

Child development: Give the gift of presence and love during the holidays

December 21 2022, by Nikki Martyn



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The holidays are a time for family, connection and love. Family

traditions are an important component of the holiday season. They are constant and reliable. They allow us to slow down and be in the moment, appreciate each other and [express gratitude](#).

The holidays are happy times where [generations and families](#) come together to [share time with and show generosity](#) to one another. These are particularly important experiences in childhood, when we are starting to [understand relationships and how the world works](#).

These special times together—laughing, squabbling, playing—allow us to be part of [something larger than ourselves](#). To love and feel loved. They create memories we can take with us and [provide children with a sense of security](#).

It also allows us to look forward to something enjoyable. Family traditions allow an opportunity to [share the love we have for each other](#) and recognize the importance of being together.

Love is important

Love is the greatest gift we can give our children. The opportunity to be seen, heard and understood and to feel valued, worthy and special is [invaluable to their holistic development](#).

Childhood experiences impact who we become and how we understand relationships and the world. They [live under our skin](#) for our whole lives, creating patterns which can be difficult (but not impossible) to change.

Children are constantly evolving, forming ideas, making connections and developing relationships with the most important people in their lives. These relationships impact their [development, neurology, the way they interpret and understand themselves and their experiences](#) throughout their lives.

Knowing who your child is and what they love allows you to see their future self and build experiences to support their development. These opportunities to [feel seen and known](#) are important for your child's sense of belonging in the [family](#), within themselves and in the world. They will learn who they truly are, what makes them unique and perhaps share their beautiful sparkle as part of the family tradition.

Holiday struggles

There can be a lot of [pressure and stress during the holidays](#).

Parents can feel overwhelmed by holiday preparations and expectations—especially if they are back in their childhood home or with their [parents](#) and siblings. These experiences may [bring back old patterns of behaviors from their own childhoods](#).

Parents might unintentionally be [less sensitive toward their children](#) and respond more impulsively based on their [own unconscious experiences](#), resulting in unanticipated expectations or responses from the child's perspective.

Family gatherings and events can also cause us to feel like we need to be perfect or provide perfect experiences. This added pressure is often externalized to children because parents feel judged based on their children's behavior and engagement. This is not fair to children, who do not understand the nuances of complex social situations, patterns and [family history](#).

For the child, it might feel like dad or mom is less available or responds sharply and quickly, in a way that is not typical of them. Creating time and space to share feelings will help your child to understand the environment, while reinforcing that the love you share is secure, stable and constant.

Setting expectations

Parenting is difficult. We are often consumed by [shame and guilt](#) when things go wrong, believing we should know how to do it naturally.

We tend to parent the way we were parented because parenting is intergenerational and [lives under our skin](#) the same way our [childhood experiences](#) do. If we grew up in a family that felt emotionally secure, safe and loving, we will likely create secure, trusted relationships. Early experiences impact who we become and how we understand the world.

Creating safe, secure, loving environments and being present with your children is the greatest gift you can give. [Creating boundaries and setting expectations](#) is important for helping children feel in control of themselves and their environment.

Addressing an upset

If there is an upset, have an age-appropriate [conversation with your child to talk about what happened](#) and why you were upset. It's important for children to understand what occurred and what they have done.

Without clarity, the child is left to interpret the situation from their own limited perspective. They may create an unintended association, such as associating getting in trouble with expressing their feelings, when the consequence was to teach them about how to use their words and not throw things in the house when upset.

The parent privately sharing their feelings and experiences helps the child understand their upset feelings and provide healthy and safe alternatives for expressing and sharing their feelings.

The parent may also find balance in this reflection by spending time together, cuddling, talking, drawing and playing. The child can process their emotions and experiences while connecting and reconciling, which will make everyone feel cozy in a space of security, trust and love.

Creating secure relationships

Moments of reconciliation create secure loving connections and [become a child's internal model](#). This model becomes ingrained within them, affecting their holistic development, positively impacting who they become and how they understand themselves, relationships and the world.

Forming secure connections positively affects a child's self-esteem, confidence, organizational skills, emotional and social skills and school performance. It affects everything in a child's life because they learn to self-regulate, develop empathy, deal with emotions and conflict and take care of themselves. They learn they can manage the unknown by learning perseverance and resilience. They learn they matter, are valued, worthwhile and loved.

Family traditions and being present provide [children](#) with trusted, safe, secure, loving experiences and relationships that are important for their [healthy development](#) and future self. They are the greatest gift you can give your child.

This is [love](#) in action—the ripple effect that will last a lifetime.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Child development: Give the gift of presence and love during the holidays (2022, December 21) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-12-child-gift-presence-holidays.html>

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