



Turning the Tide

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Redesigning Christmas after Domestic Abuse



Turning the Tide is an education and empowerment programme written and developed by Alpha Vesta alongside their Survivor and Insight Network. The Programme is for those who have experienced domestic abuse at some point during their childhood or adulthood and are struggling to make sense of their experience and move forward to a life of freedom and independence.

The Programme is not suitable for those still living within an abusive relationship but for those struggling to move forward afterwards. The Programme aims to ‘break the cycle’ for the future.

Learning Modules, Peer Mentor Sessions and Advocacy are provided within the Programme which is currently being offered across Job Centres in Essex.

Please contact us at breakingthecycle@alphavesta.com if your service would like to commission ‘Turning the Tide’ but in the meantime, please share our Christmas Handbook for those who may be struggling post-domestic abuse.



The Handbook has been written by members of our Survivor and Insight Network using valuable additional resources from national mental health charity, MIND.



Christmas can be a very difficult and stressful time of year for anyone currently or previously having experienced domestic abuse.

Some survivors and their children may not even be able to see their families this year because they made the incredibly tough decision to flee their violent and abusive relationship and, for their own safety, are not able to return.



You might be struggling this year for the first time. Or you may have found Christmas difficult in the past, and you're dreading it again this year.

You may also enjoy Christmas, but not be able to celebrate it how you'd like to. Or you might find some parts enjoyable, but other parts stressful.

Common Struggles



- **Dealing with other people's expectations or decisions.** This might include family norms, or religious or cultural expectations.
- **Demands on your time,** including pressure to socialise or see people, whether it's online or in person.
- **Difficulty setting boundaries and having less privacy.** For example, having to spend time or share your plans with other people.
- **Listening and empathy,** including feeling pressure to be available for others.
- **Worrying about gifts,** such as what you buy, who you buy for and how they'll be received.

Common Struggles



Christmas is also the time of year where alcohol is flowing and because it's winter, we are often inside the home far more than we would be in the summer. It's dark at 4pm and walking out of the home if you feel something is brewing it is nearly impossible particularly with young children.

We urge those living in perhaps an unpredictable, volatile home to have someone they are able to contact quickly if they need to. A safe word that they can use to let them know that they need help.

Re-Designing Christmas!

Reflecting on Christmas Past, Present and Future



Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Past



Your Perpetrator was likely to have kept everyone on edge. Remember the minutest detail of the day, have issues with the presents that were bought, the amount everyone was drinking, who said what to whom, the dinner that they ate which wasn't up to standard, the mess that has been left behind, the children eating too much chocolate and being spoilt by other family members.

Literally everything will have been a problem and somehow you probably felt it was all your fault.

Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Past



For those having lived in a very controlling, coercive relationship, Christmas would have carried with it a number of tense moments.

The person delivering this kind of abuse in the home, doesn't even need alcohol, they need to be and feel in control of the home all of the time.

For you, keeping a façade up while others are around is challenging and once everyone else had left, you certainly would have felt everything was your fault.

Re-Designing Christmas! Christmas Present



Life may not be exactly as we would like it at the moment for lots of different reasons.

You may all be at different stages of the 'grief journey' as you begin to process your own individual experience and rebuild.

Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Present – What can I do?



Take time for yourself: Make time for something you enjoy...

Manage your social media: Try to avoid comparing yourself to others...

Plan ahead: Take time to work out what you're feeling...

Reach out: Spend time with loved ones when you feel able...

Try a relaxation or grounding exercise: Sometimes something simple like controlled breathing can help us feel calmer...

Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Present – What can I do?



Certain places may feel very uncomfortable for you, for example if they bring back difficult memories. If possible, you could plan to **spend less time in difficult places, or not go at all.**

Think about whether you really need to do things if you're not looking forward to them. It may be that you can **do them for less time, or in a different way.**

Make a list of any services that you might need and their Christmas opening hours.

If you're worried about feeling lonely or isolated this Christmas, think of ways to help pass the time. For example, this might be **doing something creative or spending time in nature.**

Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Present – What can I do?



If you're going to be somewhere unfamiliar for Christmas, think about **what you need to help you cope**. For example, things you can bring to make you feel more comfortable. Or somewhere you can go to take a break.

If having a routine is important to you, try to include as much of your **regular routine** in your Christmas plans as you can. This could help prevent you feeling too disrupted. Or you could slowly introduce Christmas activities to your routine, rather than do them all at once.

If you sometimes experience flashbacks, panic attacks or dissociation, make a note of **what helps** during these moments, and keep it with you.

Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Present – What can I do?



If you can't be with the people you want to see in person, you could arrange a phone or video call to catch up with them on Christmas day. Or try to arrange a **visit around Christmas**, if there's a time when it's possible to meet.

Try out some **new traditions** if any of your previous traditions don't feel possible this year. For example, if they're too expensive, or too difficult. These new ideas could be a one-off, or they could become part of your Christmas future!

Try to **plan something nice to do after Christmas**. Having something to look forward to next year could make a real difference.

Re-Designing Christmas! Christmas Future



It's a totally blank
canvas!



Re-Designing Christmas!

Christmas Future – An ongoing project!



What would you want to see?

What would it smell like?

What would it feel like?

Who would be there?

What new traditions would you want to introduce?

What would you like to feel like when you wake up on Christmas morning?

What would you like to feel like when you go to bed at the end of Christmas Day?





Remember that you are on a journey... The destination is yet unknown!

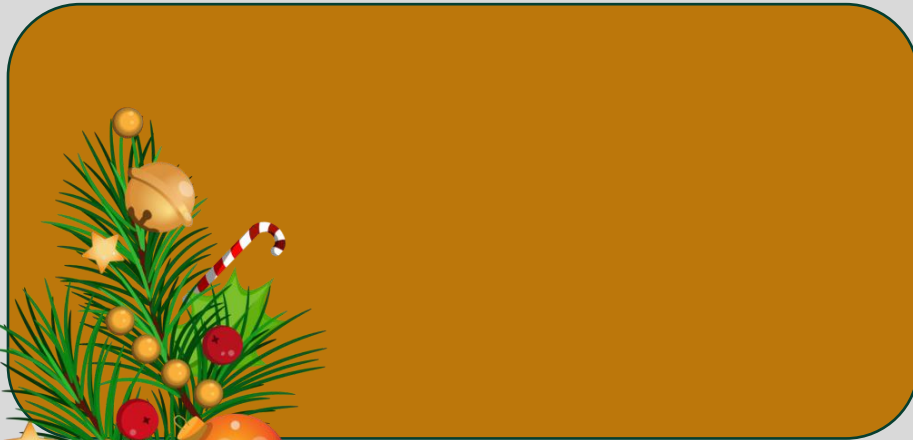
Once the skies clear, you will paint that destination yourself...

ACTIVITY

Redesigning Christmas



What 3 things might help me when I'm feeling low this Christmas?



You can write down your thoughts in your journal.

What 3 things would I like to see in my Christmas Future?





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We wish you a lovely Christmas!