



# Let's make the yuletide gay



VICKY BEECHING SHARES HER SURVIVAL TIPS FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

"Have yourselves a merry little Christmas, make the Yuletide gay," so goes the famous festive song. However, in reality, Christmas can be far from merry. It's often a tough time for many – especially those of us in the LGBT+ community. And far from being "gay", the

"Yuletide" season can feel extremely straight!

Whether it's the pressure of buying and choosing gifts, or spending time in close quarters with relatives, research has shown that Christmas gets listed among the top 10 "most stressful life events" for the general public; up there with divorce, losing a job, or moving house.

Now, before you think I've become a total Scrooge and only have negative things to say about it, let me assure you that I love Christmas. It has huge significance for me spiritually.

Plus, I adore twinkly fairy lights and the excuse to eat chocolate in vast quantities while watching Harry Potter and Lord of The Rings box sets on repeat.

But I'm aware – from my own experience and that of my lesbian, gay, bi and trans friends – that it can be a difficult time of year. If that resonates with you, then this column is for you! Think of it as your Survival Kit For The Festive Season. Hopefully, some of these tips will make things easier – or at the very least, make you smile.

**My first tip is this: Be honest.** If you're dreading the festive season, then 'fess up and talk to trusted friends about it. Chances are, some of them will feel the same. Too many people bury their sense of sadness and give in to fake cheer, as incessant Christmas music plays in the supermarket and we rush from one party to the next.

It's easy to think "I can't be a downer – it's supposed to be a happy time of year!" But beneath the happy veneer, lots of people are experiencing the same emotions and disguising them for identical reasons. The truth

is: no-one can support you unless they know you're struggling – I've discovered that principle the hard way, from personal experience.

So, it's always best to speak up and get some help if you know the coming weeks will be tricky for you. Please don't suffer in silence. Find a small support network – just one or two others who are on the same page – and commit to helping each other get through the weeks ahead.

If you don't feel able to talk to friends or loved ones, then give the LGBT Switchboard a call. They provide a confidential listening ear for anyone, in the UK or overseas. You can ring them on 0300 330 0630 (lines are open from 10am-10pm UK time, every day). Their website also has options to use email or anonymous Instant Messenger. Check them out at [switchboard.lgbt](http://switchboard.lgbt).

**My second tip is: Don't believe the hype or perfection of other people's social media.** We all tend to show our ideal life, rather than our real life, on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Just because someone's status updates are glowing with Yuletide joy, and their

photos show impeccable roast dinners and joyful family parties, it doesn't mean this is the entire truth.

When we compare our real lives to others "Photoshopped lives" it can feel like we don't measure up. So, it's crucial to remember that social media doesn't reveal the full story of other people's reality. Behind the scenes, it's likely that they're having their fair share of negative moments too.

On the flip-side, social media can sometimes be helpful if you are feeling in need of community. Comedian Sarah Millican came up with the hashtag [#JoinIn](https://twitter.com/sarahmillican75) as she hated the idea of anyone feeling alone on 25 December. It's become a tradition now, taking place for the past five years, and is a great example of how Twitter can bring people together. You can follow Sarah's tweets at [@sarahmillican75](https://twitter.com/sarahmillican75).

**Thirdly: If you're single, don't let it make you feel alone, or left out of the festivities.** November and December seem to have a weird effect on everyone; one minute people are on their own, and the next, everyone seems to have coupled up! It's a romantic time of year, so suddenly everyone's walking around hand in hand.

Being single can make Christmas time hard; much of it seems to revolve around attending parties with a plus-one, having someone to go on snowy walks with, or buy gifts for. It's crucial to remember you're not the only one, and it doesn't have to impair your fun this festive season. Lots of people are not in relationships – and for a plethora of reasons. I'm currently single, so here's a virtual high-five to all the other single folks out there this December!

It can throw up a few challenges, though: it may feel tough to go home to relatives without a partner as a side-kick and confidant. And it's especially awkward when well-meaning people take it upon themselves to set you up with other singles at Christmas parties or meals. Before you know it, you're living your own version of Bridget

Jones' Christmas jumper scene; casually getting left alone with the person your friends, or family, think could be your soulmate. This is even tougher if you're not out and are being set up with someone who is entirely the wrong gender.

**Fourth: There are no rules about who you "should" spend Christmas with.** If you're finding family relationships difficult due to a lack of understanding around your sexuality or gender identity, then perhaps it's healthier to stay away.

Your own emotional and psychological health must come before any sense of obligation. After all, if we don't take care of ourselves, we won't be able to relate to others from a place of wholeness. Self-care can initially seem like selfishness, but really it's the best way to help others as well as ourselves. When we take care of our own wellbeing, we will naturally be more loving, grounded and functional toward those we value the most.

Many LGBT+ people have found that friends can be a wonderful version of family. I know several groups of LGBT+ people who spend special occasions like Christmas or New year's Eve together. If that appeals to you, then rally a few like-minded people and create some new festive traditions together.

**Fifth: If things all get a bit too much this month, I'd highly recommend trying meditation.** It doesn't have to be weird, spiritual, or other-worldly. It can be a very practical, easy habit that requires nothing more than a few minutes and a pair of headphones. There's a fantastic app called Headspace that I enjoy using. This app provides a super-easy introduction to meditation for those who haven't dabbled in it before. It's available for Apple and Android phones, and you can start with just 10 minutes. Everything is guided, so you're not left alone in silence wondering what on earth to do!

Meditation can help us get in touch with how we're feeling and why. December is a dark month in the most literal sense; we see less daylight than usual, so it's natural we might feel a bit down even if we don't usually. Meditating helps centre us and hopefully brings a bit of peace and respite. So, if the turkey gets burned, or someone is visibly unimpressed with the gift you spent hours choosing, why not nip off to a quiet part of the house and spend 10 minutes with Headspace. It might be the soothing solution you need!

**My final tip in this Survival Guide is for those of you who are excited about Christmas: if the festive season is a joyful time for you – that's fantastic!** It's a positive time for plenty of people, including lots of LGBT+ folks. If you are lucky enough to be in that position, do spare a thought for those who might not be doing so well.

Be pro-active this month – ask others in our community how they're feeling and whether they have somewhere to celebrate the holidays. Don't expect people to tell you the truth right away; many feel under pressure to give a cheerful pat answer, so it might take some gentle questioning. If there is going to be space at your table on 25 December, perhaps consider inviting someone who might be at a loose end. It could make all the difference to them.

However we feel about this time of year, let's make sure we keep an eye on each other in the coming weeks. Especially, let's be mindful of those who are newly out and experiencing their first Christmas outside the closet. We all know how tricky that can be and the ways it can impact family relationships! The spirit of Christmas is goodwill to all, so let's model that in powerful and tangible ways: at a time when loneliness and isolation can rear their heads, let's be living reminders that light always beats darkness, and love always wins. **D**

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