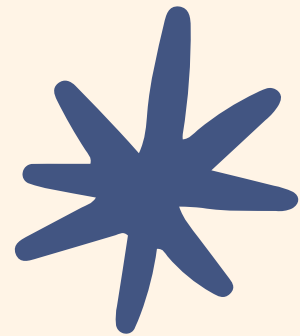
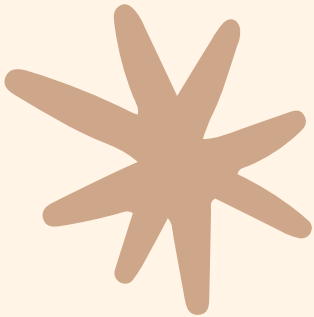




COPING OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON



The holiday season can be fun and exciting, but it can also be hard for many of us.

In this booklet, we're going to run through some tips on managing the challenges you may be facing.



This time of year can be difficult for our mental health for a number of reasons.



The cooler weather, darker evenings, social gatherings and the busyness school and work as the year comes to an end can all have huge impacts on our mood.

Be kind to yourself, you're allowed to struggle. Even if your feelings don't "match" with what's going on around you, let yourself experience your feelings.

In this booklet, we're going to run through some tips and advice for coping with difficult feelings that may arise.

There's also some info on where to get more support on the back pages in case you need it.

It's important to reach out in you're struggling.

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Christmas



For a lot of people, Christmas is their favourite time of year. But there lots of people who find it quite difficult too.

The social events, traditions and the pressure to be happy all the time can be exhausting.

Try not to compare your Christmas to someone else's, or something you see online. Everyone's Christmas will be different and although it can be tricky to manage feelings like jealousy or disappointment, remembering that everyone is different can help.

And remember, it's only a few days of the year!
And they will be over soon.

Not everyone celebrates Christmas, this could be due to religious or cultural beliefs, or some people just might not like to celebrate. Maybe you usually do, but things are a little different this year.

It might seem like everyone celebrates Christmas with everything on social media, school or in shops and that can be overwhelming. But even if you or your family don't celebrate Christmas, you can still enjoy this time of year. It's a holiday and that means you have some time to relax, enjoy yourself and see friends and family.



Some Things That May Help

Stick to Routine

Something that can help is keeping to your normal routine over the holiday period. Sticking to bedtimes, eating schedules and self-care routines can allow you to feel more in control.

Be Prepared

Before the holidays begin, taking time to plan ahead can help relieve some anxiety. Write reminders of what helps you cope and keep that with you. Even if you don't end up needing it, sometimes just knowing you have that is enough. Knowing what services are available can help too, we've listed some at the back of this booklet for you.

Take Time Out

Stepping away to feel calm or manage your feelings is a good way to make things less overwhelming. If you can't take time out, think about something you can do afterwards (eg. I can't step away now, but later I could lay in bed and watch Netflix). It'll help to have something to look forward to, that's just for you.

Have a break!

If you have homework or studying to do over the holidays, it's important you relax too! You deserve a break and a rest, it's the holiday's after all!

Managing Emotions



The holidays can kick up some strong feelings, sadness, jealousy, anxiety, disappointment - and that's perfectly normal, its all about how you manage these feelings so they don't take over.



Remember to communicate how your feeling with those around you. It may be hard to say them out loud, you could try writing them down and giving them to someone to read instead.



If you can identify the negative emotions you are feeling, it becomes easier to work out how to tackle them.

- One way you can do this, is to identify the opposite emotion to how you're feeling
- If you're feeling sad, try listening to happy music. Or if you're anxious, try and do things that make you feel calm.



Loneliness

You may feel lonely over the holidays. You may be missing your friends or maybe you're away from home.

It's important you don't keep things to yourself if you're struggling. Reach out to a friend or family member, ask how their day is going. We know it might not be the same as seeing them in person, but maybe video call them - a chat might help a little.

You're Not Alone



Grief

When you lose someone close to you, it can be difficult for a long time. At Christmas those feelings can get more intense. Happy memories may come to mind, which may bring you comfort, but make you miss them more too. You may experience difficult feelings or memories around this time too. It might feel strange if someone isn't around the dinner table like they used to be. Maybe this is your first Christmas since someone passed.

Surround yourself with people if you can. You might all be grieving together you can support each other. It's okay to miss them and be sad.

Something that might be nice is putting a decoration on the tree for the special person or lighting a candle. Share those positive memories with others and remember the good times you shared together.

Family Struggles

Sometimes there are issues at home which make it hard for you to **cope**. Maybe you're seeing relatives you don't get along with.

Perhaps the home doesn't feel comfortable and supportive.

You may feel things aren't in your control.

You don't have to justify yourself. Seeing family you don't see often can prompt comments on your appearance which may feel uncomfortable, or people asking questions about school or future plans. These things can be really hard to discuss, and it can be hard to explain.

Remembering that the holidays are only temporary can be helpful.

Christmas doesn't last forever and neither will these feelings, even if it doesn't seem that way at the time.

Prioritising you and your well-being is the most important thing.

Not Being Together

If your parents are separated there may be pressure about who you spend Christmas with. You deserve to do what is best for you and what makes you most happy and safe.

You may not be seeing your friends or family for a number of reasons, but it's super important to stay connected when you can, reach out to someone you trust who can support you.



If you don't feel safe at home, please reach out and get support.

We've listed some support services at the back of this booklet.



Eating Issues

If you have an eating disorder or struggle with food, the festive season can be really tough. There's a huge focus on food around this time of year, and lots of diet talk too.

We have some tips on things that may help:

- **Plan as much as you can in terms of meals/snacks.** This can be helpful to do with someone you trust so they can support you. If you're being supported by the ED team, it's important to follow their guidance and support to help you stay on track with your recovery.
- **Have some distractions planned after dinner.** You could help with the washing/clearing up; play some board games, do something arty or play a video game.
- **Unhelpful conversations may come up around how much food people are eating, diet talk or comments on people's bodies.** These can be really difficult to manage. If you're comfortable doing so, maybe ask someone you trust to let others know to avoid these topics - or get them to help steer the conversations away.
- **It's important you look after yourself.** If you need some time out or a sleep that's okay.



LGBTQ+

There may be family coming over who aren't accepting of your identity or you may not be out at home at all.

There are a few things that can be helpful to remember:

- No one can tell you who you are.
- Your identity is still valid and important.

Being addressed with the wrong pronouns or name can very uncomfortable. Getting cards/gifts aimed at the wrong gender can be really hard too.

Remind yourself this is only temporary, stay in contact with people who support you and make you feel good.



Sensory Issues

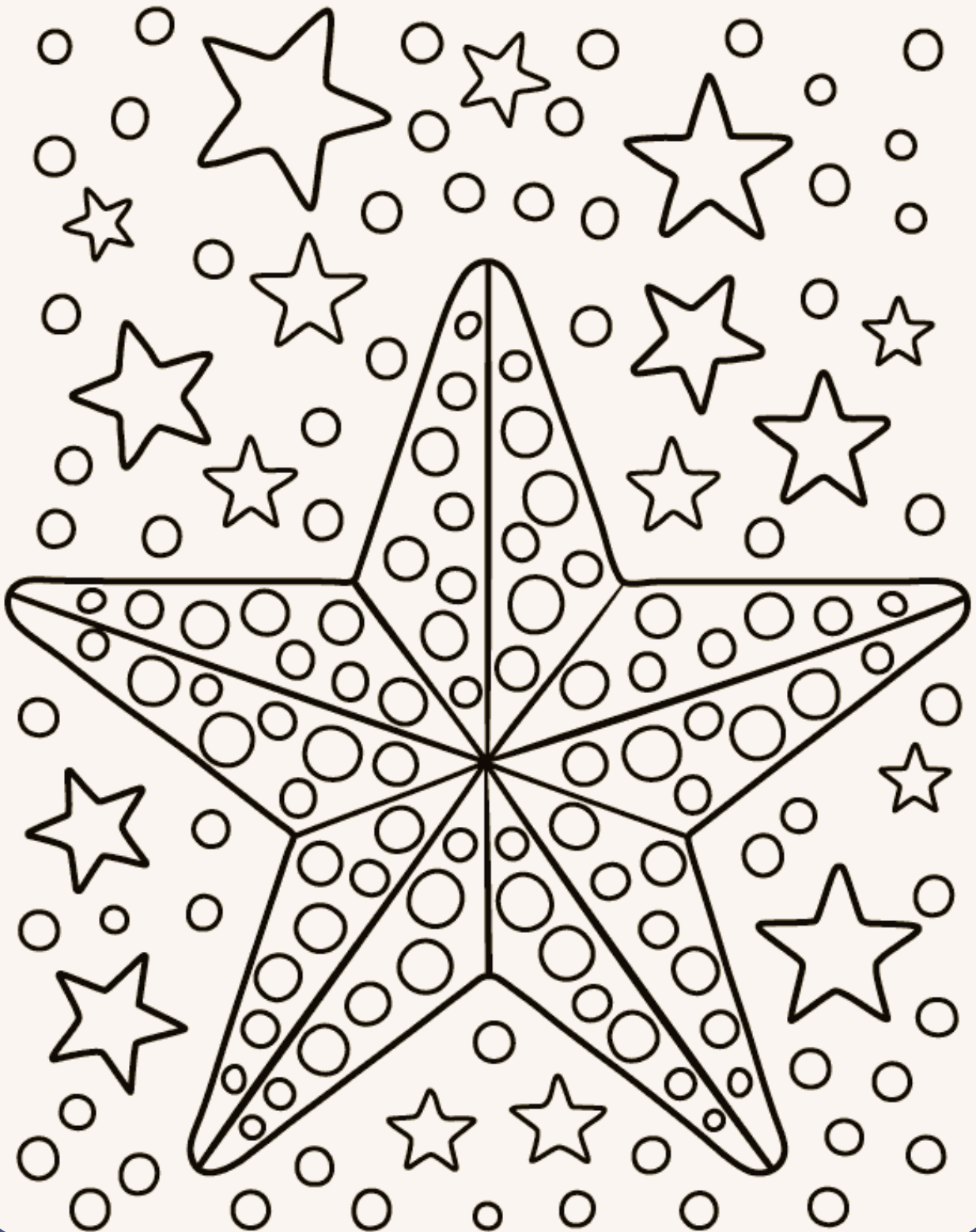
Christmas is a very busy time, if you struggle with sensory processing it can be particularly overwhelming, with all the loud music, busy events, flashing lights and strong smells and tastes.

Here are some things to try:

- Use headphones/ear defenders/ear plugs to block out loud and busy sound, or listen to your music
- Have a 'quiet space' you can go to, whether that's your room or another place if you're not at home. Take breaks!
- Wear comfy clothes, and have you comfort items with you that usually help, whether that's a soft toy, headphones, fidget toys or anything else that helps you!



Colouring



* Support *

childline

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME
childline.org.uk | 0800 1111

Childline are available 24/7 via helpline, online web-chat or via email

YOUNGMINDS

fighting for young people's mental health

Young Minds have lots of information and advice on their website

Switchboard LGBT+ helpline

Switchboard LGBT+ have an online chat and helpline which opens 10am-10pm



Beat - Eating Disorders have a helpline and lots of information and support on their website



The National Autistic Society have lots of helpful advice on their website about coping over Christmas

