

## 12 Tips to Save Your Sanity at Christmas

Christmas takes a lot of organising. Which would be fine...if you didn't have anything else to do. You know, like making sure your family's life runs like clockwork as normal but with the added seasonal extras thrown in, not to mention all the Christmas dos you feel obliged to attend and the dealing with your children's excitement which gets ever louder and more relentless the closer the big day gets.

It's enough to drive you round the bend.

So here are a few tips to help you to keep your head and hopefully feel like you still have the capacity to enjoy Christmas once the preparation is done.

### 1 Christmas doesn't have to be perfect

It really doesn't. To start with, who, apart from you, is going to acknowledge that Christmas *is* perfect? Only you can see that image in your head.

Think back over Christmases past – how do your fondest memories stack up against this perfect ideal in your head?

Chances are that your happiest festive memories revolve around the *people* who are dear to you – family and friends – not all the whistles and jingle bells and sparkly stuff that accompanies Christmas. Hold on to these memories, particularly when you're feeling frazzled with too much to do and not enough time to do it in.

In lots of ways this is similar to how we are fed a distorted image by the media of what women should look like...your Christmas does not need to be Photoshopped! All those pictures in magazines have been put together by stylists...even the ones that are purporting to show happy families celebrating Christmas in their beautiful homes, have been styled to a certain degree. It's just not really the real world.

Don't get me wrong – I LOVE those sort of magazines. But *my* home and *my* family is very different. For one thing, I don't have a stylist on hand to decorate my house and sprinkle *just* enough fake snow on the outside of my windows!

## 2 Sniff lavender

To help you to regain an element of calm and presence (not presents!) carry a little lavender bag around with you to whip out and sniff in stress emergencies!

Or add a few drops of lavender essential oil to a tissue and keep that in your pocket for a quick sniff when you need it.

Lavender oil is easy to find and cheap, I get mine from Wilkos for £1.25 for a little 10ml bottle which lasts for ages.

I put a few drops on my pillow every night to help me relax at bedtime too...highly recommended to help you drift off.

## 3 Be open and honest with people

I can guarantee that you are not the only person you know who is feeling under pressure at this time of year. Whether it's financial pressure, family pressure or time pressure there will always be other people in your immediate circle who are feeling the same.

Have a conversation about it. If there's one thing I've learned recently it's how having the courage to show your own vulnerabilities gives other people permission to show theirs.

Take courage. Be brave. Bring it out into the open.

You'll find this will strengthen relationships, forge trust and deepen friendships. Connection with other people, real connection rather than a like or a comment online, is harder to come by these days. Peeling back a layer or two is a scary thing to do but the rewards make it worthwhile.

## 4 Drink!

By all means indulge in a glass or two of festive spirit but this isn't what I mean! When you're even busier than normal it's even more important than normal not to get dehydrated. Keep a water bottle with you all the time and sip from it regularly. If you're not getting enough water it's going to make short tempers even

shorter and make overwhelm seem worse because your brain needs water to function clearly.

And if you have, er, overindulged a little shall we say, then the more water you can drink the quicker you will return to firing on all cylinders.

## 5. It doesn't matter if it doesn't all get done

I'm going to remind you of something. *It doesn't matter if it doesn't all get done. This is not a life or death situation.*

I think we all know this deep down, yet it gets lost every year in the frenzy. Did you get it all done last year? Or the year before that? I know I didn't. But Christmas still happened...and everyone enjoyed it.

Try not to expect too much of yourself. Us mums are driven to keep our family's lives running like clockwork, which takes up pretty much all available head space, pretty much all the time. Add Christmas into the mix on TOP of all that and you're soon into overload. We set such high standards for ourselves then beat ourselves up when we don't meet them. Listen...*You do an amazing job. You do it to the very best of your ability.*

When you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed with everything you've got to do, ask yourself a simple question. "Is this a life or death situation?" 99 times out of 100 the answer to that is No. It doesn't matter if it doesn't all get done.

Sure, in an ideal world, in that perfect vision you have, every last little detail has

been attended to. But you know what? Your children won't notice or remember that you pulled the sofa out so you could vacuum underneath it – but they will remember that you spent time making gingerbread shapes with them to hang on the tree.

I know you know which is more important.

It's so easy to put pressure on ourselves over things that we think would make us feel ashamed if we were found out. The thing is, I bet that you know other people who are "hiding" exactly the same things! Like only dusting the skirting boards when you've got someone coming round. Like making sure you use the clean mugs (the ones without the brown tea and coffee stains in the bottom) when you're offering guests a cuppa. Like vacuuming under the sofa.

Truth is, people appreciate reality. Especially people with children. Having a perfectly clean and tidy home *and* children is a VERY lofty ambition – regardless of how old your children are!

## 6. Be you

This is something that I talk about A LOT. I really believe that being true to who you really are is one of the fundamental ways to find more fulfilment. At this time of year, when life becomes more of a whirlwind than usual, it's even more important to listen to your gut instinct.

Sometimes, you're asked if you can do something or be somewhere and your heart sinks – you really don't want to. All you actually want to do is go to bed... every fibre of your being is saying "NO!" but because you can't come up with a valid reason that won't upset the person asking, you find yourself uttering the immortal words "OK" or "Maybe" instead.

Just because you don't have a valid excuse this does not mean that your gut feeling should be ignored. You can

graciously decline an invitation without explaining why and the world won't end.

For example, if you're invited to yet another evening out you could simply say, "Thank you so much for inviting me, that sounds like it'll be a lovely evening but I know I need to say no this time. Maybe we could arrange something for January...?"

But being true to yourself isn't just about declining invitations. It's about not giving in to expectations if they don't resonate with you.

Of course there will always be an element of compromise when other people are involved but compromise comes in all shapes and sizes...take care that you are not the only one "compromising"!

## 7. Breathe

This is a quick little technique that you can do anytime, anywhere, to dispel the looming crazies!

Just stop for a moment and focus on breathing. Take a couple of deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, squeezing out as much breath as you can on the outbreath. Close

your eyes while you do it and tune in to how your body is feeling. Mentally release the tension as you breath out – visualise it all dispersing.

Simple as that. (This is really good to help kids to calm down too, if you can catch them before they've reached the complete meltdown stage!)

## 8 Give the gift of time

Time is one of those things that most of us mums feel like we need more of. It seems like it is always in short supply. Yet it is something that money can't buy.

We all have the same amount of time each day, it's what we fill it with that differs.

There are people in your life who would place more value on spending a couple of hours with you than any sparkly gift you could buy them.

Give them the gift of your time.

It doesn't have to be right now, when there is so much more you have to cram into your days, but let them know a specific date that you will spend time with them and honour that.

It might be taking an elderly relative out for a drive to their favourite places, reminiscing about fun times you spent together, or you could offer to look after your friend's toddler for a couple of hours so she could go to the spa.

Time is precious. It is a gift in itself.

Time is also a gift that you deserve to give yourself. This is essential all year round, but more so during the festive frenzy.

Take. Time. For. Yourself.

Give yourself the gift of a guilt free 30 minutes to sit down with a cuppa and a magazine. Park your to do lists, both those that you have actually written down and the myriad things you need to do that are whirling round your head. Leave them be, they will still be there when you return to them. Take an hour to go and soak in a bathful of bubbles. Go out for a walk on your own, even if it's just 10 minutes round the block.

Now more than ever you need to keep topping up your well in order to keep up with the pace of demands on you. Even if it's only 10 minutes, do it.

You are the lynchpin in your family's machine. If you break, it'll come to a grinding halt. Which will take a LOT longer to fix than half an hour to yourself.

## 9. Teach your children to appreciate the simple things

This is one of my favourites because it kills two birds with one stone.

Stopping for a moment to notice little things that would normally pass you by interrupts the pattern of busyness and tunnel vision that is so prevalent at this time of year. It gives you the opportunity to be mindful for a moment, to rest briefly. Sharing these moments with your children will help them to slow down a bit too and hopefully to take in more of what's going on around them.

Notice things like marvelling at a spider's web spangled in frost or the smell of

gingerbread cooking or perhaps even a brass band playing Christmassy tunes. Use all your senses. It's all these simple things that make up the wonder of the world we live in, and if your children are anything like mine, any opportunity to prize them away from a device with a screen in order to see, hear, smell and appreciate the real world is an opportunity well worth taking.

If you do this often enough, it will become a habit that will benefit both you and your children throughout your lives. Find joy in the small things, for that is where happiness lies.

## 10. Be grateful for what you have and for what you are able to give

Gratitude is powerful. The minute you stop striving for more and consider what you already have is when you change your mindset and change how you feel in that moment.

If you're feeling frazzled and stressed, pause and think of five things you have to be grateful for. Large or small, it doesn't matter so long as you really *feel* the gratitude. Smile with the thought of it! Breathe it in!

All that effort and striving in the hope of achieving feeling good is such hard work and comes from a place of not enough, a

place of lack. Gratitude comes from a place of abundance, which is a much more pleasant place to be. You have the choice to feel good *right now*. You don't need to wait. A mind full of gratitude has more patience, more ideas, more joy. It feels more spacious somehow not hemmed in by the mountain of tasks to do.

This spaciousness gives rise to opportunity – the opportunity to give back to those around you with your words and deeds. What a lovely way to be able to give.

## 11. There is always time for huggles

This is one I learned from my son recently...

I was trying to get a load of household chores done when he came up and gave me a hug. I started to push him away and was halfway through a sentence along the lines of "I really haven't got time for this now..." when I checked myself and thought "what on earth are you doing? Your 12 year old son comes and gives you a hug and you haven't got *time*??!! Get a grip woman!"

So now we have a saying that it doesn't matter how busy you are there is *always* time for huggles!

Make room in your day for huggles, cherish them when they're offered. Nothing is more important.

Showing those you love how important they are to you in little ways, often, helps to put things into perspective when you feel weighed down by Christmas pressure.

## 12. Press Pause

As Christmas Eve draws in, press pause.

Stop for a while, make yourself a cup of tea or pour yourself a drink and reflect on everything you've achieved.

You are flipping amazing.

It's ok to acknowledge yourself for that. In fact, it's positively encouraged.

You are flipping amazing!

You are a multi-tasking maven, the hardest working Christmas elf and the best mum in the world all rolled into one.

Give yourself a big pat on the back. Don't worry about the bits that didn't get done. No-one will notice. Promise.

From me, to you,

# Merry Christmas!

with love

Mel xo

[www.melmorrisjones.com](http://www.melmorrisjones.com)