

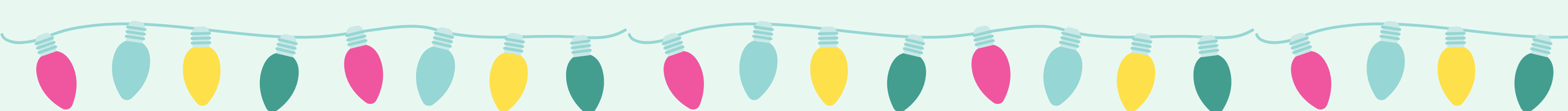


December Safeguarding Briefing

Best practice spotlight on

Navigating Therapist Leave over the Holiday Period


The Christmas and New Year period can be difficult for people with lived experience of mental health problems and their family. This year, the Clinical Excellence and Safeguarding Team at HelloSelf wanted to place the spotlight on best practice within our clinical network happening in the run up to Christmas. We are grateful to [Elaine Morrow](#), Senior CBT Therapist at HelloSelf, for sharing her thoughts on supporting members by working in collaboration with resourceful others ahead of taking restful leave over the Christmas period.




Christmas can be an isolating and distressing time for many. As therapists, we must place a high value on our wellbeing, and take adequate time off to rest, recharge and connect with loved ones. We must also ensure the wellbeing and safety of our members, when taking such leave and pausing therapy, especially during the holiday season.

For many at Christmas, trauma wounds can reignite, family issues can intensify and maladaptive coping strategies can surge. Christmas can often be a time of crisis, especially for those with lived experience of C-PTSD, and is also the time when therapists will often be pausing therapy for a break. So we have a combination of Christmas pressures, potential crisis, and less therapeutic support to consider.

Below, I have highlighted some strategies I adopt when working with C-PTSD/trauma and preparing for a break in therapy.

- **Transparent communication:** I always communicate leave well in advance. I will often tell members of my leave dates 2-3 weeks in advance, allowing them to make note in their diary. This is a mini version of 'working toward an ending' and allows for the member to prepare in advance and focus on making a plan, if required.
 - **Stage of treatment:** Consider the progress of therapy, and current phase of treatment (if doing EMDR). Once a member knows I am going on leave, I will openly discuss with them what treatment sessions are going to cover up until leave and will always hold off any intense trauma narrative work/EMDR until my return. Sessions will often focus instead on grounding, stabilisation, planning, and addressing 'present day' triggers.
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- **Understand the member's unique history:** Talk about the impact of Christmas for your member and consider their unique personal history. What are the triggers likely to be at Christmas, and do they have some support. The session before going on leave will usually focus on making a safety plan. This is an emotional support plan, more like a therapy blueprint. This also allows the member to continue to feel supported while the break is occurring.
 - **Create continuity:** When preparing to go on leave, ensure that plenty of resources are provided between sessions, and have this discussion with the member. This can ensure that the member can continue a sense of routine, even if this means they are working through a workbook at home. I always ask my members upfront, if they wish to take a break like me, or they wish to have additional reading materials sent across. The option allows the member to consider their needs, and I find this response is often about 50/50. Some value having a break from therapy, and permission to relax, whereas some feel a sense of emotional safety and progress from having therapy tasks/homework to work on during the break. This is an individual choice, so I always ask.
 - **Our NHS partners** insist on continuity of care and if there are more than two weeks of a break please liaise directly with the referring team to discuss and agree a plan.
 - **Risk assessment:** Assess risk and collaboratively make a written safety plan with crisis support information, if needed. Ensure your member is very clear on the fact that you will be inaccessible during leave, and that HelloSelf is not a crisis service. Ensure they have the safety plan in place before going on leave. HelloSelf has put together a useful safety plan [template](#), which I often use. As ever, please hold in mind that members must be thoroughly risk assessed following their referral to us, be that a self-referral, insurance funded or through an NHS partnership. Please see the associate shared drive [safeguarding folder](#) for guidance on [risk to self](#), good practice documents (e.g., [associate handbook](#)), safeguarding [briefings](#), and [policies](#).
 - **Modelling Healthy Boundaries:** Finally, I believe that taking leave, and expressing the importance of self-care to members, helps model healthy boundaries, which I hope they enact themselves as far as possible. From this perspective, taking leave allows the member to understand the importance of setting aside time for the self, prioritising needs and setting boundaries. Therefore, a healthy rested therapist can help their members in more ways than one!

We know from learning garnered across our organisation that positive outcomes for our members often rely on connected care and working in partnership with professionals and resourceful others in their network. Please consider who else needs to know about your member's needs to best support over the Christmas period and in your absence. Consider asking for help from other professionals (i.e., GP), or next of kin, in your Christmas leave plans if you think this is needed to safeguard member safety during the break. If there are risk concerns it is best practice to speak directly to professionals by telephone (ideally with consent) and then follow up on any agreed plans in writing. If you and your member have been working towards a planned therapeutic ending ahead of Christmas, please refer to our recent safeguarding briefing on [safe handover and discharge of care](#).

Now all that is left to do is enjoy Christmas!

*Elaine,
Louise, Diane and Tom*





Safeguarding availability over the festive period

Safeguarding Leads need to be notified of serious incidents within 24 hrs (see [Serious Incident](#), [Safeguarding](#) and [Escalation](#) Policies in associate shared drive for further information, these are saved in the Safeguarding and Serious Incidents folders).

Notification of Serious Incidents forms need completing within 24 hrs and forwarding to the Safeguarding duty lead working that day.

Over the festive period, you can reach a senior member of the [clinical team](#) on safeguarding duty as follows:

Monday 25th December	Tuesday 26th December	Wednesday 27th December	Thursday 28th December	Friday 29th December
Closed	Closed	Rumina AM Annemarie PM 07990516112 and 07515111547	Louise Egan AM 07517435518 Diane Kohl PM	Pelumi AM Tom PM

Monday 1st January	Tuesday 2nd January	Wednesday 3rd January	Thursday 4th December	Friday 5th December
Closed	Tom Price	Tom Price	Diane Kohl	Diane Kohl



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