

# Christmas Dilemmas Special

**A**t this time of year it can seem that everywhere we look the message is about how wonderful and magical Christmas is. But this isn't always the sense I get from my postbag, and I know from your letters that many of you find this time of year particularly hard. When our lives don't match what is sold as the dream, we can feel disappointed. I've chosen a selection of letters from the last few weeks, hoping my advice to these will help you to manage, and enjoy, this period as much as you possibly can.

**How can my daughter keep my first grandson from seeing us this Christmas?**

**Dear Keren**

My daughter had a baby this year, our first grandson. I've been looking forward to spending Christmas with them since he was born. But she's just told me that she will be going to her in-laws as it's *their* year. I can't believe she can do this; she must know we wanted him here. They live many miles away, so we can't even do Boxing Day.

**I** know this is hard but, if the agreement is one year on and one year off, it can't be changed because she had a baby. Imagine how the other grandparents would feel. The good thing is that you've got next year to look forward to, when your grandson will be old enough to appreciate his presents and the day. Many families, particularly those separated by long distances, have meals and celebrations on other days. Why not make yours the weekend before *your* Christmas?

**Spending the big day with my ex seems an unbearable prospect**

**Dear Keren**

My husband and I split up last year because he was having an affair. My children have found our break-up really difficult and they've asked if we can do Christmas together. My husband (without asking me, which is typical) said yes. I have insisted that 'she' isn't there but I just can't imagine spending a day with this man - who's hurt my children and me.

**T**his is such a difficult situation and sadly one that many face. As good parents, we put our children and their feelings first and you've rightly done this. I think the easiest way to cope is to focus only on the children and don't think about yourself or your ex. You won't then allow yourself to be hurt or angry with him. Agree with a family member or friend that you can call them that evening to let out *your* feelings. And remember, however hard it is, it's only one day.

**How can Christmas ever be the same without Mum?**

**Dear Keren**

My mother died in the summer and I just can't bear the thought of Christmas without her. She was only 74 and full of energy - she always cooked the family meal and none of us expected that last year was her final one. I'm the eldest daughter and now it seems to be falling to me to host it. How can I do it?

**Pressure for perfection just makes me want to run away and hide**

**Dear Keren**

I know Christmas lunch is only a meal but the thought of it makes me feel ill. Everyone else seems to be able to make the perfect lunch, have a table that could be photographed for a magazine, look immaculate themselves and still be jolly in the evening. I, on the other hand, usually lose my temper, forget something, and by six o'clock want to go to bed!

**I** haven't met anyone who fits this idea of perfection! As I said in my introduction, we're all seduced into believing the 'dream' and this leads us to believe that anything less won't do. If you ask your family, I expect they'd rather have a happy mother and a slap-up meal than one who has pushed herself to the limit and now feels exhausted and fed up. Ask some of the others to help. And, if things do go wrong, laugh about it and store it in the family album of memories to recall as everyone grows up.

*'The reality for most of us is that there will be some good, some not-so-good elements of Christmas'*

**I want my dad to be happy, but surely he should be thinking of his grandchildren, too?**

**Dear Keren**

My mother has Alzheimer's and is living in a home. My father says he wants to spend Christmas Day with her. My sister and I understand him wanting to see her, and so do we, but surely he could come and have lunch with his grandchildren? Without wanting to sound harsh, Mum won't remember that he's been but our children will remember that he didn't come to us.

**I**'m guessing this is the first year your father and mother will be apart at Christmas. It's understandable that he wants to be with your mother and make sure she doesn't feel abandoned and alone. Of course you want him with you. I wonder if you could change the day round a bit? Could you eat in the early evening, after visiting time at the home? Talk to him and say you want to find a way where he can see as much of his wife as he wants but also to see you. I expect he'll be happy to find a solution.

**Am I being a killjoy if I give charity gifts?**

**Dear Keren**

I've been in and out of the shops to find presents for my grown-up family and there's nothing that any of them need. I'd like to suggest we give money to charity instead but I don't want to look mean or the one who can't be bothered to shop.

**T**hat sounds like an excellent idea to me. I'm sure others are feeling the same as they try to think of what to buy. You can of course combine the two by buying ethical gifts or sponsoring a child or business. Google 'ethical gifts' and I think you'll be surprised by all the possibilities.

**Seeing their happiness heightened my grief**

**Dear Keren**

After my husband died, last year. I went to my sister for Christmas. I don't have any children and I sat and watched this happy, growing family, then went home and sobbed for two days. My sister wants me there again. How do I tell her I don't want to go?

**I**'m sorry you had such a hard time last year. From the sound of it, your sister is offering you what she'd want if she was in this position. She doesn't mean you to feel hurt or anxious. But, if you've made your mind up, explain this and acknowledge that you know she's being kind but this year you'd like to be alone. Perhaps you could compromise and go for tea rather than the whole day?

