

28 November, 2017

Be kind to your mental health this festive season

Financial hardship, family conflict and loneliness can increase stress for people with anxiety and depression in the lead up to Christmas and New Year celebrations.

beyondblue clinical adviser Dr Stephen Carbone said people with mental health conditions should start thinking about coping strategies now for the festive season.

“Common triggers for people with mental health conditions during the holiday period include budget stress, being invited to more social engagements or being left on your own, and the pressure of living up to expectations,” Dr Carbone said.

“Most people find the Christmas and New Year period stressful, but if you have anxiety or depression an increased level of stress may cause an escalation of the condition.

“Stress is a fuel source for anxiety or depression, so the more stress there is the more those conditions flare up. Some people might start putting too much pressure on themselves about what they should buy or do for others. Others might dread catching up with family because it may end in conflict.”

Dr Carbone said people with mental health conditions should reduce the expectations on themselves so they can deal with the stress of Christmas and New Year.

“Be kind to yourself when you’re planning what you will do at this time of the year. It’s OK to look after yourself and say no to some things to reduce stress and keep things enjoyable,” he said.

People who may be alone at this time of year should also start planning ahead, Dr Carbone said.

“If you don’t want to be on your own during the festive season, you can contact organisations where you can connect with people,” Dr Carbone said.

“Community groups offer many opportunities to meet others in friendly and enjoyable settings. Most local councils publish a list of community groups on their websites.”

With Christmas just weeks away, *beyondblue* has created an online forum thread titled [CHRISTMAS 2017/NEW YEARS Chillout Lounge](#) where people can seek support, join conversations or learn coping strategies.

“Forum users can post anonymously about how they are feeling and share tips on how to cope during the festive season,” Dr Carbone said.

“A team of moderators and 18 community champions who have been affected by depression, anxiety and suicide monitor comments as they come in.

“It is a great way to speak about issues you might find difficult raising with a friend or family member and there will always be someone who can offer support and guide you on the right approach.”

The CHRISTMAS 2017/NEW YEARS Chillout Lounge thread is one of many *beyondblue* forums available online at beyondblue.org.au/get-support/online-forums

Mental health professionals are available 24/7 at the *beyondblue* Support Service – 1300 22 4636 or via beyondblue.org.au/get-support for online chat (3pm-12am ADST) or email responses (within 24 hours).