

And so this is Christmas.....and what have 'you' done?

Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house nothing was stirring as much as my angry spouse!

Christmas obviously is celebrated by all genders and therefore – choose what suits you.

I love a good old sentimental Christmas as much as the next person, but I know for many people this time of year can be a nightmare to get through. There are many reasons for this but I am going to look at how couples that are not really getting on survive this jolly old time of log fires and mince pies at The Waltons.

As I said, Christmas can be lovely.....but it is a heck of a lot of work. Sorry guys, traditionally It's usually the woman that does the following. But it could also be a man.

- Buying the Christmas tree, (or finding it in the loft) decorating it and buying new bulbs.
- The buying of Christmas cards, the writing of the cards and the posting of them to attend to.
- The buying of Christmas presents for you, children, both sets of parents and families and friends at work, PLUS, buying all the wrapping paper and having to wrap them all up and put tags on them.
- The planning of and buying of food for Christmas dinner plus goodies such as boxes of chocolates to munch and also all the Christmas booze.
- The whole Christmas dinner to cook, serve and clear up after.
- If you have children, you may have to conjure up at short notice costumes that depict various characters in the school's nativity play/concert.
- The normal household chores such as cleaning and cooking.

If your partner work's outside the home – this can be a huge amount of work to undertake, actually delete that, if you 'don't work outside the home, it is also a monumental undertaking and it is understandable that your partner is not twinkling in enthusiasm and joyousness - all that work is just too much for one person.

If a couple are going through a rough patch prior to Christmas, it is unlikely that they look forward to the upcoming festivities, but there are lot of reasons for doing the traditional things-especially if children are involved. Some couples will often decide to go away on holiday to escape all the frenzy & catch some sun. This sounds good however, this then means you have to spend e.g. 2 solid weeks with your partner 24/7 & if you have children, are they going to be miserable as most of their presents are waiting for them at home? Being in each other's company 24/7 can be hard to do even if you are getting on.

Perhaps your partner withdraws from you at this time of year – with very little affection for you and definitely no sex. You regard the holidays as a good chance to be attentive to each other as a couple, but your partner doesn't seem to want any part of that. I am not surprised as it can feel like just so much more work to do, rather than relaxation & pleasure.

I would suggest addressing the Christmas workload a few weeks before the preparation starts. Pick a night when you can take your partner out for dinner, (or cook dinner yourself having the kids out with family for a sleep over) having told her/him that you sincerely want to take steps to take more responsibility for all the work that needs to be done, in order for you both to have a less stressful, happier time together. Show /him care and concern that she/he has had so much work to do in the past, you are sorry for that but now realise it has not been a fair division of labour.

Ask her/him what she thinks would be best for you to tackle and stick to your promise to take that responsibility. If your partner is struggling to suggest tasks for you to do – find your own e.g.

I will buy write and post all Christmas Cards

I will wrap all the presents

I will get the tree out of the loft

I will dismantle it

Etc etc. If he/she asks for help in the moment, be responsive. Your partner is not deliberately trying to make you miserable, he/she is needing help.

So often its one partner that slaves away to make Christmas happen only to miss out on most of the fun and happy things sweating away in the kitchen whilst it's Dad that opens the presents with the children and Mum misses all the happy faces etc. If even talking about this is so stressful it is almost taboo, perhaps you could make a list of your expectations of Christmas and ask your partner to make her list of expectations i.e. what you expect from each other at this time. It may be that your partner expects you to always invite their entire family over each Christmas day and you don't want that because you would like to spend time together with your husband/wife and own little family and also it would be a relief to be invited out for Christmas lunch some years.

Perhaps it is expected from family members that they will be fed and watered and have the cleaning and tidying attended to whilst they put their feet up. Think about what you can do.....perhaps ask everyone to take a turn each Christmas in bringing pudding or the roast turkey. Address the problem early...e.g. in Autumn meet with all the family members one by one /friends that usually come over for dinner and explain this year you can't do it. Suggest that everybody takes a turn in

hosting Xmas and you can decide who is going to bring e.g. pudding this year or turkey. If you meet with resistance, don't be tempted to 'justify' your position. Simply say that without help you can't do Christmas this year and that you have reached a stage whereby you are not enjoying Xmas as there is too much work to do. It's important that not only your partner values you, but also that you value you and so if they are questioned about this, you need to be backed up by your partner.

Having huffs, anger and arguments is not going to do you both as a couple any favours, but by agreeing what you will talk about and how you could do things differentlyyou could be a lot happier going into the New Year together. It's essential that both of you don't take this time to get your old laundry list of complaints and resentments from previous years out, apportioning lots of blame to your partner. This is old stuff, you need to have a positive new way of thinking and doing, so harping on about previous years needs to be let go of.

The above information primarily focusses on how to approach your partner and family in order to make changes that should make a more enjoyable Christmas for all – if you are miserable and shattered – that will have an effect on people around you & sex will not feature on any 'to do' lists. However if you are relaxed and enjoying the day.....that also effects people – in a good way and if your partner feels you genuinely 'understand' Christmas is too much for one person and by sharing the load she/he feels less anxious and hard done by – sex may just 'eventually' be on the menu.

If you wish to look at relationship dynamics at a deeper level, e.g. your husband/wife insists every year that their widowed mother should spend the day with you all, but she is full of none stop criticism for everything your partner does and how much noise the kids are making.....how do you approach this, especially if your partner refuses to talk it over calmly? If you think it would be helpful to talk it over with me – email me for an appointment and we shall start to unpick what is really going on.

Best wishes to you all, I hope fun will feature for couples this year.