



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." I had entered Redirecting Children's Behavior™ Hell. 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 feeling insignificant to the most significant person in their lives. It is about a woman, blind to the light of love, going through the motions of motherhood in an empty space. How sad for them. How sad for the world. We are all diminished.

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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 your 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.

Wishing You a Happy and Peaceful Holiday Season.

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