

Whole Hearted Parenting

Joyfully Parenting with Your Whole Heart!

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The Holiday Spirit: Shifting Our Focus to Giving

As Dr. Becky Bailey, creator of **Conscious Discipline**, says, “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. Wishing you well and happiest of holidays.

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