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## CHRISTMAS MIND GAMES

Mind games can be played in a variety of circumstances. In each case, one person is trying to gain the upper hand over the other, disarm them and force them into some specific action. Important celebrations such as Christmas – a time of joy, family atmosphere and tranquillity – prove to be the ideal ‘fighting ring’ for many families. But is that so?

### WHAT ARE MIND GAMES?

The dictionary defines a mind game as ‘a psychological tactic used to **manipulate** or **intimidate**’ [1]. The person playing mind games tries to control the other person by lying, cheating or trying to deceive them. It makes them feel strong. It is a form of defence mechanism, as in ‘try to get them before they get you’.

### ROLES IN MIND GAMES

Transactional analysis psychiatrist Eric Berne identified three roles revealed in mind games:

1. I-Parent – a state that mimics the patterns acquired from parents. It defines norms, prohibitions, orders, values. It can be summarised by the words ‘I must’.
2. I-Adult – it expresses objective reality, the acquired skills through which we understand our surroundings. It goes together with the words ‘I can’.
3. I-Child – fixed childhood feelings, drives, emotional reactions – in other words everything that ‘I want’.

In specific situations or interactions, a certain ‘I’ can become activated in each of us. Why? Because we want to get support, understanding or recognition, but we don’t believe we can get it in a genuine and sincere way.

### HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE A MIND GAME?

Note the following behaviours in each scenario:

- **Assessing** or **comparing one to others** – this tactic makes the person feel inadequate, they start to question their actions and perhaps feel jealous.
- Constantly repeating that someone is **wrong** and **ignoring** or **ridiculing** the other person’s point of view is also an attempt to undermine someone’s position.
- Inconsistent behaviour – as mentioned above, alternating between liking and disliking someone.

Christmas is a good ‘stage’ for playing mind games. How to neutralise them?



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If you want to learn more about transactional analysis, we recommend this [article](#)

### ROLES IN MIND GAMES OVER CHRISTMAS

What mind games can we spot in different situations?

1. Sending greetings – why do we do it? Any situation in which our motives are not based on pure affection can be a game. Also receiving them if we assume that someone is wishing us well out of pity or 'because it's the right thing to do'.
2. Gifts – they become the subject of games when it is not the gesture that counts, but their actual value. Or when we start comparing who got the better, cooler, more useful gift.
3. Christmas dinner – making a sumptuous dinner, preparations beyond one's means, complaining that 'nobody is helping me', 'everything is on my head'.... isn't this an attempt to cry out for recognition?

When you notice these behaviours, talk to the other person and express your concerns. Don't jump to conclusions, but pay attention to emerging patterns. Then take the appropriate steps to deal with it. It is worth being firm, not getting drawn into games or seeking a third party to help deal with the problem. Communicating your needs appropriately is also key.

### HOW TO EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS WITHOUT MIND GAMES?

There are several ways to 'disarm' a mind game:

- Confrontation – clearly expressing one's own thoughts, feelings and concerns. Trying to explain the situation in question and identifying the 'game'.
- Ignoring the game – for example, when someone takes on the role of a victim, don't take the role of a rescuer.
- Honest conversation – asking questions about the other person's ulterior motives.
- Referring to the 'here and now'.
- Not lowering one's own value and that of others, including accepting one's own and other people's capabilities and limitations.
- Reflecting on one's own behaviour and becoming aware of one's tendency to take on certain roles.
- Becoming aware of unmet needs and looking for ways to meet them.
- A mindset of listening (not just hearing) to others.

The best way to feel joy is through real and direct communication with others. We undervalue ourselves, others, our abilities... and yet we can decide for ourselves what this Christmas will be like and what we will value most in it. Gifts or the joy of time shared with our loved ones?

*Don't wait, call now! If you feel overwhelmed by the upcoming Christmas, contact a specialist.  
We are here to support you!*