

# TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY?....

By Adam Getty

Do you remember the TV scene of David Bowie and Bing Crosby by the piano singing "The Little Drummer Boy/Peace of Earth"? When I think of Christmas that is one of the images that pops into my head. I suppose we all have this image of what a perfect Christmas is; families coming together, exchanging presents all piled up under a tree, novelty jumpers and happiness. Then, singing carols around the piano and reflecting on the wondrous year that has just passed we hug, smile and glow with festive joy. Reality check! This is a Hollywood fantasy version of Christmas that rarely if ever exists in the real world!

Christmas is not like that for a lot of people though. In general though, Christmas can be a really stressful time for anyone. I am not a big fan of shopping but when it comes to Christmas shopping I know that my own tolerance levels significantly reduce. Crowds of people getting in your way, have to walk in a zig-zag just to get down the road and the constant temperature change between walking outside in the cold and then coming into a shop that has their heat turned up full. Every year I say "never again" or I focus more on online shopping to avoid the hassle of town. I am a keen fan of statistics and it was interesting to look at mental health around the festive period. Mind conducted a survey a few years ago and found that more than a third (36%) of people with mental health problems have self-harmed to help cope with the pressure of Christmas. Mind's survey of 1,100 supports also found that more than half (52%) had considered harming themselves at Christmas and nearly half (45%) had considered taking their own lives. In addition to that, in 2014 more than 21,000 people with mental health problems spent the festive season in hospital because they were unwell. This meant that thousands of families across the UK were without loved ones. So much for the "most wonderful time of the year".

So right about now I am feeling like the Ebenezer Scrooge as I write this article and sadly, I have only scratched the surface. Around 76% people report having difficulty sleeping at Christmas and nearly 60% of people have experienced panic attacks over the festive period according to the report. It really isn't sounding that festive and right now, as a serving or retired officer; you might be experiencing additional mental health problems throughout the year that are only increased during this period. Christmas can be a time of anniversaries and sad reflections of loss. Depression, anxiety, a history of trauma, financial worries, alcohol dependence and estranged from family members. I could go on and this is only your personal life maybe. As a serving officer, who is working at Christmas, you might not get to see your family that much and instead of sitting around the dinner table, you are on shift at a station or out on patrol. You might even be on shift now reading this. Whilst family are opening presents and having a lovely time, you might be heading out to deal with a family having a domestic, or an elderly person who has been attacked. You might be coming towards the end of your shift and have experienced this multiple times today. It can feel soul destroying, it can make you feel like Ebenezer Scrooge because as a serving or retired officer, your career is spent seeing and dealing with the



not so nice things so that others don't have to. For that we are all eternally grateful but it can take its toll on you. Life is tough at the best of times and Christmas can be particularly difficult for people.

So here is my Christmas message to whoever is reading this now.

**"Thank you for all you do and have done in the service of the community"**

"If you feel that you are suffering, struggling to get by with low mood or anxiety, pick up the phone and call PRRT on 02890427788 or the 24 hour confidential helpline Trustcall on 0800324802. If you are a serving officer and feel you need psychological support, please contact your line manager for a referral to OHW. Let us work together so that in the future, your festive period is a festive one."

PRRT is based at Maryfield, Holywood and provides Psychological Therapies, physiotherapy, personal development and training to the retired police population. PSNI employees can access our healthcare services via referrals from PSNI occupational health. Serving officers can access personal development and training directly.

For further information or to make an appointment please call 028 9042 7788 or email: [servicesadmin@prrt.org](mailto:servicesadmin@prrt.org)



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