

Getting ready for Christmas

Remember when Christmas ended last year and you told yourself “next Christmas I’m going to” . Well, now you have time to start and the earlier the better, as far as Christmas planning is concerned!

Christmas can be one of the most expensive times of the year. Buying gifts for family and friends along with the Christmas food shopping and January household bills can put many of us under financial stress! To help avoid this and to have a Christmas you can truly enjoy, put in place some of our useful tips on preparing for Christmas early this year!

How much did you spend last year?

List all the presents you bought last Christmas (it should be still relatively fresh in your mind!) and tot up the extra expenses you incurred for grocery shopping, travel, accommodation, socializing and so on. Check it against your bank statements, credit card bills and receipts – does it compare well? Did you spend more or less than you thought?

How did you finance your Christmas spending?

If you financed Christmas through a loan, by using a credit card or by buying on credit through a catalogue, then it is important to pay all this off before next Christmas. Have you a plan in place to do this? Also could you save even a small amount at the same time and increase it later in the year when you have paid off last year’s borrowings? It will all help to minimize the borrowing needed, if any at all, for this Christmas.

Make a list of all the gifts you bought?

Were all of these necessary? After all, almost no-one has been left untouched by this recession and maybe your friends would be eager to do something different this year. Perhaps a Secret Santa would work better in your family or circle of friends, so that everyone buys just one gift, or you could set a limit on how much to spend, or just agree to meet and spend time together. Have this chat now so that you don’t feel bad bringing it up at Christmas!

Make a plan for next Christmas

- Make a list of everything you need to buy for Christmas. Divide it into gifts, food, clothes, travel and socializing (use out Christmas planner to help).

- Estimate how much money you expect to spend on each item.
- Now prioritise – what are the most important items on that list? What would you cut if you had a limited amount of money?

Shop Smartly

Look back at how you shopped for Christmas last year. Did you buy in shops or through catalogues? Did you leave everything until the last minute? Many retailers now have sales throughout the year and particularly in November to encourage us to shop early for Christmas. Big savings can be made for those of us who are organised to do this.

If you shop through Catalogues check the cost of interest applied to your purchases. Payments by instalments may seem handy at the time but check what it finally costs you by the time it’s all paid off. If you do want to buy something, keep an eye out for interest free or delivery free offers and only buy it then.

Christmas Clothes

Are new clothes really needed for everyone in the house? If not, then you should prioritize and buy according to need and age awareness. Younger children, in particular may not be so aware of getting new clothes.

Start saving

First add up all the priority items on your list. Then calculate how many weeks there are between now and Christmas. Divide the total cost by the number of weeks to see what your weekly savings target should be. Can you afford to put aside this amount? If not, then you need to look at your list again and make some cuts.

Start saving a regular amount each week or month and put this money aside in a bank or credit union – somewhere you cannot access this money easily. Other options include a savings club either with a shop or with a group of friends or neighbours. Or, if you are a member of a loyalty scheme with a supermarket, you could carry-over the vouchers until the November mailing and use them for Christmas grocery shopping.

Chat to your friends for more ideas on ways to save and remember - more savings = less borrowings = less stress = more enjoyment!

Whats will Christmas cost me?

Food	Description	Cost €
Cost of normal weekly shop		
Main meal on Christmas day		
- Turkey/Ham, other meat		
- Vegetables		
- Dessert/Christmas cake		
- Drink		
Other Items		
Clothing	Description	Cost €
Self		
Partner		
Child 1		
Child 2		
Child 3		
Gifts and Cards	Description	Cost €
Partner		
Children		
- Child 1		
- Child 2		
- Child 3		
Extended Family		
- Parents		
- Brothers		
- Sisters		
Close Friends		
- Friend ()		
- Friend ()		
- Friend ()		
Christmas Cards		
Postage		
Socialising	Description	Cost €
Work/Social Christmas Party		
Going out with friends		
Family Party		
Day out with the family		
Other treat or outing with children		
Total Cost		
What can I set aside for Christmas each week/month	No of remaining weeks/months to Christmas divided by total cost	



The Money Advice and Budgeting Service has helpful information, budget sheets and sample letters available online at www.mabs.ie. Advice and information is also available by calling the MABS Helpline 0761 07 2000 (Monday – Friday 9.00 am to 8.00 pm.) and from over 60 offices nationwide.

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