

The Alternative Christmas Day: A Guide to Spending Christmas Alone.



Is this your first Holiday as a single?

Dealing with divorce is difficult no matter what the time of year, but dealing with divorce over the holidays compounds the stress. It means more time with the family who may or may not be on board with this significant change in your life. It means hearing opinions that you did not ask for, even though they mean well. It could also mean missing out on some traditions you love, but, who's to say that the new traditions you create can't be just as good if not better?

Don't let your emotions get the better of you. If this is your first Christmas as a single person, it is reasonable to have some emotional ups and downs, you are still in the grieving process. Do your best to think about your new future and try not to dwell on the past. Think of new possibilities. What are the activities that you've always wanted to try but never had the time? Now it's time to make that happen. Yes, ok, perhaps Christmas 2020 is not the best time to plan a visit to Australia to have Christmas on the beach but what else can you do?

Before I give you some ideas for alternative activities here are some tips to help you survive.

1. **Take care of yourself:** Eat well, get exercise, and make sure you get adequate sleep. All of these will put you in a better position to deal with the stress
2. **Do something nice for yourself:** I know the holidays are times when we think about others than we do about ourselves. However, if you are having a difficult time, do something nice for yourself too. Get a massage. Go out for dinner with a friend. Take a long luxurious bubble bath with scented candles, relaxing music and a glass of bubbly. Do something that will make you feel good about yourself. I know money can be tight during a divorce, but you don't have to spend a lot to do something nice for yourself.
3. **Be flexible when it comes to your children:** Flexibility is critical, especially if there are children involved. Remember that children want to spend time with both parents. If you're not with the children on the 25th, plan a 'Special Christmas' when you will be. There's no need to give up on anything, rearrange. Santa can always write a special dispensation letter to allow you to celebrate Christmas on any day of your choosing. Have Christmas dinner with

all the trimmings and decorations and family that you would have on the 25th but make it an extra-special day. How many others have two Christmas Days?

4. **Don't spend it alone:** With all the changes you have going on in your life right now, it's easy to cocoon in bed and avoid family and friends. Resist the temptation. Reach out to people who care about you and will be supportive.
5. **Establish new traditions:** Let's face it. Sometimes going through divorce means you are divorcing friends as well, especially if you and your soon-to-be-ex shared all of the same friends. If you've always had a big gathering of friends at Christmas, this year is probably the best year to start new traditions, as you couldn't have a big gathering anyway with social distancing rules.
6. **Take a time out:** If you feel as if your emotions are building up and up and up, ready to explode at any minute, then taking time out to focus on your wellbeing is an absolute must. It can be difficult to come to terms with your relationship breakdown and seeing other couples happy at Christmas sometimes heightens these emotions.



Some fun things to do if you can't celebrate with the family.

1. **Make Hampers of Happiness:** Fill boxes with treats for elderly neighbours, or families that are struggling. It doesn't have to be expensive but look for small treats that will make a big difference to someone's day.
2. **Volunteer at a homeless shelter:** you can be asked to do a variety of things from cooking and food preparation to simply talking and listening.
3. **Love thy neighbour:** if you know an elderly neighbour who is spending the holidays alone, as long as its safe to do so, why not drop in on them with a plate of food and a little tippie to share. When I did this, it was so educational. I spent a good few hours talking to a neighbour in his 90s who told me all sorts of things about his time in the war. Its now become a Boxing Day tradition
4. **Become a penpal:** or if there isn't a local scheme, why not set one up. There are many lonely people who would love the thrill of the postman dropping a letter through their door

5. **Volunteer at a foodbank:** In the UK, more than 14 million people are living in poverty, including 4.5 million children. Find your nearest foodbank and volunteer a few hours. It really makes you appreciate what you've got when you see people who have nothing
6. **Do a house swap:** Whether it's for a couple of days or a couple of weeks, house sitting or pet sitting in someone else's house can be a great way to break with tradition. Housesitters UK can match you. Fancy a few days by the sea? Search for houses available and contact the owner.
7. **Zoom parties:** connect your laptop to the TV, set up the karaoke machine and have a zoom karaoke party with drinks and nibbles. Yes I know, I'm sad!! You'd be amazed at how many people really enjoy it though, even if they look at you daft at first.
8. **Make a gratitude tree:** Yes, this was difficult for me at first. My first Christmas I wasn't sure there was anything to be grateful for. My ex left on 20th December. Then I thought about it and realised I wouldn't have to make bread sauce this year. I hate it, he loved it. I wouldn't have to get up at the crack of dawn to put a massive turkey in the oven. I cooked a leg of lamb instead, my favourite meat. I wouldn't have to listen to the Queen's speech, I could listen to whatever I wanted to. No more football on a Saturday night, yippee. Day by day, week by week the tree filled up. Now I look back and I really am grateful for my divorce. If I hadn't got divorced, I would never have found ambition. If I hadn't got divorced, I would never have spent a month on my own travelling across four continents. If I hadn't got divorced, I would never have been free to meet my lovely new husband who is the wind beneath my wings not the wind trying to blow out my flame.

Remember Christmas is only one day in the year. Make it fun, fun for you, fun for the children and fun for everyone you can help. Celebrate.

Be gentle with yourself. Be patient. Don't try to rush your recovery. You don't need to accept every single invitation. You still need time to process changes and to feel.

Slow down, breathe, relax and nurture yourself. That doesn't mean throwing a pity party.

No-one can guarantee it will be perfect. No-one will fill the hole in your heart that not being with the children creates. But have a happy holiday and believe that next year it will be easier and you. You will be that much stronger.

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