

Focusing on Togetherness During the Holidays

*Tips from Nefertiti B. Poyner, Ed.D.
By Joscelyn Paine, Devereux Communications Specialist*



For many families, the holidays are spent dashing around trying to find those perfect presents, slaving over a hot stove cooking up family feasts and scurrying from one festivity to another.

As the whirlwind weeks go by and stress levels soar, it might be time to slow down and remember what is important: **spending time with the ones you love.**

Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) Early Childhood Specialist and National Trainer **Nefertiti B. Poyner, Ed.D.**, offers tips for families to focus on togetherness during the holiday season.

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Tip #1: Enjoy the simple things

DCRC research shows it is often the most ordinary things that have the most extraordinary power. Whether it is having your child help you prepare a meal, sitting down as a family and playing a board game or having an older child tell a story to a younger child, life is full of magical moments that make lasting impressions.

"It doesn't matter if the presents aren't perfectly wrapped or the turkey is a tad overcooked," explained Poyner. "What matters is you slow things down and focus on enjoying the everyday moments before they're gone."

Tip #2: Unplug from electronics

It can be hard to connect with the people around us during the holidays when we are constantly glued to our smartphones, tablets and computers. Parents wanting to set a good example cannot expect their children to disconnect from their devices if they are not willing to unplug, as well. Setting aside time each day to power down your phone, put it in a drawer and focus on family activities can have a huge impact on family engagement and connection.

"We're losing the simple art of eye contact with each other because we're on our cellphones all the time," said Poyner. "In order to reconnect, we need to be willing to put down our electronic devices and spend more time physically interacting with our loved ones."

Tip #3: Respect others

While the holidays are a time when family and friends come together, they are also a time when joyful gatherings can quickly turn into heated exchanges. To avoid any family squabbles, skip discussions around the dinner table that focus on religion, politics or any other controversial topics. If someone tries to start a spat, remember – everyone is entitled to their opinion.

"For me to respect someone and be empathetic toward them, doesn't mean I have to agree with what they're saying – and that's OK," Poyner said. "I like to seek agreement, but sometimes agreeing to disagree is agreement enough."

Tip #4: Lend a helping hand

Helping others is not only a benefit to them, but to you, as well. Offering support as a family – whether it is by going caroling at a nursing home, delivering cookies to employees at a fire station or leaving a card in your mailbox for the mail carrier – can bring about feelings of self-worth, happiness and even optimism.

"Giving back to others and modeling that behavior for your children can really have a profound impact," Poyner said. "Even the smallest efforts – showing someone else that you see them and support them – can have big rewards."

Tip #5: Cultivate moments of mindfulness

If you find yourself losing focus of what the holidays are all about, utilize mindfulness techniques such as deep-breathing to relax and regroup. Feel free to involve your children, if you notice they need to unwind as well.

"Step outside and take a few, deep breaths," Poyner explained. "Begin by inhaling the air slowly and deeply through your nose or mouth. Count to three, and then exhale through your lips. This can help you return to your state of calm, so hopefully, you can get back to focusing on what's important."