Jeff Kennett’s Christmas wish: good mental health for everyone

beyondblue Chairman The Hon. Jeff Kennett has written his Christmas wish-list, outlining how all Australians can promote good mental health over the festive season.

“This is a wonderful time of year, but it can be lonely and stressful for some people, potentially triggering symptoms of depression and anxiety,” he said. “This list contains simple advice and my wish this Christmas is that Australians follow it to ensure their holiday season is as enjoyable as possible. Good mental health is an amazing gift and it’s something we should cherish.”

Be financially responsible
Christmas presents, Christmas lunch, entertaining the kids over school holidays – the list goes on. Make sure you don’t overspend and remember that what your loved ones really want for Christmas is to spend time with you.

Don’t discriminate
Christmas functions see people of different gender identities, religions, ethnic backgrounds and so on, who might not otherwise gather together. Research shows discrimination damages people’s mental health and it’s never acceptable, so don’t ruin someone’s holidays this year by being a bigot.

Reach out for support
For some people, Christmas is the saddest time of the year as they remember loved ones who they’ve lost or are estranged from. If you’re feeling lonely, or need support for any other issue, the beyondblue Support Service can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on 1300 22 4636, via the online chat service from 3pm to midnight, seven days a week at www.beyondblue.org.au or via email at the same site. If someone you know is struggling, use the season of goodwill as an opportunity to reach out to them and encourage them to contact the Support Service. It’s free.

Make a plan
Plan to spend time with people who are supportive of you and make you feel good about yourself. If you don’t have family or friends who can do this, there are many charities that would love you to volunteer for them over the holiday period.

Don’t fight with your relatives
Family tensions can boil over at Christmas as relatives come together in an environment where sometimes, alcohol flows freely. If you’re at risk of drinking too much, try to raise any issues you may have before or after the event, mindful of the fact that these conversations are often better in private and when alcohol is not involved.

Create a mentally healthy workplace
If you run a business that’s open over the holidays, it could be one of the busiest times of the year. Mentally healthy employees are happier and more productive, so look after them. Visit www.headsup.org.au to learn how to create a mentally healthy workplace and reap the rewards. Similarly, if your job is making you unhappy, now is a good time to reflect on whether you should look for something else in 2015.

Don’t overdo it
Drinking too much or using drugs can be very harmful to your mental health. The stress of the festive season, along with end-of-year parties see some people over-indulge but remember, alcohol and illegal drugs can exacerbate most problems. If you need support, contact the beyondblue Support Service using the details above.

Most importantly – have fun!
What is the point of getting together with family and friends if you don’t have fun? Eat, drink and be merry, just remember to do so in moderation while being mindful of others.

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