

You know, because we're bombarded with images of big family tables, matching pajamas, laughter, all those things. And if your life doesn't look like that, I think you can feel like you've failed somehow.

Hi, welcome to You Keep Me Sane.

I'm Aileen.

And I'm Julie.

And we're two friends navigating life's ups and downs together from opposite sides of the world.

Hi, and welcome back to You Keep Me Sane.

Hi, how are you, Julie?

Hi, I'm good actually. Looking forward to Christmas tomorrow. Can't believe it. You?

So am I. Is Santa coming to town?

Santa will be there. I can't believe it's Christmas already.

It just feels like we just had one.

I know. This year's gone so quickly.

I cannot believe it. But as we head into Christmas, the one word I keep coming back to — I just want to have a quick chat today about that, because it's Christmas Eve — and that's connection. It's come up a lot this year. This is something that has really resonated this year, connection.

We've done two episodes around it. One was after our experience at the podcast show. And it really feels like the heart of everything, doesn't it? And I honestly think it's the most important thing to a happy life. And I think about it a lot at this time of year anyway.

Yeah, I completely agree. And yet it's often the thing that slips away when we need it most. And this time of year can feel so full — full of plans, people, noise — but not always full of meaning. So you can be in a room full of people and still feel miles away from everyone, including yourself.

So connection can feel elusive at this time for some people.

Yeah, it can actually. Because real connection isn't about how many people are around you or whether you're at the perfect table with the perfect setting. It's about presence. And I think that's about being connected as well to yourself first — to that quiet inner voice, to your true feelings, even the uncomfortable ones, which is always tough.

And I know you mean presence rather than Christmas presents.

Yeah, presence — P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E — absolutely.

That's what I thought, it was shocking.

Because when you're not connected to yourself, everything starts to feel off. You say yes when you mean no, you try to fit in instead of being honest, and you hide how you're really feeling because you don't want to bring the mood down. But when you take a moment to tune in, to breathe, to check in with your heart, that's when real connection starts.

Yeah, it does. And it's so important. And I think actually that's why this season can often be so emotional — because people aren't really connected to themselves. Everybody is so busy being with other people, doing things to get ready for the holiday season. And I think that therefore, for some, it can even be one of the loneliest times of year.

Even though there's so much talk of togetherness, I think the reality can feel very different.

Yeah, I agree. And there's numbers behind that actually. In Australia, a Red Cross survey found that around one in three people feel lonely around Christmas. And for younger adults, the number is even higher. In the UK, Age UK reported that over two million older people wish they had someone to spend time with at Christmas, and about 1.6 million think Christmas Day is the hardest day of the year.

So while the world tells you it's the season of joy, for many it highlights what's missing — loved ones who've passed, friendships that faded, and relationships that have changed.

Yeah, that's the thing. I think what it does is it highlights that gap between expectation and reality, because we're bombarded with images of big family tables, matching pajamas, laughter — all those things. And if your life doesn't look like that, I think you can feel like you've failed somehow.

But I think we have to remind ourselves that connection isn't about performing the perfect Christmas. It's about finding moments that are real and being connected to yourself.

Absolutely. And sometimes it just means acknowledging the sadness or the emptiness instead of pushing it away. Because when we do that, we're being honest — and honesty is a form of connection too.

Yeah, it is. But I think it is really hard to do that. We all keep busy to try not to acknowledge exactly what we're feeling. But I think we also need to take the pressure of that ideal off, because it's the comparison with that ideal that makes us feel really lonely.

And I think also for some people at this season, it's the overwhelm that takes over — too many commitments, too much pressure to keep everybody happy. So it's loneliness and overload existing at once for a lot of people.

So no matter what your Christmas looks like — whether you're surrounded by a big family, a small group of friends, or spending the day on your own — connection is still possible.

Yeah, it really is. Because connection isn't just about who's in the room, it's about how you show up. It might mean having a real conversation instead of small talk — I can't stand small talk — or reaching out to someone you've lost touch with, or even showing yourself a bit of compassion.

Perhaps sit quietly and say, "I see you. You've done your best this year."

We need to say that to ourselves, Julie.

We really do. A lot of people go through the year without acknowledging everything they've carried. And sometimes just saying, "You've done a lot, and you've done your best," really matters.

But whether you're connecting with yourself or with other people, it does require vulnerability — which is scary. But vulnerability is actually the bridge to connection. When you drop the armour of busyness or pretending everything's fine, that's when real conversations happen.

Someone will say, "Yeah, I feel that too," and suddenly you're not alone anymore. Even just acknowledging it to yourself — "I'm feeling rubbish" — can be such a relief. There's so much power in being vulnerable.

Yeah, absolutely. It's taken me years to be able to do that because of things that have happened in the past. But it takes courage to be seen. And when you find the people you can be vulnerable with, that's where love lives — not in performance, but in truth.

That's connection.

And it makes me think how many times we chase the idea of the perfect Christmas — the right gifts, the perfect meal, the tidy house. But those aren't the moments you remember. It's the small, unplanned ones.

I always remember sitting with my sisters, putting our feet up, having a cup of tea and just chatting. Those quiet moments of being together. Or even an unexpected phone call that makes you think, "Oh, it's really nice to talk to that person."

That's what stays with you.

I can picture you and your sisters doing that. That's really sweet.

And sometimes connection is lighting a candle, remembering someone you love, or just being grateful for getting through another year. That's connection too. Sometimes the deepest connections are silent ones — when you realise how far you've come.

So maybe the question this Christmas isn't what we're doing or who we're with, but how we're connecting. How can we make it real? How can we create connection — not through perfection, but through presence.

P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E-S, **Aileen**. We have to say it at this time of year.

Because connection doesn't need to look a certain way. It doesn't have to be loud or busy or traditional. It can be as simple as a phone call, a hug, a kind word, or a moment of stillness with yourself.

So whether your Christmas is full of laughter and chaos, gentle and quiet, or even if it's just you — remember you're worthy of connection. You're worthy of love exactly as you are.

And maybe the best gift you can give this year is showing up as your true self — the one that doesn't need to perform or prove anything. Because that's where real connection begins.

So Merry Christmas to everybody. However you spend it, we hope you find a moment of genuine connection — to yourself, to someone you love, or simply to the world around you.

Merry Christmas. And may it remind you that love isn't something you have to earn. It's already within you. You're enough just as you are.

Thanks so much for joining everyone. Take care.

Bye.

Bye.

Thanks so much for joining us. We hope you're feeling more understood, a little less alone, or that something we've discussed resonated with you. And if you have something to share, email us at hello@youkeepmesane.com or message us on socials at **youkeepmesane.pod**.

Please remember, we're just two friends sharing our personal experiences and discussing everyday challenges. We're not qualified coaches or therapists, and our content is for general information and supportive conversation only. If you need professional help, please seek advice from a licensed therapist. And if you don't know of any, we'll aim to help you find one.

You Keep Me Sane acknowledges the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which part of this podcast episode was filmed. We pay our respects to their elders past and present.