

# Guide to Surviving Christmas

It's that time of year again, when the evenings draw early, there's frost in the air and glittery ads are on the telly. Yes, Christmas is coming... If the thought of Christmas makes you shiver when you think of how much it's going to cost, then take a breath and a moment to think. It is easy to get caught up in the moment, which is why it's so important that you take control of your finances when you can. Remember, if you are the person who keeps track of the money in your household, you deserve a Christmas too – don't turn it into a nightmare.

## The 12 steps of Christmas

1. Make a list of what you need to buy for Christmas. Divide it into gifts, food, clothes and socialising. Use our Christmas planner to help.
2. Prioritise – if you had a limited amount of money, what could you cut from that list? Work your way through, numbering items in order of importance.
3. Try to estimate how much money you expect to spend on each of these items. What does it add up to ?
4. Is it a very large figure? If the number makes your eyes bulge, look at each individual item again. How can you reduce the cost?
5. What does it add up to now? Is that a better figure?
6. Keep going with this until you get to a number you can live with – it is important to be honest with yourself.
7. This is the amount of money you have decided you NEED for Christmas.
8. If you have been able to put aside a few euro over the year to meet the cost of Christmas, well done. Will it be enough to cover the costs you planned for?
9. If you have not been able to put aside any money, or if what you have saved is not enough, then you have a choice; either you cut the amount you intend to spend again, until your savings can cover it, or you may decide to borrow.
10. Try not to build your plans on the basis of a bonus or overtime payment, or any other payment that you are not absolutely certain you will get – only count the money you can rely on getting.
11. Smart Shopping
  - Try to get the best value you can when shopping for gifts – look for offers in the shops, three-for-two deals and so on, but remember the value is only there if you actually need the three items.
  - Stick to cash – you will spend less than using debit and credit cards.
  - Keep the receipts in case something needs to be exchanged.
  - Work from a list to avoid unplanned, impulse shopping.
  - Leave the children at home.
  - Remember the shops only close for one or two days, so there is no need to stock up on food.
12. Borrowing

If you really believe borrowing is your only option, then remember these points:

  - Only borrow what you truly need and not once cent more
  - Try to make sure you can pay back this loan before the middle of next year, if at all possible, otherwise it makes it difficult for save for next Christmas.
  - Find out what the weekly or monthly repayments are going to be and see how this will affect your budget next year – can you afford that amount, and still pay your regular bills and expenses?

- When looking for a loan, try to get the best value you can. Generally, loans available from a money lender will cost you much more than a loan from your Credit Union or bank. Using a credit card is also a very expensive way of borrowing money.
- Remember to read the terms and conditions of any credit application, make sure you understand what you are getting into. Get advice before you sign.
- Contact MABS before borrowing to see what options are available to you.
- Before you borrow, look again at your list – is it worth it? Are you sure this is what you and your family need?

### Cutting the cloth

When we struggle all year round, with little cash to spare, we often feel we need to take a break at Christmas – we want our children and our loved ones to have the best. But that doesn't always mean spending a fortune – particularly a fortune you don't have. Be open with your family – even Santa has been hit by the recession! Talk to your friends and extended family – do you need to exchange gifts at all? Or would you rather spend time together? Almost no-one has been left untouched by this recession – everyone has less money this year than last year; be the one to bring up the subject in your circle – suggest that this year, is the year to bring back more basic values. Take the time to be with those you love – and those you love will not want you to worry, and to struggle for six months to pay for the gifts they didn't need.

**Happy Christmas from MABS**

## Christmas Planner

	Priority	Amount to Spend - First Estimate	Amount to Spend - Second Estimate	Amount to Spend - Third Estimate
Gifts				
Clothes				
Socialising				
Food				
Total Planned				
Too Much? Yes/No				



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