

Christmas – Spending Time Together



The end of the year has come around very fast and the pace is picking up as Christmas approaches.

In our final article for the year we would like to thank you for your readership and wish you all a very happy, restful and restorative Christmas break. And before we go, we would like to highlight some of our key parenting messages as they relate to Christmas.

Be mindful. Christmas time is a wonderful time of the year, but not for everyone. Some members of our community are experiencing their first Christmas without a dearly loved friend or family member. Some people will be alone. Others will be experiencing hardship of some kind. We remember you all, send you our love, and keep you in our thoughts and prayers.

Let the real gift to your children this Christmas be the most precious, your time. It is the experiences from our childhood that we remember the best. If the time you have off work is limited, plan how you can best spend it with your children. Think about the family traditions and rituals you have together. Do you go to Carols by Candlelight or Midnight Mass? Visit the Giving Tree? Have a photo taken with Santa? Go on a family bushwalk every Boxing Day? It is by spending time with your children that you are creating bonds and building relationships. And it is these very experiences that will make your adult children want to seek you out and spend time with you in the Christmases of the future.

Teach your children to give and to be kind. Christmas is the perfect time to do this. For example, help them to bake some gingerbread biscuits and take your children to deliver them to an elderly relative, or the neighbour who lives alone in your street. Encourage them to choose some toys they no longer play with, in good condition of course, and take your child to deliver them to an appropriate charity. Suggest they use some of their own money to donate to the Giving Tree, or to buy a gift for another child for the Giving Tree. Altruism (the act of giving) is its own reward. Help provide your child with the opportunity to experience it; it can be life changing.

Share your stories. Christmas time is the perfect time to tell your children about your own childhood. This sharing can create and strengthen a sense of family and belonging in your children. Focus on the things you did together with your family when you were young, keeping it positive. Show your children a new side to their aunts and uncles and grandparents. Children often forget that their aunts and uncles are their parents' siblings, and that their grandparents are their mums and dads. Teach your children which rituals you have brought with you from your family of origin.

Involve everyone. Where ever possible allocate special tasks and give them kudos. For example, the youngest (or the eldest) is to put the star on top of the tree and the children set

the table (don't be afraid to use the good stuff. What's it for, after all?). Allow the children to decorate the tree, stir the cake batter and make a wish, wrap Nanna's present and write the gift tags. Create new tasks if you need to; someone to hand out the gifts, someone to light the candles on the Christmas table, someone to carry in the Christmas pudding and someone to light it, someone to bowl the first ball of the afternoon's cricket match and someone to bat first. The list is endless. Make it your own.

Most importantly, be safe. Cherish each other and the time you will get to spend together. Practise forgiveness and kindness. Model those behaviours you most want to see emulated in your children, because they will take your lead. To those of you who won't be at home at Christmas because you are in our essential services, nursing, driving ambulances, fighting fires, policing and more, THANK YOU.

Happy Christmas,

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