



# Jo Gawthorpe

Life coach  
www.calmrme.com

## For some, the pressure to have the perfect Christmas can be too much

**C**hristmas can be the most wonderful time of the year especially if you are seven years old with only a Santa letter to write!

For some though, the pressure to have the perfect Christmas can be a bit too much and it can be difficult not to succumb to the idealised media expectation; adverts showing perfect people, behaving perfectly, dressed perfectly, giving perfect gifts, eating perfect food with not a pair of elasticated pants or a burnt turkey in sight! But perfect does not equate to happy.

In the great scheme of things, at a time when we are all supposed to be thinking about what life really means, do we really want to be worrying about mismatching plates or overdone parsnips? Shouldn't we be thinking about actually being 'present' for those we love, spending Christmas with family and friends enjoying every moment, rather than thinking about the present we will give and receive?

So how can we take it all in our stride and look forward and enjoy Christmas? Well we can start by:

Slowing it all down – It's easy to think about everything you need to get through; setting the table, opening presents, carving the turkey, lighting the pudding, washing dishes and eventually sitting down. The thing is when we are multi-tasking our mind starts to default to how things can go wrong and this anxiety sends our stress levels rising to the point where we are catastrophizing the smallest thing. When we focus on what 'might' happen and constantly projecting into the future we are not living in the present moment and that is where the best parts of life happen and are often missed.

Let the small stuff slide. Some people make a big deal of things while others are able to shrug things off. One person may drop their keys and pick them up and carry on, another may grunt and swear under their breath. And while dropping keys may seem insignificant, how we react to small hassles has a direct effect on



our stress levels.

When we let mundane incidents get to us, we are teaching ourselves that life is always stressful but if we learn to brush aside the small stuff we reduce our day-to-day stress and over time we build the capacity to stay calm for the bigger things. With a regular practice of not 'sweating the small stuff' we can build patience, acceptance and truly learn to live in the present moment. So, when you forget to de-frost the turkey take a deep breath, smile and ask yourself will this really matter in six months' time? Don't let the little things spoil your whole day, instead take a deep breath, shrug your shoulders and smile! It will impress your guests more than homemade mince pies!

Let go of perfection – Christmas is not about buying the best present or having the best set table. Spending time with the people you love is more important because tomorrow

is not a given. So, personalise your gifts, or make them, they will mean so much more. Last year I typed up a lovely poem for my sister and put it in a £5 photo frame. She cried when she read it. I did find the poem on the internet but it's the thought that counts and I meant every word.

It is also important to accept that people have different personalities, and you can't always choose your relatives. You can't change other people, so just accept them for who they are. Remember to let go of what you feel is a perfect Christmas and accept that if things go wrong it is not the end of the world.

Spend some time thinking about your Christmas. Who will you spend it with, where will it be? What you will be doing? Close your eyes and after a few deep breaths think about what and who is important to you at Christmas. Imagine how your day will play out, even visualize something small going wrong and without judging

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take a few deep breaths and let it pass. Watch the scene play out in your mind, not with tension or irritability but with acceptance and flow. Alternatively take a few simple calming breaths, in through your nose for four, hold for five and release through the mouth for six.

Here are a few tips to reduce stress at Christmas

If you don't like writing and posting cards, then don't, instead send friends and family a text and let everyone know you are donating money to charity. It's a win win!

Ask for help, there are no awards for doing it all yourself.

Remember to have fun! Put some music on, have a glass of wine and throw away your 'to do' list.

Have daily gratitude, which is known to increase happiness by up to 30 per cent. Spread the word by buying people a gratitude journal, they will thank you for it.

Think about people who

may be on their own and pay them a visit, or better still invite them round.

Don't sweat the small stuff because it is just that, small.

And if you find yourself alone:

Give back by volunteering for a local charity

Get together with other people also spending Christmas alone

Schedule your time and fill your day with different activities

Don't be too proud to reach out to family and friends

Being alone doesn't always mean being lonely, sometimes we are our own best company

So, be yourself, enjoy yourself and however Christmas comes gift wrapped this year remember it's not what is under the tree that matters, it is who is gathered around it.

To learn more about increasing positivity, reducing stress and being truly happy, contact Jo for a free discovery call at calmrMe.