



THERAPIST'S TOP TIPS FOR

Helping Young People with Eating
Disorders Over Christmas



THE WAVE
CLINIC



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IT'S CHRISTMAS BUT NOT EVERYONE IS EXCITED

While it can be magical and exciting, Christmas also brings difficulties for teens with Eating Disorders. This year you can validate your young person by being aware of the challenges surrounding the festive season.

It can be really tempting for parents to tell young people with additional challenges to 'pull themselves together' or to 'just do it for me'. Eating Disorders are complex psychiatric conditions that young people are not able to wish away or put on hold for seasonal events. Validate your young person. Let them know that you know how tough it is for them and work together on strategies for the really tough days. Let your young person know that there is a safety plan for moments that feel really difficult and overwhelming.

Top Tip

- Tell your teen three things that you know are difficult for them and the reasons why. Showing that you truly understand helps your teen feel seen and understood.

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1

2

MERRY AND BRIGHT

Christmas Resources for Teens with Eating Disorders

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 2

All teens can benefit from having resources throughout the celebrations (and come to think of it, the adults can benefit too).

What do we mean by resources for Eating Disorders? We mean having some activities that can help your young person to regulate or ground them. Big emotions, noise, mealtimes, sharing plates and a food filled holiday season can be triggering for young people challenged by Eating Disorders. Prepare a resource list and a plan ahead of the big day. There are as many resources as there are young people who use them. It is good to have six resources that really work and to have the preparation at hand throughout the Christmas holiday.

Our personal favourites are Butterfly taps and Monkey hugs. Using the power of touch to gently regulate your big feelings and slow your breathing can be helpful in tricky moments. Walking, drawing and a great piece of music can work as well. Tennis balls, fidget devices, singing and smelling something wonderful (our favourite is Oud on a charcoal burner).

Top Tip

- Maybe you could try Light Stream - the instructions are on the next page.

THE LIGHT STREAM TECHNIQUE EXPLAINED

The Light Stream technique is an exercise that helps to ground feelings and bodily sensations. It is a technique that can be used by anyone when they feel triggered and experience negative emotions and anxiety.

Yassin shares the step-by-step process of the Light Stream technique:

Step 1

The first part of the light stream technique is to be mindful of what you are experiencing and feeling at that moment.

Ask yourself this question: What am I feeling right now, and where do I feel it in my body?

Step 2

Then, imagine those feelings are an object. The goal is to take the first thing that comes to mind after recognising the emotions and location.

Ask yourself these questions about the object:

“If it had a shape, what shape would it be?”

“If it had a size, what size would it be?”

“If it had a colour, what colour would it be?”

“If it had a temperature, what temperature would it be? Hot or cold?”

“If it had a texture, what texture would it be?”

“If it had a sound, what kind of sound would it make? High or low pitch?”

Step 3

Next, focus your attention on an imagery exercise.

Pick a colour you associate with healing. Now imagine a stream of light in that colour coming down from above and flowing in through the top of your head. Focus the light stream down on the object.

Let the light vibrate and resonate like a laser beam in and around this object. Allow yourself to notice what happens to the object.

The more light or energy that you need, the more is available to you. Allow yourself to feel the light enter your mind, and allow the healing light to vibrate and resonate in and around the object. Notice what happens to the object.

When you notice the object is gone or it feels contained, allow yourself to let the energy from the light flow into your body. Allow it to reach the tips of your fingers, and the tips of your toes.

Allow yourself to be engulfed and overwhelmed by the energy, count to three and open your eyes.

You should notice the feelings of anxiety have subsided or have completely gone.

3

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW

Holiday Travelling with Young People with Eating Disorders.

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 3

Packing, preparing and going on holiday or away from home with a young person with an Eating disorder can be incredibly difficult. The preparation, routines and rigidity can be really stressful for families to manage. Many parents feel overwhelmed and others feel that the holidays are taken over by the difficulties that an Eating Disorder can bring.

Changes to locations, food types and times of meals can be difficult for young people including those in early recovery. Feeling prepared without furthering the restriction behaviours or patterns is a balance that can be useful to keep everyone safe during the holidays.

Top Tip

Agree on a plan in advance, if you are travelling be sure to pack a selection of snacks and stay hydrated. If your young person is in early recovery, stay as close to snack and mealtimes as possible. Spontaneity in ED recovery is a blessing but remember not to take in too many challenges if you are tired or jet-lagged.

If your young person is not yet in recovery, pack items that you know will fill gaps in the normal routine. This is not the time to confront ED behaviours or make sweeping changes. Understand that sometimes changes can be really difficult and that you may need to provide additional, gentle encouragement. If your teen is actively having difficulty before Christmas and there is a chance that things may escalate, talk with your therapist, paediatrician or Eating disorder specialist to discuss whether the trip is safe. Avoid conflict and confrontation with family present.

4

IT'S BEHIND YOU

Three, Three and Three Again.

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 4

Remember in early recovery, it can be easy to assume that the really tough days are behind you. Any good pantomime Dame will tell you that old behaviours can pop up at any time, sometimes when you are not expecting them and sometimes when we know that perfection, pressure or anxiety is high.

Keep on track by remembering to stick to your three meals and three snacks, three to four hours apart. Regulating your eating will keep your energy and mood even and leave you feeling that you can get through even the most anxiety-provoking of days in small chunks.

Top Tip

Have snacks prepared in small travel containers to take with you on visits, for car journeys and for shopping trips. Nuts, raisins and homemade energy balls are great for popping in your bag and yummy too.

5

ROCKING AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

How to Manage Christmas Parties for Young People with Eating Disorders

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 5

The season of parties, celebrations and get-togethers can add additional worries for young people with eating disorders: Dressing up and meeting friends and family, especially those not seen often can bring fears about receiving comments on body shape, body size and food in general. Well meaning guests can often contribute to the shame and distress that young people feel by making body-based comments.

Top Tip

Parents can ask grandparents, family members and close guests to refrain from any 'looking good' greetings. It's a much kinder (and more polite) greeting to simply acknowledge that it is really great to see someone.

Discuss outfits in advance with your young person. If there is a risk of compensatory behaviours or self-harm, maybe suggest getting ready together or give your young person the role of make-up or hair artist for Mum (and maybe dad too). Use your resources, music and any grounding techniques to keep anxiety at bay.

6

SPARKLE AND SHINE

Skin, Hair and Nails in Eating Disorder Recovery.

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 6

In the early weeks of recovery you will find that your hair, skin and nails also begin to recover. Eating Disorders really affect the body's largest organ - the skin. Our skin has an amazing job to do, keeping our organs in and the harshness of the world out.

In active Eating Disorders and malnourishment, the skin becomes very dry and fragile. Eating Disorders can really age the skin, causing premature ageing. Nails become brittle and hair often breaks or falls.

The Christmas holidays are a great time to spend some time giving yourself the gift of nourishment and rewarding your commitment with beauty routines to make the most of your new glowing hair, skin and nails.

Top Tip

Use deep moisturisers on hands and feet, with cotton gloves and socks to help very dry skin recover. Use gentle shampoos and conditioners on hair regrowth and find time for a manicure with hand oils to sooth dry hands and discover Christmas nail art.

7

COUNTING STARS AND NOT CALORIES



The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 7

Christmas is a time filled with traditions. Many of the traditions centre around food or drink. The Christmas cake, fed daily since the later summer, the sherry trifle, the small gifts in the pudding. Where you have Christmas lunch and who is invited? Mulled Wine, Egg Nog, Yule logs and Gingerbread houses. It seems that the whole world is thinking about food.

Young people with eating disorders already spend a huge amount of time thinking about food. Whether it is the calories, how to avoid food, how to hide food or how to make it appear that you have eaten already. In fact, it can take up most of the day.

Christmas food advertisements appear everywhere, only to be followed by Diet advertisements on Boxing Day. The message is that traditions with food are fun in the short term and that they are followed by punishment later on. We know that food cannot be good or bad and that giving food human characteristics is not helpful. Let's make this Christmas about enjoying food that is guilt-free and is not followed by a punishing January

Top Tip

Count the top moments this holiday by adding Christmas traditions that improve your well-being. Counting blessings instead of calories is a great way to add sparkle to your day. Mum (and maybe dad too). Use your resources, music and any grounding techniques to keep anxiety at bay.

8

NAUGHTY OR NICE?

Avoiding Divisive Language at Christmas

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 8

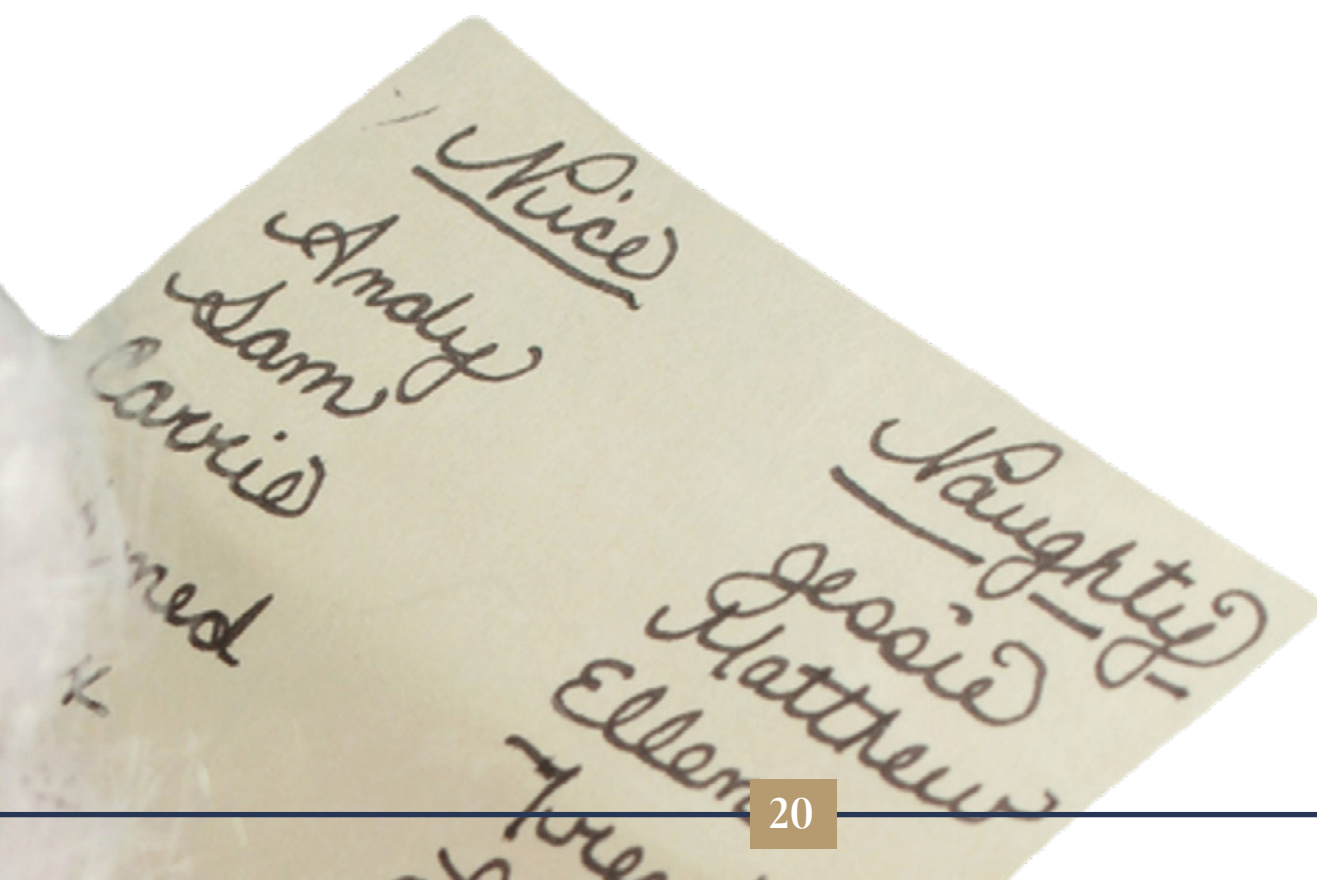
"If you do that you'll go on the naughty list!"

"I've been so good, I definitely deserve second helpings"

Using divisive language around or toward your child or young person is easily done but can cause deeper issues. When we label certain behaviours as good or bad we inevitably infer that children are valued based on their behaviour and not unconditionally. When it comes to eating disorders this can also translate as good foods and bad foods and lead to concerns for young people who may feel that their worth is linked to what they do and the way they eat.

Top Tip

Count the top moments this holiday by adding Christmas traditions that improve your well-being. Counting blessings instead of calories is a great way to add sparkle to your day. Mum (and maybe dad too). Use your resources, music and any grounding techniques to keep anxiety at bay.



9

NINE LADIES DANCING

Holiday Travelling with Young people with Eating Disorders.

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 9

We know that exercise in early recovery can trigger stress and distress. Exercise may have been an area that was previously problematic or had to be avoided for some time.

Christmas and New Year can see a rush of people joining gyms and exercise plans online, most will advertise weight loss and can leave us feeling uncomfortable and our old behaviours activated.

In Eating Disorder Recovery, we need to begin thinking about exercise in a different and less pressuring way. Talking to yourself (yes, that is absolutely allowed in ED recovery) and others about exercise without reference to body shape and size can be a good start in finding your balance. Exercising with others in a non-competitive way is a good way to set boundaries and put the enjoyment back into movement.

Find exercise, dance classes, or team games that make you smile.

Top Tip

Parents, Avoid body and weight language with children and young people, instead think about stamina, strength, balance or speed.

10

GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

and Learning to Move Forward From Disordered Eating

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 10

Returning home for Christmas can bring back many old memories. When a young person is struggling with an eating disorder it can be difficult not to slip back into old habits. The intensity of the festive season can sometimes be a catalyst for these unhelpful behaviours and patterns of thinking.

Top Tip

Although it is very tempting, try not to bring up previous Christmases too much. Your teen might not be in the emotional headspace to think about these things. Instead, you can focus more on the present and the future. What are we going today? What would you like to do tomorrow? While the past is important it needs to be brought up in safe sensitive spaces. It might even be nice to give your teen a break discussing the things that have already happened.

11

I'LL GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Support Networks in Eating Disorder Recovery

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 11

We know that Christmas and New Year can be really difficult for people in recovery from an eating disorder. Magazines, TV and Family group chats are full of menu ideas, shopping plans and the world seems to be focused on food. This can prove to be extra challenging for young people.

Switching your focus from food to relationships can be really helpful, Christmas is about spending time with people that we feel connected too, family, friends, or recovery support networks.

Top Tip

Make a list in advance of online and in-person support groups during the Christmas period. Check with your therapist or Recovery Coach on the hours that they will be available over the holiday period. Plan time with friends and family who make you smile. If you need a little extra support, try online meal support groups or eating with close friends in an online dinner party - with crackers and party hats of course.

12

It's the Final Countdown.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

and a Diet Free New Year

The Wave Christmas Tips - Day 12

The wrapping is barely off the presents before the talk of diets and summer holiday advertisements hit our screens to entice us into the world of New Year diets.

The diet industry is worth billions of dollars and they will be looking for new candidates to join their monthly plans, apps and at-home diet programs.

Diets don't work. People don't have 'ideal' weights. It really is that simple. At any point in time, almost a third of the population is 'on a diet' and some of those people with additional vulnerabilities may trigger a downhill battle with disordered eating and possibly a life-threatening eating disorder.

Avoid the diet talk. Enjoy Christmas by staying present and turning off ads encouraging dieting or weight loss.

Top Tip

Politely ask others to change the subject to something that everyone can join in with. Restrict diet-related content in your teen's settings on social media.



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