

'Tis the Season to Show Kindness

As this is our final newsletter for the year, we would like to take the opportunity to thank you all for your readership and support, and to recap some of our key messages for 2017. It has certainly been a very busy year for us at St Mary's College and we have no doubt things have been busy and even frenetic at times at home with all that families must do and achieve these days.

Christmas is a perfect opportunity to build and strengthen family connections through the making and maintaining of rituals and traditions. There is no right way to celebrate this important occasion. We all bring different ways of celebrating to our families, both from our family of origin and from our cultural traditions. As sure as memories are made, so are connections and bonds of belonging created when we spend precious time with those whom we love. Time with you is the most precious gift you can give your child. They will remember the hours together around the Monopoly board, or the family cricket games on the beach long after they think about that iPad or new phone that has long since been replaced. We recognise that this extra time can be hard to find, but let it a priority. Seize it where you can.

Our most recent article was on unconditional love – a gentle reminder that it is our job to teach our children, not to punish them. Be prepared for over-excited, over-tired and sugar-pumped children. Plan some low sugar, fresh food meals into the holiday mix. Plan to spend some time outdoors where they can burn off the extra energy. Do some calming activities like story reading or carol singing (yes, carol singing) with them, especially if you are lucky enough to have someone in your family who can play a musical instrument. Know your own limits. We all feel tired and stretched (and possibly grumpy) when there is too much to do and too little time. Slow down when you can. Let some things go.

Model the behaviours you want to see in your children: moderation in eating and alcohol consumption, generosity of spirit in helping each other, appreciation of gifts and gestures no matter how small. Christmas is also the perfect time to model altruism. Help your children to find a way to give to others. By this we mean, do not do the giving for them. Help them to choose or even pay for a gift for the Giving Tree, make cards for extended or absent family, or a cake for a neighbour or relative. Visit an elderly neighbour, wash Nan's car or mow her lawn ... the list is as long as your imagination. The act of giving helps your child find meaning and value in Christmas. It promotes happiness and helps your child to feel good about themselves.

When the pressure is off and the holidays are in full swing, it becomes particularly important to keep an eye on technology use and cyber safety. Know what your children are accessing, especially if they are spending a lot of time alone at home. In fact, holidays are a good time to encourage your children to maintain and grow their friendships out of the school setting, with friends from school and with friends outside of school (neighbours, cousins, etc.). Help facilitate play dates, preferably ones that do not require an internet connection, like trips to the beach or park, a cake making afternoon, rock climbing, bike

riding or even picnics. Spend some time planning and setting goals for the New Year. Having things to look forward to lifts the spirits and fosters a sense of well-being.

Finally, we recognise that Christmas time can also be lonely, emotionally painful and a financial struggle for some. Members of our school community have experienced, or are experiencing, serious illness, heartache, loss and grief, relationship breakdown, job loss and separation from loved ones. We remember you all and keep you in our prayers.

Let love and kindness guide your thoughts and actions. We wish you a happy and restful holiday break. We look forward to continuing our blog next year.

Happy Christmas!

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