brown, £14.99), supporting high-striving women in letting go of perfectionism. [thethomasconnection.co.uk](http://thethomasconnection.co.uk)*



*Karin Peeters is a coach and psychotherapist at Vitalis Coaching, with her website *Inner Pilgrim* offering a spiritual deep-dive. [vitaliscoaching.com](http://vitaliscoaching.com); [innerpilgrim.com](http://innerpilgrim.com)*

# Have a mindful Christmas

**W**orking out your values and doing your best to let go of perfectionism can help you have the joyous Christmas you really want. And bringing in mindfulness can help us with finding and embracing those little moments of joy over the festive season, as well as managing any stress.

'Sometimes, when you eat and you're distracted, you don't realise you've cleared the plate, and then you're left wanting more,' says coach and psychotherapist Karin Peeters. 'We run the same risk at Christmas: we look forward to it, but then get distracted when we're actually there. And so we don't feel nourished by it.'

If you find your mind wandering to your worries – fretting about finances, or that work deadline coming up in January – while you're sitting with your family or watching a festive panto, Peeters recommends a simple breathing exercise to ground you and bring you back to the present. You take a deep breath in, and then breathe out just a little bit longer than the in breath. You notice the silence between your thoughts. 'The out breath helps us to let go of everything, and then becoming aware of the silence brings the presence,' explains Peeters. You can do this subtly whenever you feel distracted or anxious rather than being in the moment – see it like a reset.

Other mindfulness techniques like drawing attention to your senses by noticing what you can see, hear, smell, taste and touch can help ground you. Peeters also encourages the use of a scheduled worry time, if you find that

anxious thoughts interfere with your festive fun. Set aside around half an hour each day where you can think about and action any worries.

Another way many of us are guilty of not being mindful is by using our phones. We'll be opening gifts with our loved ones or watching our favourite festive film together, and then absentmindedly reach for our phone and scroll – and, suddenly, ten minutes have past, and we realise we've missed out on what is going on around us. 'Beforehand, invite the entire group to have a dedicated mobile phone tray for a certain amount of time,' suggests Peeters. You can still check your phones if you need to, but by placing them out of the way, it is much less tempting.

Having a mindful Christmas isn't just about techniques to bring you into the present; it's also about making space for, and recognising, the moments that really matter to you. So, if you spotted that your value is around connection, could you catch up with a friend you haven't seen for a while, over a meal? If making time for yourself is a priority, could you set aside some time to do something you find nourishing? Everyone's balance will be different.

There is no right way to celebrate Christmas – this season means different things to each of us, and each year we may need to approach it from a different angle. What would make your heart sing this year? What would a good Christmas really look like? Ask yourself these things now, and revisit your intentions throughout the holidays to help make this a truly meaningful time for you.

## MINDFUL MOMENTS

Being mindful at Christmas involves appreciating those moments that it's all too easy to let pass us by, and making time for the things that spark joy. You may well have ideas of your own, but here's some inspiration...

- Savour the spices in a slice of Christmas cake, or the smell of gingerbread wafting through the house.
- Play games with your loved ones. Break out the Monopoly, or have a go at charades – leaping around the living room as you try to mime a film is sure to get everyone laughing.
- Notice the cosiness of early winter: the robin that lands on the bird feeder each morning; the frost on fallen leaves; the smell of the air and its cool brush against your skin.
- Sip a gingerbread latte or another festive drink that you keep meaning to try. Take the time to enjoy the flavours and the feeling of the warm liquid.
- Light a Christmas scented candle, curl up under comfy blankets, and savour the sensory details.
- Get in touch with your inner child and do activities that you loved when you were younger. How about getting crafty and making decorations, complete with glitter gel?
- Try the Icelandic tradition of Jolabokaflokkur. This is where you give and receive books on Christmas Eve, and spend the evening reading. It's a great way of making time to get lost in a good book.