

Whole Hearted  Parenting

The Present of Presence

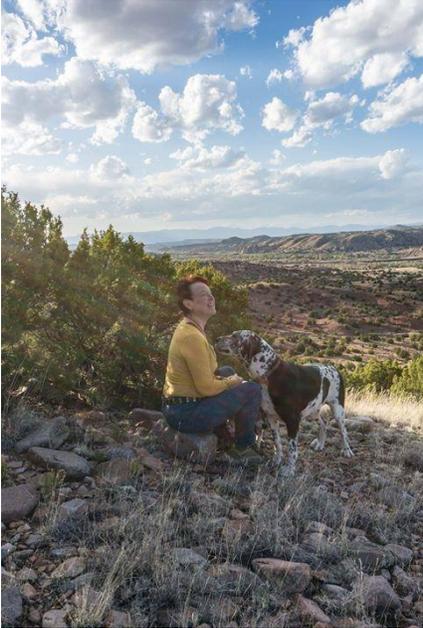
Bringing More Peace to the Holidays

By Maggie Macaulay, MS Ed

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Introduction



Welcome!

The Present of Presence: Bringing More Peace to the Holidays offers three articles taken from our e-book, Parenting Week by Week, to guide, encourage, and inspire you create the relationships you desire with your children, and with everyone for that matter! I hope you find words that resonate and tools that you will embrace.

All the Best –

Maggie Macaulay, MS Ed

About Whole Hearted Parenting



I am glad you have landed here, and may this be the beginning of a new adventure in whole hearted living. Would you like to experience life whole heartedly – with your spouse, family, and friends; in your career; as a parent? Our coaching and training guide you to discover that place inside you that feels like home so that you fully and joyously live the life that you desire.

I am a Florida Native who grew up in an Air Force family. Exchanging humidity, hurricanes, and heat for the stunning high desert, I am now living in New Mexico, The Land of Enchantment, with my husband, daughter, and our ever-growing, well-loved herd of pets.

I have a Master of Science in Education and under graduate degrees in Computer Science and Sociology. Having been a teacher, dancer, and counselor in a variety of therapeutic settings, my focus is now on coaching and training that provide the skills for living life fully and deeply.

My daughter's clear preference for the word "no" as a toddler inspired me to more deeply explore children's behavior and development. After attending a parenting course and experiencing the benefits in our family, I became a certified parenting educator. I created Whole Hearted Parenting in 2000 to share what I had learned with other parents so that they could experience greater peace and cooperation at home. I soon became a trainer for parenting educators and then a certified coach and course facilitator through [Your Infinite Life Training and Coaching Company](#). I now work with individuals, educators, schools, companies, summer camp programs,

municipalities, organizations, and governmental entities as well as parents providing individual and professional coaching and training.

Please [contact me](#) if you have any questions about Parenting Week by Week, speaking engagements, our training, and coaching. I invite you to subscribe to our weekly newsletter, [Whole Hearted News](#), for weekly inspiration and information on whole hearted living!

A Question about Holiday Meals



Question:

My husband and I are looking forward to hosting our children and grandchildren over the holidays — or were. We were recently informed that our 30-something daughter and two of her children have decided to go completely “vegan” and gluten-free and will only eat food that is devoid of any and all animal and wheat products.

I have always cooked for omnivores. Now I’m informed that I must prepare one meal for 10 people and another entirely separate meal for three people.

Furthermore, my daughter has informed me that should I regard cooking two meals as a hassle, they will bring their own food. Am I right in thinking that there’s something very self-centered about telling someone they must cooperate in your dietary choices or you will bring your own food? If so, what is your advice?

Answer:

Food is not only a life-sustaining necessity, but it also comforts and connects. That is particularly true with meals prepared and shared during the holidays. We wrap memories around our holiday meals, so changing the way we eat has an impact on everyone. Three decades ago, my husband and I decided to become vegetarians, and I remember our first Christmas with my family after our big decision. I felt a deep pang watching everyone eat my mother’s turkey and dressing. It wasn’t about missing the taste, although it sure smelled and

looked great! It was about missing out on sharing the food that my mother had so lovingly prepared for everyone. It was missing out on a part of the holiday ritual.

There are steps that you can take to have a wonderful holiday with this big change. First of all, know that their decision to eat differently has nothing to do with the beautiful food you prepare or how well you take care of your family. This awareness can assist you in honoring their decision to eat more consciously without taking it personally. Secondly, become more curious about their decision. This can assist you in shifting from it being a burden for you to being something to learn about and share with your family. Whether it is for ethical, ecological, or health reasons, your daughter and granddaughters have decided to eat differently. Although that decision is more mainstream than it was three decades ago, it still sets them apart in your family. If you focus on the connection – which is what the holidays are all about – you will feel more serene.

You have the job of setting the boundary that feels best for you. Boundaries are self-respecting and they respect others. Your daughter has offered to bring food. Say “Yes!” Let her know your menu and see what dishes they can eat. Ask them to bring gluten free pie crusts or to prepare desserts to share. Make their decision the beginning of a conversation rather than simply a “declaration” that you have to handle.

On that first Christmas with my parents, we brought vegetarian dishes that we could share with our family, and we ate the vegetables that my mother had prepared. My family really loved what we brought and asked that we bring it back the following year. We created a new ritual, new comforts, and new ways to connect. You can do that, too, and thoroughly enjoy your family over the holidays!

Focus on Giving



We get what we focus on. We can train – and re-train – our brain to focus on either misbehavior or great decisions made by our children, problems or solutions, bad luck or our contribution to our circumstances, unfortunate events or opportunities to learn. The holiday season is a perfect time to help our children shift their focus from what they want to receive to what they wish to give. This shift can last all year and can jump start a child’s development of gratitude. Here are some easy ways to swing your family’s focus towards giving.

Create a Gift List

A child’s wish list to Santa is always precious. When they reach the age of seven or eight, children can create a second list – their gift list. It can begin with mom, dad and siblings. The list can grow annually to include grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, teachers and friends. Creation of the list can be a craft project or as simple as a lined piece of paper. You can even have your child write the selected gift on the back of a photograph of the recipient. Regardless of the format, begin early in the holiday season so that your child has fun, can save for any purchases and does not feel rushed and pressured.

In making gift choices, emphasize that it is not the cost or size of the gift but the expression of your child’s love that matters most. Spend time talking about what the recipient enjoys so that the gift can be thoughtful and appropriate. If your child has difficulty with ideas, offer suggestions and include gifts that he

can make. A drawing, beaded necklace, poem, woven potholder, or photograph taken by your child will be treasured. Cards which say "This Entitles You to One Back Rub" or "I Will Clean the Dinner Table" make terrific gifts that cost nothing.

If your child chooses to purchase his gifts, provide opportunities around the house to earn extra money. Help your child create a budget and a savings plan so he can successfully raise enough money. Help him learn to shop wisely.

Your focus on giving can be a powerful model for your child. Have your own list of gifts to give, ask for your child's advice on what to give family members, and make your gifts rather than buy them. Incorporate your hobby. If you knit or crochet, ask your child to pick a pattern and have them watch while you create the sweater for her cousin. If you make jewelry, have your child pick out the beads for the necklace for Aunt Linda. If gift-giving is stressful for you, it will be stressful for your child. An early start and good planning will make it as smooth as possible.

Create a Giving Calendar

Create a holiday calendar that includes acts of giving on each day. One parent created an Advent Calendar that had phrases such as "Today I will carry [open, hold, make, pick up] something for someone" for each day of Advent. Children may initially resist and complain, especially if they were receiving gifts each day in the past. Make it fun and discuss the activities each evening. The opportunities to carry someone's books, groceries, or puppy will present themselves in unexpected ways, and children will enjoy the adventure. The shift will change from "Why do I have to do this?" to "You won't believe what I got to do today!" Changing our language from "have to" to "get to" is significant.

Create Opportunities to Serve

Scheduling times during the holidays for your family to volunteer at a nursing home, hospital, or animal shelter can teach everyone the joy of giving. Sing to the elderly or to children confined in the hospital. Bake cookies to give. Planting seeds or cuttings in small pots can make lovely gifts, and if cultivated far enough in advance, you can have herbs or flowering plants to give. Make wreathes, ornaments, or assemble baskets of toiletries. Take a huge box of dog biscuits to the animal shelter.

The gift of giving will be returned to you many times over.

The Present of Presence



Gifts are wonderful. As one of the five love languages ([The Five Love Languages of Children](#) by Chapman and Campbell), gifts allow us to speak love without words, and the opportunities for gift giving are boundless this time of year. There is one gift for children – and for children in adult bodies – that is amazingly gratifying. It costs nothing, so it will not appear on your credit card statement. There is no need for stressful trips to the mall because it is not carried in any store. You can give it away repeatedly, and best of all, it is a gift that deeply enriches both the giver and the recipient. It is the present of presence.

I was reminded of presence with an example of what it is NOT while watching a mom with her two children at the pool. The six-year-old daughter was constantly pushing other children into the water, throwing things, and acting aggressively. The four-year-old son had a pacifier that never left his mouth, making it impossible to understand anything he said other than the fact that he was whining. Mom, talking on her cell phone, blandly said, “Stop splashing” to her son. She then held the phone up to his ear saying, “This is daddy telling you to stop splashing.” For the next six hours around the pool, there was no clear communication or guidance from mom. In fact, she modeled whining for her children. Mom was not seeking assistance or feeling exasperated with her ineffective discipline. She did not even seem to notice the results. Mom was not present. The children, however, were hungry for a response from someone who was “there”. Their brains craved meaningful feedback about the world

and their connection to it. Their misbehavior was communicating, "Tell me how I'm doing even if it is not good news."

All three missed out on the present of presence. When we are present, we feel centered and in the moment. By being present for our children, they feel heard, valuable, loved, and acknowledged. Virginia Satir, a pioneer in family therapy, said, "I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen by them, heard by them, to be understood and touched by them."

We could dismiss our example at the pool as "bad mom" and "bratty kids;" however, it expresses something deeper. It is about two children pushing for guidance from the most significant person in their lives. It is about a mom not fully stepping into how effective and influential she could be. She is not seeing her magnificence and brilliance. She was not present.

Give the present of presence to you and your children.

- Slow down
- Practice mindfulness by tuning into your senses. Notice how the air feels on your skin right now. When you give a hug, place your hand on your child's back and feel her heart beating. Feel the warmth of her touch and softness of her skin.
- Breathe deeply. Let your belly expand. Take the time for 10 deep breaths.
- Make connecting with your child your highest intention at least twice a day.
- Provide focused attention for your child. Say, "tell me more" then listen to their response. That is the gift for you.

In [The Prophet](#), Kahlil Gibran said, "You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give." May your gifts be bountiful and your connections deep.