

Breathing Through The Holidays

By Kathy Slattengren, M. Ed., [Priceless Parenting](#)

How do you feel when you think about all the activities of the holidays? Are you taking calm, deep breaths or shallow, short breaths? Is your heart racing when you remember all the things you want to get done?

Sometimes your own high expectations rob you from enjoying yourself. Take a step back and consider

Breathing Deeply Together

Families spend more time together at the holidays. How does the rhythm of your family change with your kids on a break from school?

Do you have time to slow down and catch your breath? Or is there additional tension that leads you to holding your breath as you navigate through? Are your [family gatherings stressful](#) due to taking on more than your share?

Mindfully deciding on how to spend your time and energy over the holidays can increase your joy. When you think of your own childhood what are your fondest holiday memories? What holiday traditions would you like your kids to remember when they are your age? Do your favorite memories include any of the following ...?

- Baking cookies or other special food
- Decorating the house together
- Sipping hot chocolate with candy canes as stirring sticks
- Attending a religious service
- Walking or driving around looking at light displays
- Going to a holiday concert or play
- Watching a special holiday show
- Going sledding, building a snowman
- Volunteering at a soup kitchen

Activities that allow you to connect with each other create lasting memories. The things you do together are more important than the gifts you give them. You can check this out by asking them if they remember what presents you gave them last year. What do they recall receiving? Next ask them what they remember doing over the holidays last year. What were their favorite activities?

Breathing Through Difficult Emotions

The holidays are a time of big emotions. There are extra special activities to fill your evenings and weekends. Gatherings with family are ripe for strong emotions – positive and negative.

If someone in your family is experiencing a health issue or an addiction issue, you may feel a sense of loss. The holidays are especially difficult the first year after someone close to you has died. It's healing to acknowledge your pain and breathe through it. Stuffing your emotions or smiling when you feel like crying leads to more agony.



Your kids learn how to process difficult emotions from watching you. Difficult emotions are like waves on the ocean. They rise up and then they retreat. Acknowledging and owning these emotions helps heal the pain. If you feel like you can't breathe, try holding your breath. Then take a deep breath. Take a few more deep breaths to center yourself.

Giving Gifts That Promote Easy Breathing

Gift giving can be challenging. Your kids may want gifts that you can't afford or don't want in your family. Perhaps your child wants a pony and you don't have the space nor the desire for it. Or your child wants a smart phone and you believe they are too young.

Set your kids' expectations ahead of time. Let them know that you will not be giving them something that may cause significant problems within your family.

How can you select gifts for your kids that help them grow in healthy ways? Choose gifts that will allow you to breathe more easily. Just because your child wants something and you can afford to buy it, does not make it a good choice. If a gift will cause a lot of extra work or worry for you, do not get it. Your children may be disappointed but they will get over it.

You want to avoid giving your child a gift that will lead to problems. One mom struggled with what to give her 12-year-old son, Mark. A few months earlier Mark had started seeing a psychologist to deal with his addiction to pornography. Mom had taken away his electronics as recommended by the psychologist. She decided to give Mark a Kindle that he wanted for reading books. Much to her dismay, Mark was looking at pornography on the Kindle within a day.

Your gift selecting is made more difficult by commercials filled with kids overjoyed with opening their expensive presents. These rehearsed, scripted scenes are designed to pressure you into buying whatever they are selling. Talk to your kids about how advertising makes it look like happiness comes from owning more things. Discuss how [researchers found that authentic happiness](#) comes from things like closeness to others, gratitude, acts of kindness and living a meaningful life.

The holidays provide an opportunity to spend time with loved ones [creating cherished holiday memories](#). May you enjoy many magical moments together!

Kathy Slattengren is an internationally recognized, inspirational parent educator and founder of Priceless Parenting, <http://www.PricelessParenting.com>. Priceless Parenting offers online [parenting classes](#), [parenting presentations](#) and [parent coaching](#). Parents learn to effectively handle misbehavior while building loving relationships.

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