



Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs



As the holiday season approaches, we share our heartfelt support and guidance to every family member across Scotland who is dealing with challenging circumstances this year. The constant stream of festive cheer everywhere we go, coupled with the pressure to have a traditional celebration can make this season particularly difficult for those of us struggling. Remember, it's okay to prioritise self-care and set boundaries for your own well-being. Connect with trusted friends, family, or support groups, and don't hesitate to reach out to us if needed. The team wishes you resilience, strength, and moments of peace through this holiday season.

Our lovely family member, Amanda Barr, has created another illustration for us to use this winter. We chose a snowflake as they are all unique, like every family in Scotland affected by alcohol and drugs. Amanda felt very connected to this image and we just want to give our heartfelt thanks to her for making something so wonderful.

This short booklet shares our Helpline over Christmas and some helpful contacts. We also have some information for planning for Christmas, along with a beautiful written piece from Antonia Rolls.

Holiday Dates for our Helpline and Naloxone Services

Naloxone dates:

- Last date for requests – **Wednesday 13th December**
- Normal service delivery to resume - **Thursday 4th January**

All naloxone ordered by the 13th of December will be shipped before the new year. Any kits ordered after will be shipped from the 4th of January.

Helpline dates:

- Helpline will run as normal and close on – **Friday 22nd December**
- Normal service delivery to resume - **Wednesday 3rd January**

If you need any support over the holidays, you can contact:

- **NHS 111** - 111
- **Breathing Space** - 0800 83 85 87
- **Samaritans** - 116 123
- **Police Scotland** - 101 (for non-emergencies)
- **If it's an emergency please call 999**



Christmas Time for Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs

'Tis the season to be jolly,' they say, but for many families affected by alcohol and drugs, Christmas can be a challenging time. The constant stream of festive cheer everywhere we go, coupled with the pressure to have a traditional celebration can make this festive season particularly difficult.

We have some tips for navigating the festive season when you are dealing with someone else's alcohol or drug use.

Plan Ahead

We can't say this enough – planning ahead is vital. Often, family members say they're waiting to see what happens. They'll wait for this or that with regards to their loved one, but we encourage you to make plans that suit you and only you. Don't wait to see what your loved one is or isn't doing. If you are doing this, the stress will build and you will create these expectations of 'maybe they can get it together for that one day and it'll be lovely' but the reality is probably going to be quite different and quite difficult.

Make plans that prioritise your own wellbeing and stress levels. Whether that's having a traditional meal, a relaxed day in your pyjamas, or something entirely different. Choose what suits you and your family without waiting for your loved one's behaviour to shape the day. This helps you get into a space where you can look at this day of the year as not being something that you just have to get through, but something you can actually find a bit of enjoyment in.

Look After You

We know self-care is a buzzword and is thrown around a lot, but it is a vital tool for you. It's about recognising what makes you feel better and helps you with your mental health. Self-care can be as simple as a hot bath, going a walk on a cold winter day, watching your favourite film (doesn't have to be Christmas-related) or spending time with a friend.

The key is to prioritise your needs because that is so important. Self-care is not selfish.

Thoughtful Gift-Giving

When it comes to gift-giving, consider practicality with the plans you are making about buying gifts for a loved one who might be using alcohol or drugs. Christmas is a time where we often feel that we have to be over-generous and let our guard down, but if you are giving a gift to someone who is not in a good place in terms of their substance use, an extravagant gift might be something they see as a way to access more alcohol or drugs by selling it on or using it in a way you hadn't intended for.

Instead, plan ahead and think about practical gifts. They could be gifts related to essential needs like food or shopping. Sometimes we feel under more pressure to give money as gifts, and that's never a good idea when someone's in a state of mind that they might want to spend that on something that's harmful to them.

So think about how you can avoid doing that or avoid being put in the position where you feel like you've got to do that.

It's crucial to set budget boundaries you're comfortable with to avoid disappointment if the gift is misused.

Including Your Loved One

While it's wonderful to include your loved one in celebrations, be prepared for the possibility that their substance use may lead to lapses or relapses during the festive season. We encourage you to be realistic and plan. Think in your mind that this is quite likely to happen, so how do I deal with that? What tools do I have in place now? This proactive approach, combined with self-care, can help manage expectations and reduce stress.

Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries is essential, especially when it comes to communication. We suggest being realistic about when you're available and not allowing your phone to dictate your peace of mind. Set boundaries that are manageable for you and help reduce stress.

You should not feel that it's your responsibility to have the 'perfect Christmas'. If it doesn't go to plan, it's nothing that you have done or should have done. It is what it is. And it's about how to pick yourself back up again from that disappointment and try to still make the best of the situation.

Advice from a Family Member

We asked a family member to share bits of advice and information about their Christmas:

'I love Christmas and I always have and have always tried to make it special. As I've got older though, I've started to

put less pressure on myself to focus on one day, where I usually end up exhausted and missing everything because I'm in the kitchen half the day. Last year wasn't easy with my son, and he was out for a big part of the day and then the police were involved on Boxing Day. So this year we've decided to do something different, take the pressure off ourselves so that if things don't go as planned it won't really matter.'

Some Things to Consider

Simplify the Celebration: Consider breaking away from tradition by ordering takeout or simplifying the meal. The focus should be on enjoying the day and reducing the pressure of preparing an elaborate feast.

Invite Supportive Guests: If you're worried about judgement or negative interactions, invite family members who understand your situation and can provide emotional support during the day.

Flexible Timing: Prepare meals in advance, allowing you to eat whenever you want, freeing up time for activities you enjoy.

Christmas is a time for joy and celebration, but it can also be challenging for families affected by alcohol and drugs. The key to navigating this season is planning ahead, practicing self-care, and setting realistic expectations.

Remember that support is available through Scottish Families, and you're not alone in facing these challenges. You survived every hard day up to this point, so you can do it. With the right tools and support, you can make Christmas more manageable and less stressful.

Lights of Love and Memory



When we have lost someone we love, Christmas will never be the same.

At this time of year, when families can feel pressure and isolation at a time when smiles and joy are expected, we are coming together to shine our light.

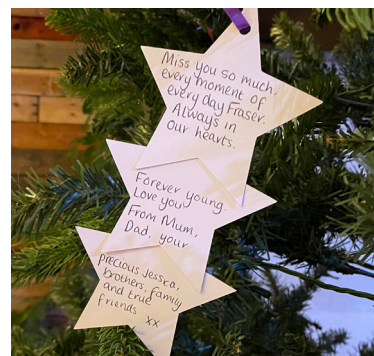
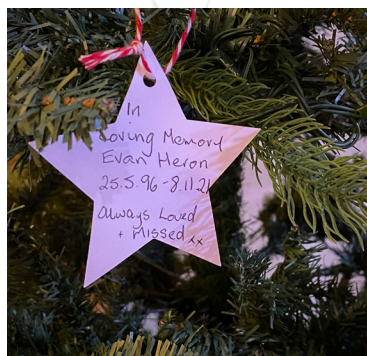
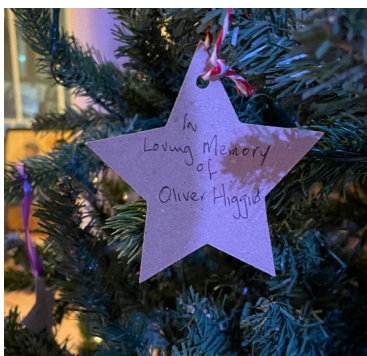
Each light on our online tree represents the love we have for our families, wherever they are.

With Scottish Families no-one needs to feel alone. Every donation to our tree will help make sure we are here when they need us, the leading charity in Scotland providing expert support for families.

Will you help us by donating and dedicating a Light of Love and Memory?

If the link above does not work for you, please copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://visufund.com/lights-of-love-and-memory-2023>

'This is for the families who has that empty seat at the Christmas Dinner'
- a note left on our online Christmas tree



From Antonia Rolls - "The legacy from my son is sorrow, love, courage and gratitude."

I have lost my son. I lost him many years ago, while he was still alive. I kept hoping that he would come back, that I would find him again, that somehow he would have the will to leave the drugs and drink behind, but he could not.

The months before he died, he seemed to wake up, and look around him at the world he had created for himself. I thought, "He is coming back, there is hope." **We talked from the heart**, and he admitted he had drink and drug problems, as if I did not know, but until that point, he denied it all. Despite falling over in the street, despite running into the traffic screaming and trying to take his clothes off, despite all the calls to the emergency services from members of the public terrified of his strange behaviour, my son did not agree that he took drugs and drank alcohol. Even after a short stay at my house once, when I uncovered five empty litre bottles of vodka hidden in his room, he said they must have been someone else's. Even when I had to ban him from coming home and block his number because I was frightened of him, he said he didn't drink and take drugs. "I'm in control," he said, when patently, he was not.

A week before he died, he came to stay, bringing his partner. Somehow, in the chaos and squalor of his life, amidst the dirt and darkness of his flat, with the overflowing loo and broken windows, the months of dirty crockery in the sink and the piles of old rotting food under foot, **someone came into his life and wanted to look after him**. A miracle, I thought. Another lost, lonely young man, who had been where my son was, stepped into his life and tried to help.

A miracle, I thought, a miracle. Now I know there is hope.

But the darkness of addiction is not so easily put away. **The years of increasing dependency on substances and drink wove a powerful, destructive, paranoid and lonely blanket of hopelessness around him**. Sometimes, he remembered that he was more than all this, but the pull of the drugs, the intense need for more and more, addled his brain and his body, so that at 29 he was like an old man with Alzheimer's. Until his partner took him in hand and cleaned him up, he would not wash or change his clothes for months. **He would sleep where he fell and forget to eat because the vodka was all he wanted**.

For a long time I did not know what I was seeing when he began to spiral out of control. It began in his teens. **He was lonely, he was different**, he was gay and didn't want me to know but I did know. And I didn't care, but it seemed to be too much for him to make public. This was why bringing his partner home for a week just before he died was so wonderful. Not only that he had found love, but that he saw that we all only cared that he was happy. It blew his mind a bit, and I know it made him happy. **As happy as someone who was falling further and further into the darkness could be**.

When I found him on that Friday in February, on his sofa in that dark and lonely flat, dead and cold, his bottle of vodka next to him, a used needle on the table, **I knew the crazy was over**. The worst and the best had happened. His life was over and he was gone but he

had escaped the torment of living and had become free of pain forever. My beautiful son, so troubled and so different, had left the mayhem of his life and **had gone where nothing and no one could hurt him again.** Sitting in his flat with him before the police and ambulance came, I thought that the darkness that had become like a suffocating fog cutting out all the light had got his body and his mind but it had not got his soul. He had gone the only way he felt he could and left this world. **The darkness could not and would not follow him.** It had lost him, and he was free.

The paradox is that I miss him so much, but also the madness is over. I don't fear calls from numbers withheld or from numbers I don't recognise any more. I do not have panic filled days and nights when he is found overdosing, or nearly dead in a squalid flat, or when he is frightened for his life from shadowy and vicious people that know where he lives. He is completely safe and beyond all that.

We gave him such a wonderful funeral. We had to wait until he was released by the coroner, and his inquest is still ongoing as I write. I don't have a death certificate for him yet. But we gave him such a send-off, he came back in his coffin to spend the last night in my house with his family, and all the friends and people who wouldn't make a church funeral came to say goodbye. After his funeral the next day, we drove to the cemetery in the beautiful Sussex Downs and buried him next to his grandmother and uncle. As we arrived at the cemetery, a storm of such ferocity blew up that we could hardly stand in the wind and rain. We all thought it was his way of saying goodbye. It was utterly biblical.

So now, what do I have? I have the memory of a beautiful, troubled soul who was with me for just 29 years.

I have the joy of all the times – and there were times especially towards the end – when he and I truly saw each other. **I caught a glimpse of his soul, and he told me he loved me. I am grateful for the hard lessons he taught me.** I believe that after the dust has settled when we have lost someone we love, we can see the gifts they left us. I am just beginning to sense the gifts my son has left me, and they involve love, and courage, and learning not to judge, and understanding that though love is important, it cannot save. My son left this earth through a door into such brilliant brightness and I like to think that he did not fully close that door behind him. Sometimes, I think I can see him in my mind's eye, on the other side of that door, smiling and well and whole in the most wonderful rehab that nothing on this earth could match.

The legacy from my son is sorrow, love, courage and gratitude.



Above: Antonia with her son, Costya.

If you'd like to follow Antonia or read more of her work, [visit her website here.](#)

Grief at Christmas

Christmas or any other holiday period can be a hard time for people experiencing bereavement. Whether it is your first holiday without your loved one, or if you have had many, it can be a tough time of year. We are regularly told, through TV, songs and social media that Christmas is a time to be with family, which can make you miss your loved one more. You may find that your emotions feel less controlled – people have described feeling ‘irrationally’ angry at things; bursting into tears for no reason and feeling particularly anxious at this time of year – perhaps anxious about how to get through the ‘festivities’. The pressure to be enjoying yourself can exacerbate these feelings. These feelings are all normal and you are not alone this Christmas – many families are facing similar concerns.

Some tips for ‘getting through’ Christmas when you are grieving someone:

Plan what you want to do ahead of time: have a think about who you want to be with (if anyone), what you want to be involved with, and what you don’t. Communicate this ahead of time to those around you. Also, think about what you want to do and don’t be scared to change up traditions if it is too painful to do the same thing, for example, you might want to go out somewhere rather than stay at home.

Do things differently: If you usually do all the cooking but don’t feel up to it this year, ask someone else to do it or go out for a meal. Relieve yourself of responsibilities that feel unmanageable.

Write down your anxieties and make plans on how to cope with them: sometimes when we write down the

things we are worried about it can lessen our anxiety. It can also help us to problem solve and plan how we are going to deal with them, so nothing comes as a surprise. For example, if you are worried you will get upset in front of others, a solution for this may be to let those you will be with know that this is a concern and that you plan to remove yourself from the room if this happens. Maybe also discuss with them what they can do if this happens - if you want to be left alone, or if you want someone to leave the room with you.

It is okay to ‘opt out’ of the festivities: if you are not feeling up to it, it is okay to remove yourself, either for the whole planned event, or for parts of it. Do what feels right for you.

Allow yourself time to grieve: it is okay to feel sad at Christmas, or any other time of year. Pretending you are not can be exhausting.

‘Involve’ your loved one who has died: have a think about if and how you want to ‘involve’ your loved one who has died. It might be nice to dedicate some time to sharing memories of them or to write a letter to them. If you feel you want to involve them in the day, then do.

Be kind to yourself: grief is difficult and tiring. Try to look after yourself emotionally, physically and practically. If you are struggling with any of it, don’t be afraid to ask for help.

Don’t feel guilty for enjoying yourself: moments of enjoyment or happiness don’t diminish your grief. Enjoy these moments of respite from your grief and try not to feel guilty for them.

The Reality of Christmas



Some family members and staff members have shared stories on 'the reality of Christmas' which we have included below. The stories share the emotions and real-life struggles that often go unnoticed during a time when we're expected to be joyful and carefree. By sharing these stories, we can connect on a deeper level and truly understand the difficulties and strengths of families.

Young Person - Routes:

'I don't even want to think about Christmas because it's all for families. You see all these normal families spreading love and happiness. For me it's just another day but even worse because you know everyone else is out there having lots of family love and joy. Drinking gets worse at Christmas because everybody is doing it so they think it's ok. Last year I ate Christmas dinner on my own in my room because everyone was drunk and I just wanted to get away from them. I think people drink more because they think about people they have lost or worry about money. Now I'm older it's less about the presents, you want to enjoy it with your family, so that's me f****d! When I'm older I can't wait to be a mum and do it right. I'm going to do everything that I never had, lots of

presents and the powder footprints on the floor, you know, to make it look like Santa's been. I can't wait to give my children what I never had.'

Heather:

'I have always loved Christmas, the lights, the carols, the spell of pine trees, presents of course, it is without doubt my favourite time of year. I have trouble remembering specifics about my home life as a child and many are not happy, I have much more vivid memories of times with friends. Children are resilient, they find the joy in life even when it's difficult to see, and at Christmas time, there was always more joy to be found even if it coincided with the difficulties that I experienced all year round from having a parent with an alcohol use issue. I have one specific memory of Christmas where my father's alcohol use really impacted my day. It was after my parents had separated, and while life had improved for me having a more stable home environment, my father's alcohol use had escalated. I was in my early teens and trying to maintain a relationship with someone who was rarely sober enough for me to even have a conversation with. However, it was Christmas and my mother had encouraged me to have my evening

meal with my father and sister. He was drunk when I arrived and continued to drink until he fell asleep at the table. I don't remember what happened next, I don't remember what I did, I only remember how I felt, that I wasn't worth more to him than whisky in a glass, that he couldn't even give me a few hours of him, sober him, the man I loved, on Christmas day. Now I know that it had nothing to do with me, that he loved me and my sister more than anyone, that he wasn't trying hurt me, that it wasn't his fault. I still love Christmas, and I wish my dad was still here to celebrate with.'

Agnes:

'Tis the season to be jolly lalalalalalalala. Yes it is the season of love and families and sharing gifts. Well wishers sending good will to all. But not for everyone. Christmas for people with mental health and drug and alcohol dependency, this can be massive triggers of what they have lost due to the level of drug and alcohol dependency to zone out of the reality of life. Life that most people take for granted. Music everywhere causing emotional waves of what used to be. This year give the gift of awareness of mental health. Cut out stigma. Less judgement of people who are not carrying bags of pressies. But might be carrying sacks of sadness for what they have lost. Give the gift of understanding. Gift of compassion. This costs nothing and you can give this all year long. Make someone happy with a smile and the understanding that this is someone's loved one. You won't feel their pain till you touch it. Stop and think. Joy to the world, yes. Peace on earth, yes. Goodwill to all men, yes. That means all men. Make someone's Christmas with a smile. Support mental health.'

Gill from our team:

'This year I have been surprised at how

far in advance families are thinking of the festive period and dreading Christmas. One recurring theme is families struggling with setting boundaries, wanting family members to adhere to boundaries set but then also worrying that they won't and will be alone at Christmas. We are having a lot of conversations about how families can look after themselves over the festive period and also concentrating on what they can control. We have made sure that we have a group in the first week of January and that families are equipped with phone numbers and information on services they may need in an emergency.'

Kiera from our team:

'Was speaking to Allison, one of the volunteers, about Christmas time and she spoke about 'slowing it down this year' and spending more time 'taking it in' as she has spent the last few years really busy and worrying about pleasing everyone at Christmastime she found it was much more important to be mindful and focus on herself and her family as they were doing better this Christmas.'

Family member:

'I make up a food hamper for my son. I try and put food in that he can't afford and wee treats. I also put in socks pants hat and gloves and thermal clothing. Like so many I have gave money in the past and it hasn't gone well. At the moment he is coming on Christmas day but that has changed a few times. The way I put it to him was there will be a hot meal available for you on that day if you want to pop in.'

You are not alone this Christmas – many families are facing similar concerns. Please reach out to us if you want someone to talk to or need support. Our team are here for you when you need them.



Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs
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