



## Struggling at Christmas: Social Anxiety

Christmas is a holiday that sees people gathering together to celebrate the festive season. At Christmas we are expected to spend time with the ones we love the most, but what about the times when our experiences don't match up with what we see of other's celebrations?

There are many reasons why you might not be feeling the Christmas spirit this year: it could be ongoing worries about Covid, struggles with loneliness, social anxiety, family difficulties or dealing with the loss of a loved one.

These issues can be particularly hard to talk about this time of year, as it may feel like everyone would rather try and enjoy the festivities than listen to someone's problems. This is why it's so important to know you're not alone in any hard times you're experiencing.

If you ever feel you don't know who to talk to over the festive season, Kooth is open on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day with our team of counsellors available for you to talk to. Sometimes it can help just to know you're not alone in what you're feeling!

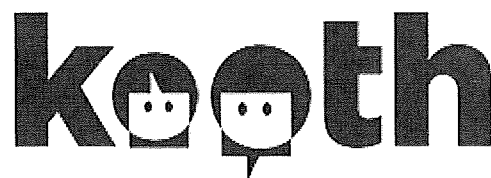
Loneliness can be a huge challenge for some, but for others the problem may not be a lack of socialising but rather too much socialising!

## Coping with Social Anxiety

One aspect of Christmas that's too often overlooked is how much it can affect a person's social anxiety. Social anxiety causes extreme levels of fear and worry from interacting with other people. This can extend to online socialising too.

From Christmas parties to visiting relatives, December sees in the most social of all the holiday seasons. While this can be fun and cheery to many, for those with social anxiety there is added pressure to spend time socialising with people they may not be able to relax around, and to act happy even if they're not. This pressure can understandably become overwhelming!

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If a social situation should ever reach a point of becoming overwhelming, whether it's online or in person, it is important to excuse yourself and take as much time as you need alone before returning.

If you can sense a potential anxiety attack coming on, people will understand your need to leave if you explain you are not feeling well.

Mental health is not always treated as seriously as physical health, yet the physical symptoms caused by a mental health issue like anxiety are just as real and valid as a physical illness. Physical symptoms of anxiety can include increased heart rate, dizziness, difficulty breathing, shaking, and nausea, to name a few.

One tip for helping control anxiety is to take a few deep, mindful breaths for releasing tension. This is an exercise that may only take a few seconds to do, but it can have a powerful grounding effect to reduce anxiety.

If you can recognise in advance that a situation will prove overwhelming for your anxiety, whether it's hanging out with friends or a Boxing Day family buffet, put those feelings first and weigh up if you'll feel able to make it or not.

The most important way to navigate this season is to know your own boundaries for anxiety, and thinking about which scenarios you can cope with and which you can't.

It's key that you don't let the pressure of social obligation convince you to attend a situation that will trigger an anxiety attack. Be honest with people if you are finding a situation difficult to cope with.

Trying to ignore your anxiety will only make it worse, so find someone you can talk to about your feelings and let them know that you need some support. Check out Kooth at [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com) for more information on anxiety and ways to cope.

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