

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW?



Our own experiences of Christmases past may have created an inner blueprint of traditions – how Christmas SHOULD be celebrated for it to feel right or to do right by others. These might have been passed down to us by our own parents and grandparents, or based on cultural or religious expectations. Firmly embedded in our minds and bodies.

**But what happens
when our deeply
rooted expectations
of how Christmas 'should be done'
aren't achievable or don't work for us anymore?**

- **Perhaps our family has grown or shrunk**, or perhaps finances have become strained forcing homes to be lost, purse strings to be tightened and access to easy choices restricted.
- **Perhaps we have found a different tribe**, a community where we belong in a way that we can't explain.
- **Perhaps we have changed**, stepping into ourselves in a way we haven't been able to before, creating a need or making space for something new.

Not following our internal blueprints can feel uncomfortable. We may end up with feelings of anxiety, fear, dread, disappointment and even grief for the ghosts of Christmases past.

Stepping away from the old and creating new traditions might feel like a betrayal – of ourselves or others – or we might worry we will deepen the very losses that we are trying to heal.

SO HOW DO WE TAKE THOSE FIRST STEPS INTO THE NEW?

- **Bite Size Chunks:** Choose a small part of one thing and do that. Too much difference all at once can be hard to incorporate and may create turbulence that shocks others or ourselves. This can then be taken as evidence that it doesn't work and we should 'go back to the old way'.
- **Tolerating discomfort:** Feeling uncomfortable about changes might propel us back into the comfort of the familiar. Learning that we can survive a little bit of discomfort AND enjoy our new experience will help it feel a little more normal the next year.
- **Preparing others:** If the new tradition involves others, invite them in to your idea and talk together about what it might look like, why it is happening and how they feel about it.
- **Not everyone needs to join in:** the thing that might not be working for you won't always involve changing something for everybody. It could be that you simply want to take some time for yourself at some point over the Christmas period and this is planned in.
- **It doesn't have to be a big 'thing':** it could just be a new tradition that someone else takes on a Christmas job like peeling the potatoes to free up a small portion of your time!
- **If it doesn't work, move on:** It is ok to try something new and for it not to deliver what you hoped . Maybe the whole thing needs to be left behind or perhaps it needs some editing!



**We asked our team
about the traditions
they have developed
over the years...**

TRADITIONS

We once had a barbecue for Christmas dinner!

I have small children and we put a mixture of sawdust and glitter outside on the garden to let Santa know we are here! Its extra useful if we are staying at other peoples houses over Christmas.

We buy one new Christmas decoration for each of the kids every year. We intend to gift them when they leave home so they have a complete set of decorations to take with them.

We collect pine cones



Decorations

We always have a walk in bad weather (down the seafront if possible). Makes you appreciate being inside!

Rainy Days



Panto

The younger adults write a version of a pantomime specific to the family complete with in-jokes. We use props from around the house and old dressing up clothes.



Pass the Parcel

We do a pass-the-parcel with jokes and fun challenges under each wrapper instead of Christmas crackers.



TRADITIONS

Smashing

We make a gingerbread house together and on Boxing Day we smash it up and eat it.



We create a 'found' table decoration by laying a fallen branch along the centre of the table and decorating it. My vision is rustic charm!

We often do homemade vouchers for gifts, e.g breakfast in bed or a movie night, rather than gifts

All the dogs (that are happy with it) take part in a Christmas fancy dress competition every year. The costumes often don't stay on for long though!

Fancy Dress



Dinner

My family are celebrating Christmas on Christmas Eve this year. We usually have a Christmas meal in a pub and we've realised that it's half the price on Christmas Eve and we can use local transport!

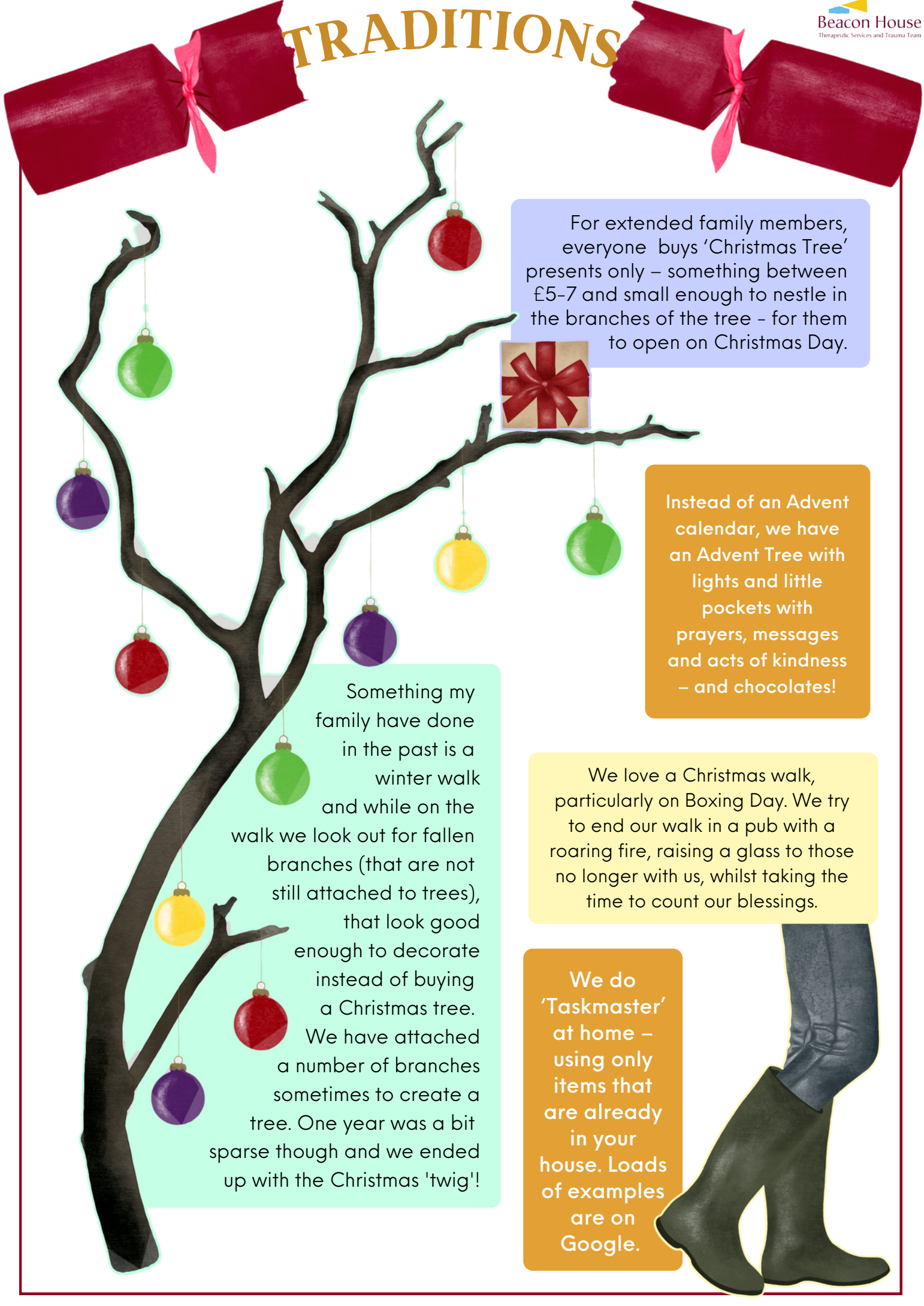


Oranges

Rather than buying an ornament for the tree this year, we are going to make oranges with cloves in as Christmas decorations.



TRADITIONS



For extended family members, everyone buys 'Christmas Tree' presents only – something between £5-7 and small enough to nestle in the branches of the tree – for them to open on Christmas Day.

Instead of an Advent calendar, we have an Advent Tree with lights and little pockets with prayers, messages and acts of kindness – and chocolates!

Something my family have done in the past is a winter walk and while on the walk we look out for fallen branches (that are not still attached to trees), that look good enough to decorate instead of buying a Christmas tree. We have attached a number of branches sometimes to create a tree. One year was a bit sparse though and we ended up with the Christmas 'twig'!

We love a Christmas walk, particularly on Boxing Day. We try to end our walk in a pub with a roaring fire, raising a glass to those no longer with us, whilst taking the time to count our blessings.

We do 'Taskmaster' at home – using only items that are already in your house. Loads of examples are on Google.



TRADITIONS

Since our kids were small, we've done a secret Santa. The present has to be bought in a charity shop and the budget is £4. Over the years we've had some sweet, thoughtful, strange and often hilarious presents! My husband is bald and one year our then 5 year old bought him a toupee! It's a way of us all having time together which in the teenage years can be tricky!

When there's loads of adults getting together we do a Secret Santa rather than presents. We set a budget, nobody's left out, and it doesn't cost a complete fortune. We use a secret santa app where we can put down some ideas so the gifter doesn't have to go too rogue with ideas!

Advent Coins

We have an advent chocolate coin hunt – each morning our boys have to look for a little bag holding a chocolate coin and a card scheduling something Christmassy for the day (e.g. singing a Christmas carol), or “give someone you love a hug”



I've made friends with a community of women that go swimming in the sea in all weathers and doing this with them and also connecting socially has brought real joy to my life. This Christmas morning, we are having drinks on the beach and a swim in the sea, and I'm probably most looking forward to that about Christmas. An important part of this for me is around representation, belonging and community, as most of the women are older gay/queer couples and for me being around this has been transformative.

We have a family joke advent calendar. We each write 6 jokes (swiped from the internet if necessary) and they are placed in a simple homemade advent calendar with pockets, usually with a gold coin. And then there is the daily reading of the Christmas joke!

As the kids are older now, we are swapping jokes for our favourite songs and listen to them at dinner time.