

CHOICES

Vancouver Island Counselling
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Finding Connection, Comfort & Meaning This Season

The holiday season can stir up many emotions. While some people look forward to gatherings and celebrations, others may feel lonely, financially anxious, or disconnected. If this time of year feels heavy, please know that your experience is valid.

Psychology reminds us that *humans are wired for connection* - not just socially, but neurologically. Supportive relationships activate the brain's calming systems, reduce stress hormones like cortisol, and help us feel grounded. That means even small moments of connection like a brief conversation, a shared walk, or a kind message can make a meaningful difference in how we feel.

"Connection is why we're here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives."

~ Brené Brown

The holidays don't require grand gestures or perfect moments; even gentle interactions can provide comfort, strengthen resilience, and remind us that we are not alone.

Here are some supportive resources and ideas to help you find community and ease across Vancouver Island this season.

December 2025 Edition



Resources & Ways to Connect on Vancouver Island

Food, Support & Practical Help

If finances feel tight this year, there are welcoming, judgment-free places across the Island that can help:

- Cowichan Basket Society (Cowichan Valley)
- Nanaimo Foodshare Society (Nanaimo)

From a psychological perspective, accessing support isn't a sign of weakness, it's a healthy coping strategy that reduces stress and helps the nervous system feel safe and supported.



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Volunteering as a Path to Connection

Research consistently shows that volunteering can improve mood, reduce loneliness, and increase feelings of purpose.

- *Loaves & Fishes Volunteer Program* (Nanaimo)
- *Nourish Cowichan* (Cowichan Valley)

Local Holiday Events & Markets

Even if you're not planning to spend money, walking through a festive market or Christmas gallery can boost mood through sensory experiences! Lights, music, atmosphere, familiar scents... all of which can positively affect emotional well-being.

Some local options include:

- *Gifts from the Heart Christmas Arts Market* (Ladysmith) – December 13-14

"Holidays are not just about the destination; they are about the journey of discovering new experiences and embracing the beauty of the world."

~ Unknown

Affordable Gifts & Activities That Support Well-Being

Here are some fresh ideas that focus on psychological health, connection, and low-cost joy.

Meaningful, Low-Cost Gift Ideas

- *A handwritten letter expressing gratitude or appreciation* - gratitude has been shown to improve emotional health for both giver and receiver.
- *A small handmade or upcycled item* - creative expression reduces stress and increases dopamine.
- *The gift of time or help* - offering support nurtures connection and reduces loneliness.
- *An "experience voucher"* - sharing meaningful time increases oxytocin, the bonding hormone.

Low-Cost Holiday Activities that Support Mental Health

- *Take a nature walk on a forest trail or beach* - nature exposure has strong evidence for lowering anxiety.
- *Visit a local market for the atmosphere* - sensory enjoyment improves mood even without spending.
- *Host a relaxed game or movie night* - shared laughter and collaboration build social connection.
- *Cook or bake something simple* - rhythmic, hands-on activities help regulate the nervous system.
- *Check in on someone else who may feel lonely* - acts of kindness create a sense of belonging.
- *Volunteer your time* - purpose and contribution are linked to improved well-being.



What Was the “Best Christmas Ever” According to Kids?

When researchers and child-development experts ask children what made their favourite Christmas or holiday special, the answers are almost never about expensive toys or brand-new gadgets. In fact, kids rarely remember *what* they received, they remember *how they felt*.

Here are the most common themes children share when describing their “best Christmas ever:”

1. “We spent time together.”

Children consistently say their happiest memories come from simple moments:

- baking cookies
- playing games
- watching movies in pajamas

Psychologically, these moments matter because kids feel *connected*, *safe*, and *seen*. Those are experiences money can't buy.

2. “The house felt cozy.”

Children often describe sensory memories:

- the smell of dinner or baking
- the sound of music
- the glow of lights

These cues help kids feel grounded and cared for, something far more powerful than any toy.

3. “We did something special, even if it was small.”

Small traditions become huge in a child's mind:

- opening one gift on Christmas Eve
- choosing a decoration for the tree
- sharing a silly family ritual

Kids don't compare these moments to expensive experiences, they treasure them *because they are yours*.

4. “My parents were happy or calm.”

Children are highly attuned to their caregivers' emotional state. When parents are stressed about money or expectations, kids can feel it.

But when parents slow down even for a few minutes, kids feel secure. The “best Christmas ever” is often the one where:

- parents sat and played
- there was laughter

It's the emotional climate, not the financial one, that makes the difference.

5. “We helped someone else.”

Many kids say their favourite memories include:

- donating toys
- baking for neighbours
- helping at a community event

These moments make children feel proud, connected, and part of something bigger, feelings that stick far longer than any trending toy.

A Gentle Reminder

Connection doesn't have to be loud or elaborate. We feel safest, calmest, and most grounded when we experience even small, consistent moments of human warmth. This season, give yourself permission to seek or offer connection in ways that feel authentic and accessible to you.

Whether your holidays are quiet, shared, or somewhere in between, you deserve care, kindness, and community in whatever form feels right.



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