

# Blended families at Christmas



**Blended families / stepfamilies** come in all shapes and sizes, probably managing their households in different ways but because Christmas is a time to celebrate with family, the festive season can lead to tension if things aren't planned properly.

If you and your child / children's other parent are separated you may not be able to assume that you will have them with you all day or at all on December 25th and there could be potentially large parts of the festive period you will be without your children, which can be incredibly difficult.

Similarly, if you are in a relationship with someone who has children from a previous relationship, you must factor in what time they will get, to spend with them, over the festive season.

If could be you are trying to balance time with your own children, your new spouses' children and the needs of both ex-spouses and their immediate families and then factoring in the potential for travel (at the busiest time of the year), children being out of their usual routine, emotions running high and trying to keep everyone happy ... you can soon see how this could quickly become an anxious time of year.

## **So... What about a few tips?**

These are a few points that may be helpful to you so you can have an more enjoyable and less stressful Christmas.

**Support your children's and stepchildren's feelings:** Let them know that it's okay to feel sad or disappointed to not be with the other parent, and you are there for them. Equally, don't make them feel guilty about their time away from you - they don't need to know you feel lonely without them.

**Start new traditions that will create positive memories for you and your family:** Try everything! See what works! Christmas movie night, hot chocolate, going to see the lights, cook a special meal altogether, a nature walk, a board game tournament or have a pyjama day. Hold onto traditions and activities from the past that worked for you and your kids and also create new ones.

**Be flexible and make a plan ahead:** Talk to each other and decide together what the best thing is for your children. Be mindful that it can be an emotional time for everyone and be as inclusive as possible. Compromises will have to be made but if you all keep the lines of communication open, things have a much better chance of running smoothly.

**Don't speak badly of any family member in front of your children:** No matter how much they annoy or frustrate you, do not speak negatively about your former partner in front of your children. All it will do is cause them sadness and tension which you don't want them to associate with the festive period especially if it is already difficult for them to navigate logistically. If you find yourself reaching boiling point with your ex, remove yourself from the situation and go for a walk, call a friend where you can have a rant without the danger of being overheard by curious little ears!

**Remember it is just one day:** If you don't have your children on the 25th of December, it can feel really difficult but remember it is just one day, and you can recreate your traditions on another day. If you can, try and make it into a positive for your children – they get two Christmas!

**Go easy on yourself:** Don't beat yourself up if everything doesn't go exactly according to plan. If you get through it and you're still talking to everyone on January 1st, take it as a win! Christmas in these circumstances, can be a logistical and emotional nightmare. **Well done you did it!**

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## So... Where can you get support?

The following link. Parents action for children will take you to a site that gives guidance on helping your child adjust.

<https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/parenting-relationships/relationships/help-children-adjust-blended-family/>  
or 1:1 live online chatting for free and confidential advice

**Family Lives** a website that has lots of information grouped into subjects like moving in together, house rules and boundaries with lots of general advice and online courses on being a family and the ups and downs of managing it...

Website: <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Don't forget we also have the **EAP line** where you can access **24hr support and professional counsellors for free.**  
Call free on 0800 015 5630 24hrs a day 365 days a week.

**Care First** for free online information and counselling, 24hrs a day , 7 days a week

Website – [www.Eap-carefirst.com](http://www.Eap-carefirst.com)

Username - lifestyle1234

Password - carefirst

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# Single Parents at Christmas



**Single parenting** This information is based on some lived experiences and the things learnt along the way mixed in with some other information from credible sources with the understanding that we are not all on the same path but in the hope that maybe someone will see a point or information that can help them or at least agree with and therefore feel like they are not the only one out there!

## So... Some common myths about being a Single parent or what not to say?

Here are a couple of points a lot of single parents will have heard at least one or maybe you have said it to your single parent friend, colleague or even a member of your family without thinking of the realities of it.

**“I may as well be a single parent , my partner doesn’t help at all”** Let’s just say to compare the two would mean that unless your partner lives in a different house/flat and never contributes to any conversations, decision-making, childcare , food shopping (with or without children), DIY, night time or getting to school routines, making dinner, playtimes, managing adolescence indifference or angst , helping/hindering with homework, keeping Dr or Dentist appointments and so on.....you get the idea, it can be intense, it just isn’t the same!

**“How do you manage it, I’d never be able to?”** You would, maybe not brilliantly at first or all the time but you get there , you work it out and making those decision on the house, the schools, the children’s life, the proud feeling at parents’ evenings and the fact they all went to school on time this week (and you remembered to pick them up!) all of that pushes you on and doing it by yourself can give you such a good feeling ..you get the idea it just is, and you do!

So it’s worth thinking about how you are offering your support and the little things you may be able to do or say to those you know that are single parents.

## So... What about the Christmas Season?

Here are a few tips for the festive season:

Don’t get into debt.. Take control of your finances  
See Money Saving Expert below or call the EAP line

Know you are not alone... check out  
<https://www.singleparentswellbeing.com/ run by single parents>

Spend time with those you love,  
family and friends

Be grateful...think of what you have achieved even the small wins,  
no tears at bedtime and a tea they all liked are amazing  
achievements you made happen!

Think of some new traditions to start... the simple things like  
baking/decorating biscuits , going for a walk on Christmas Eve, a movie  
afternoon/night, a new Christmas book (the library can help with this)

Treat yourself... get them to bed earlier and get  
your favourite movie on and that bar of choco-  
late you stashed earlier!

Look after yourself... cleaning the house can wait over an extra  
hours sleep or doing something for yourself.



# Single Parents at Christmas



## So... Where can you get support?

The NHS has a really good informative website with advice for single parents, they start with 'don't be afraid to ask for help', this is an important point as you should consider all the help that's offered you may or may not need it but for your own Mental Health & Wellbeing it's good to see what's out there for financial support e.g. Single discount for Council Tax or free school meals, and local groups you can contact....

NHS Website [Advice for single parents - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Gingerbread** for single parent families that brings the community together providing contact with others in similar positions with the hope they can support each other. They also have a diverse amount of information on Benefits, Childcare, managing Christmas, going on holiday, wellbeing, working, and more

Gingerbread Website Home | Gingerbread – [www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)  
They also have online webchat on their website  
Helpline 0808 802 0925



**Money Saving Expert** has practical help on the financial world of budgeting, mortgages, energy bills, benefits, bank accounts and where to get the best deals for Christmas Shopping all checked and verified by experts!

Website <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/deals/>

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# The Elderly in our communities and loneliness



**Loneliness can strike any of us, at any time** and if not addressed, it can lead to poor mental and physical health conditions.

People can get isolated for a variety of reasons, including the death of a spouse, getting older and weaker, leaving the workplace or through disability or illness. It is very easy to feel like you are alone and vulnerable, which can lead to depression resulting in a decline of health and wellbeing.

Elderly people are especially vulnerable but there are ways to overcome loneliness, even if they find it hard to get out.

According to Age UK..... More than 2 million people over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million say that they go a month or more without speaking to a friend, neighbour, or member of the family.

Almost 1.5 million elderly people will feel more lonely at Christmas than any other time of the year.

## So....What can you do?

Help them to grab every chance to start a conversation, whether that be with a sales colleagues in our shops or the person (it could be you) next to them in a queue or just walking past someone in the street, a friendly hello could just lift the day.



Maybe that person you know could invite friends for tea or you could help them connect with charities such as [www.reengage.org.uk](http://www.reengage.org.uk) who host regular tea parties for people over 75 who live alone.



Direct them to libraries and community centres as they regularly hold training sessions for older people to learn basic computer skills.



Collect some information on local community activities that you could share with them, there may be singing, walking, coffee morning, lunch, or bingo groups to join where they can meet and talk to new people and form new friendships especially at this festive time of year.



Volunteering could get them out and about and offers to help others. There are a variety of volunteering opportunities with organisations such as Home Start, Sure Start or Citizens Advice charities.



Help them to keep in touch with people by phone or using a computer, tablet, or mobile phone to make a video call with friends and family. Or tell them about [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) and their really successful befriending service that you can also volunteer for.

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*An Age UK story on the success of the befriending services... Of 92-year-old Joseph from Sandwell, near Birmingham, who was referred to Age UK by a local community officer after his wife of 64 years died. Even though Joseph felt he didn't need any help, Age UK refused to give up on him.*

*Someone from Age UK Sandwell went to meet Joseph and see how he was. Although his general mental and emotional wellbeing was clearly very low, Joseph didn't really want anyone to come and visit.*

*Age UK then arranged for a friendship scheme coordinator to visit Joseph twice more and eventually persuaded him to give befriending a try.*

*Derek started to visit Joseph and they hit it off almost immediately, finding lots of common topics to chat about. He now visits Joseph every week for at least 2 hrs, and they've been able to go on trips together occasionally, too – such as the National Memorial arboretum.*

*Age UK Sandwell also arranged for Joseph to visit the local lunch club and he's made some new friends in the area. Plus, he's started gardening again, with a little kickstart from Age UK Sandwell's gardeners who helped clear the undergrowth - this has also lead to trips to the local garden centre with Derek.*

*Joseph doesn't really like admitting that he was lonely - he's a proud man who fought in WW2 and is highly decorated.*

*He says now that he was too embarrassed to admit he needed help and friends and is extremely grateful to Age UK Sandwell who 'refused to give up on him'.*

**Age UK offer two types of befriending services...** telephone friendship and face to face befriending. Age UK and the Silverline offer free telephone friendship services so that the elderly can enjoy chatting with someone in the comfort of their own home. This can be every week or just when the feeling of loneliness strikes.

Face to face befriending services are available at many local Age UK's. They will often involve a volunteer befriender visiting an older person in their home for a cup of tea and a chat, or accompanying them on an activity. In some cases the befriender also accompanies them to hospital appointments.

## **So... Where else can you get support?**

These are the websites that will give you or anyone, that may find themselves in the vulnerable position of isolation and loneliness, a good start to get some information in order to reconnected with others in your own way, at your own pace....

[www.thesilverline.org.uk](http://www.thesilverline.org.uk)

<https://www.independentage.org/>

<https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/coping-loneliness-christmas>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

<https://giveusashout.org/>

<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/>