

Six ways to reduce loneliness this Christmas—from a psychologist

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Snowmen, tables groaning with food and families having a wonderful time together—these are the images that probably pop into your head when you think of Christmas.

In reality, feelings of loneliness are amplified for many over Christmas.

The parties and socializing in the lead up to the big day are swiftly followed by a lingering emptiness as offices, schools and shops close for the [festive season](#). It can feel like the whole world is caught up in a universal experience of Christmas that we are excluded from.

It doesn't help that Christmas adverts [tap in to our emotions](#) and create an expectation of what Christmas should look like.

The build up seems to start earlier each year, with evidence suggesting that people begin to think about Christmas from as early as August, and with the [cost of living crisis](#) people have been planning their spending in advance. So by the time Christmas arrives, the festive messages will have been intensifying for weeks if not months.

Christmas itself is hard if not possible to escape from entirely. But there are things you can do to manage your experience if you plan to spend time by yourself over advent.

It can help to bear in mind that far fewer people are having a glossy family celebration straight out of a Coca-Cola advert than you'd expect. For some people this will be a busy period, but for others it will be a time of quiet reflection.

Christmas is a [varied experience](#). There is no one overriding version that applies to all, or even most, people. A lot of people work over Christmas, and students ([especially international students](#)) may choose, or not be able to, return to their family homes.

Research has found Christmas can be a time of [decreased well-being](#) even for people surrounded by their loved ones. Reasons include [family tensions and financial worries](#). This year the cost of living crisis and industrial disputes will throw many people's plans into chaos. All this will disrupt that stereotype of a universal Christmas full of cheer that

everyone else is experiencing without us.

And while we often think of isolation as something that [impacts older older](#), research confirms loneliness affects [all people of all ages](#). Some studies have found actually [younger people](#) are more likely to report [feeling lonely](#) than other age groups.

There can be a huge temptation to scroll through [social media feeds](#) when we are alone to see what everyone else is doing. But high levels of social media consumption is associated with increased [negative mood](#) and [worsened loneliness](#).

Instead, if you are worried about spending Christmas alone why not try some of these tips.

1. Connect with others

Put yourself out there to friends, family, loved ones, or a group that you feel a connection to. For example, join a running group if you enjoy exercise. Being part of a group that you share a purpose and [identity with](#) can raise your spirits. If you hesitate to talk to people you know because you worry they won't have time, think about how you would respond if they reached out to you. If you would make time for them, the chances are they will too. Even if it's just for a chat.

2. Volunteer

Consider volunteering with any range of [age groups](#), communities, animal shelters or charities. Volunteering can [reduce loneliness](#) and increase your [sense of connectedness](#).

Feeling lonely is not the same as being alone. There can be many

positive aspects of being alone that you can lean into over Christmas.

3. Take time for gratitude

When we feel alone we can end up in a [negative loop](#) where feelings of loneliness lead to negative thoughts which reinforce loneliness. Taking a moment to practice gratitude breaks this cycle.

It can [boost your well-being](#) by redirecting your thoughts to more uplifting aspects of life. Regular gratitude practice has been found to [reduce loneliness](#) and even [depression](#).

4. Catch up on books and box sets

Allow yourself to get stuck in to a good book. Reading can [brighten your mood](#). If you are not confident in reading, you can always listen to an audiobook, or indulge in a box set that you wouldn't have time for ordinarily.

5. Exercise

The [physical and mental health benefits](#) of exercise are well known. Even the most gentle exercise can do wonders to cheer you up. Taking the time to focus [mindfully on a walk](#) and lean into solitude can help lift you out of a downwards spiral.

6. Enjoy the rituals

Spending the season by yourself doesn't mean that Christmas can't be special. If Christmas is something that you love, then the rituals associated with Christmas can boost your mental health and combat [loneliness](#).

Remind yourself that you can decide what Christmas means to you, and how you want to spend it, and that is a gift.

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