Relate's guide for avoiding arguments this Christmas

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'We Wish you a Merry Tiff-mas'
Relate Dorset and South Wiltshire guide to avoiding arguments this Christmas

Relate Dorset and South Wiltshire is warning that the Christmas period can become fraught with arguments. Alongside buying presents and baking mince pies, the charity is calling on everyone to put relationship maintenance on their 'to do list' this festive season.

Relate counsellor Sally Dyer said: "We all want to have a happy, relaxing Christmas with our families, but in reality it can be a stressful time. Lots of couples and families experience some of their biggest bust-ups over Christmas because there's a lot of pressure on everyone. Common causes of arguments range from money issues over buying presents, to deciding where to spend Christmas and who's cooking the dinner."

Research by Relate found that over a third of parents argue at least once a week, with money being the biggest cause of rows.* "And we know that the extra pressures of Christmas can be the final straw for couples and families on the brink," adds Sally.

Here are Relate Dorset and South Wiltshire's tips for keeping the peace this Christmas:

• Plan ahead. Christmas can be stressful so avoid arguments by planning ahead. Getting some of the jobs done ahead of time means everyone will be less stressed, and planning the festivities as a family is likely to make sure everyone feels like their hopes and expectations are being listened to. In particular, talk to your partner in advance about where you plan to spend Christmas so it's not a shock to anyone come Christmas Eve.

• Don't overspend. For a lot of people this Christmas money will be tight, so try not to succumb to the pressure and spend more than you can afford. Splashing the credit card on presents might be fun but getting yourself in a mountain of debt is not a good way to start the New Year. Money worries put huge strain on relationships – it's not worth it in the long run.

• Think of the kids. Who goes where and when can be a huge issue for parents who have split up and for step families, especially if you are at loggerheads. As hard as it is, try and keep as calm as possible and keep your children's best interests at heart. Relate Dorset and South Wiltshire's Separated Parents Information Programme (SPIP) is a 4 hour free course, designed to improve communication and help to make arrangements for children a more 'business like' process

• Talk to your children. If you are a single parent, talk to your child about who they want to spend time with over the holidays. Christmas is important to children but they can easily feel divided and guilty about who they spend time with and worried in case anyone is left on their own. Sit down with your children and talk it though with them if they are old enough and if not, then try and come to an agreement with the other parent that works for you and the children involved. If agreeing is challenging try a SPIP course to give you both extra strategies to reduce the impact of your conflict on the wellbeing of your children.

• Plan something special. If arguments are likely over the festive period, have a few special events that everyone knows about so you have things to look forward to. It might be decorating the tree, or hanging the stockings up. The important thing is that you agree that these things will go ahead, and everyone makes the effort to get along.

• Give yourself space. The oven's on, the heating's on, the kids are excited and everyone arrives at once. Christmas can be hectic, and tensions can rise quickly, so plan in a little time when you can be alone to gather your thoughts. Getting some fresh air is a good idea, or having a hot bath on Christmas Eve when the children have (finally) gone to bed.

• Think of others. Remember family members or friends who might be alone, or who find the festive period difficult. Just popping in, dropping them a card, or giving them a call can really help.

• Delegate. Don’t feel like you have to do everything yourself. If you are not careful, you can end up in the kitchen slaving away whilst everyone else is enjoying themselves, which is no fun. Share out tasks amongst your family and guests and make a plan of all the chores. The kids might not like it at first, but it will ensure you don’t get to the end of the festive season feeling like a nervous wreck!

• Go easy on the booze. We all like to toast Christmas with a nice glass or two, but if there is any tension in your family then steer clear of too much alcohol, it will only aggravate the situation.

• Have fun! Don’t forget, it’s supposed to be fun! Make sure you remember to give yourself a few treats, and remember it’s more important to have a good time together than to make sure everything is 100% perfect.

Relate’s free ‘Arguments Check-Up’ is an online questionnaire which helps people to find out about their own arguing style and their compatibility with other arguing styles. Visit www.relate.org.uk/argument-check-up

ENDS

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Notes to editors:
• *The Fieldwork was conducted by Vision Critical on behalf of Relate in Nov 2012, 1,632 British adults aged 18+ were surveyed. All were in a relationship for 3 years+, with children (of any age). There was a broad spread of age, gender, region and social grade. Quoted figures are unweighted.
• Relate champions the importance of strong and healthy relationships as the basis of a thriving society.
• Personal and social relationships are important in our everyday lives and are central to our wellbeing.
• Relationships are under increasing pressure - breakdown costs the UK economy £44 billion each year according to the Relationships Foundation.
• Over a million people every year access information, support and counselling from Relate but it's clear many more would benefit from Relate services.
• Relate’s services extend beyond relationship counselling to family counselling, counselling for young people, sex therapy and informal courses and workshops and are offered through a network of 2,000 counsellors across the country.
• Relate celebrates its 75th birthday this year
• For more information and advice visit: http://www.relate.org.uk

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