

## **Give the Gift of YOU This Year**

**Jill Crawford, LCSW**

And so the holiday season is upon us again. Not only does the calendar tell us so, but it is evident from the annual onset of our collective insanity. Commence mad dashes to the mall to find the “perfect” gift for that loved one who already has everything. Frantic scanning of catalogs and websites in search of that special something that you haven’t yet identified but are certain your child cannot live without. Sound familiar?

If yes, then pause here for a moment.

Breathe.

Breathe some more.

Collect yourself. Attempt to call forth the rational thought processes that you rely upon, and use quite successfully, during the other 11 months of the year.

Get a grip.

Now let’s think this through like the intelligent individuals we surely are. As you consider the various gift options, ask yourself the following questions: 1) What does your child actually need? 2) What will your child truly benefit from? 3) What will be a guaranteed hit? 4) What is cost-effective, yet incomparable in value? 5) What will never go out of style or be passed over for the next trendy item? 6) What will undoubtedly put a smile on that face? Could a gift so ideal in every way possibly exist?

Absolutely.... It’s you.

Yup, that’s right. Give your child the gift of you.

It is no secret that families are busier today than ever before. With everyone running in separate directions most of the week, between school, work, sports, music, and other activities, as well as the constant interference of all things electronic, certain pleasures we have always taken for granted are increasingly absent from family life. Things like togetherness, uninterrupted conversations from start to finish, eye contact...in short, human connection. The *relating* part of relationships is sorely lacking, and we as individuals and as families desperately need to get it back. What better time to start than the holiday season?

So my challenge to all of you fellow parents is to put down your catalogs, step away from your computers, and consider how to connect with your kids this season. Here are a few thoughts to get you started on this most radical of brainstorming:

Consider giving *experiential* gifts instead of tangible items. Outings, day trips, overnights, activities you can do *together*. Think about what your child(ren) enjoys. This could be anything from tickets to a sporting event or concert, an afternoon go-carting or getting mani-pedis. In short, an adventure of sorts during which you and your child/family can spend time together enjoying each other’s company and doing something fun. Perhaps you as a family agree that you will take a vacation over the holidays

instead of buying each other presents. These experiences provide unique opportunities to bond, catch up with each other without constraint of time, set aside the stresses of life, create everlasting memories, and just be with one another.

Allow me to share a personal example: On a recent family vacation, I had the wonderful experience of going parasailing with my son. We had a terrific time together, sharing the adventure of flying together up in the sky and experiencing in tandem the range of emotions that accompanied us. It was truly a glorious day. At the end of our vacation, we did not bring home any souvenirs (code for cheap touristy items that will either be broken or lost before arriving home), but we did return with a renewed sense of closeness derived from shared experience, a collection of funny stories, beautiful photos, and memories that we will both cherish forever.

If you prefer to leave the heavy decision-making up to your child, consider giving them “coupons” for a “mom day” or a “dad day,” during which they can select the activity and have you all to themselves. One-on-one time is a rare commodity between children and parents, and is treasured by everyone (even the grumbly teens who won’t admit it). Your kids may surprise you with the simplicity of their ideas. When I have asked kids what they might like to do with a parent if they had a whole day to spend together without interruption, many have simply said “read a book” or “play games.” The gift of you is more precious and held more dearly than we think.

Sharing experiences isn’t just fun, but has enduring positive side effects too. Spending quality time together will give rise to better communication, increased trust, and improved behavior. You may find that you develop family traditions, new rituals, and best of all, establish good patterns of family interaction that will last you all year long.

So this year, as you make those gift lists and feel your blood pressure begin to rise, pause, breathe, and give some thought to giving the gift of your time, your undivided attention, your companionship, YOU. Nurture your relationships with your children. Connect. *Relate*. And be merry...Happy holidays.

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