



Helpful Notes

SUPPORT AT
CHRISTMAS

Dr Claire Stubbs

Welcome



Christmas is different for everyone of course and it can be particularly challenging if you have a challenging relationship with food and your body.

These helpful notes provide an add on to a more detailed booklet, that also provides more information and helpful tips. For a copy of this full booklet, please contact Claire at withyouinmindpa@gmail.com

This guide has been produced by Dr Claire Stubbs, Counselling Psychologist and Specialist Practitioner in Eating Difficulties.

For any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me via www.drclairestubbspsychologist.co.uk

Supporting Ourselves at Christmas

Christmas is different for everyone of course and it can be particularly challenging if you have a challenging relationship with food and your body.

How can we support ourselves during this challenging time when so many of our “parts” that are food, weight or body related get activated. A food part might be the need to restrict, eat more than you need, use food as a reward, over exercise, use compensatory behaviours such as purging or laxatives and so on.

Here are some suggestions taken from an evidence based approach, that might be helpful:

CURIOUS

Be curious with yourself about what your hot spots or tricky times will be. When are your food parts most likely to get activated? Christmas day after a stressful family dinner, at the works Christmas party, when your partner is at their works party and you feel lonely? What might you need in place to look after yourself, to create a different response? What does that part of you need? Be curious and check inside and simply ask, what is that part afraid of might happen if it didn't protect you in that way, by over- eating,

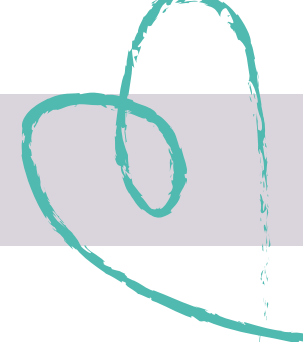
restricting, numbing the loneliness & what might it need from you instead in terms of self protection? If we are curious we can elicit more information at a deeper level.

CLARITY

If you can try and gain some clarity about your vulnerable part prior to any potential triggering situations. Where do you feel it in your body, what's the sensation you feel when this part emerges? How old is this part of you? What is it so afraid of? What's its intention for you? How is it trying to protect you? Does it have an image attached to it? What's the very first sign that you notice that tells you that this part is present? Clarity supports our awareness and may help you to identify in your body what's happening when this part gets activated.

CALM

When you notice that this part has been triggered, try and take some deep breaths in for three and out for three, pausing for three on the in breath. This will send oxytocin to your brain which is the bonding chemical and calm your nervous system. If you can try and take some space from



others and again check inside as to what that part might really need you from you in that moment, what is it scared of and what does it need to feel safe? This will immediately calm the part and your overall system. This will also turn your frontal lobe back on, which is your logical, thinking part of your brain, which gets taken over by your emotional alarm system.

COURAGE

Do you have a little bit of courage inside to take a risk and respond in a different way to how you have previously. Has there been a time in the past when something else has supported you? Can you think of a time when you have been really brave? What supported your bravery, is there anyone you can enlist to help you be a little braver? Can you remember that feeling afterwards when you were brave and bottle that feeling and soak it up in your body.

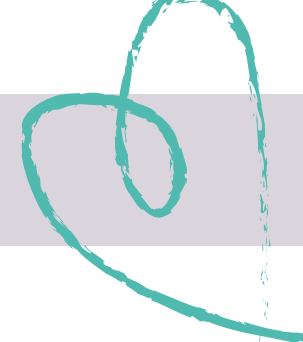
COMPASSION

Whatever happens and however you respond you are doing your absolute best. If you think these food related parts

are protecting you from something you are afraid of, then you need an abundance of compassion right now, as you were terrified and that part was trying to protect you from that terror. Self compassion means being in touch with our own suffering, not dodging it, hiding or disconnecting from it. It also means offering ourselves kindness and a non judgemental response to help reduce the experience of suffering. Everything feels better when we feel understood and supported and we all have the capacity to create that for ourselves internally, just sometimes and more often for some, our parts can overwhelm us and block this compassion.

CONNECTION

If it feels safe and it may be hard to access somewhere where you can really tune into yourself and your needs, yet acknowledgement of how we feel and what we REALLY need when it comes to food related parts is an important step in healing. What's happening in your body, do you have physical signs that indicate your hungry, or do you need something emotionally? If it's an emotional



need, can you provide it for yourself or would sounding out how you feel with someone else help? If that trusted person is not immediately available what do you imagine they would say right now? What would they suggest you do? Connecting inside with a loving, trusted confident will support you to feel held and know that you're not alone. If you are going to an event that is going to be tough, take something with you to remind you and help you connect with that person in the moment. Or ask someone to leave a voice message on your phone so you can hear their soothing tone. If a night on the sofa is a vulnerable place too, these things can also be useful. Connect inside and ask yourself what's the real need, your psyche will respond, I promise.

CREATIVITY

Perhaps ahead of time and if you are aware of when your food related parts might get activated, could you create a list of alternative responses, launching into song for example at the dinner table on Christmas day might be fun! Seriously, having a list of creative alternatives could support you in the moment. It may not even be a food

related trigger, if stress elicits a food part, it might be useful to consider what stressors might be present and what you need to support you to respond to these. Options might be, singing in your head, counting the number of people in the restaurant with brown hair, going to the loo to breathe and scream, trying another strategy like being calm or connecting, texting or calling a friend who is on hand, leaving the works do early because it's shit. I'm sure you can be more creative than me, and it's possibly easier to be creative in advance before your part gets activated. Also, be creative afterwards too, how are you going to look after yourself if things don't go as you hoped? What self soothing strategies might you need in place? This is SO important to protect yourself from a vicious cycle of guilt and shame. This time of year is hard and you're really doing your best.

For more information about eating difficulties and support access you can visit:

www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

www.eatingdisordersni.co.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

To talk to someone:

Text the YoungMinds Crisis Messenger, for free 24/7 support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis.

If you need urgent help text YM to **85258**. All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors. Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

You can also visit or call Childline for free too:

www.childline.org.uk/get-support/

 **0800 1111**

For adults in crisis contact the Samaritans:

www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/

 **116 123**

Or you can email the Samaritans if that feels safer and they will respond within 24 hours:

jo@samaritans.org



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