Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

The Most Valuable Gift

DON'T FORGET TO stop and smell the pine bough or gaze at the effervescent holiday lights. Chances are, if you savor the experience with your child, memories of those rapt moments will last longer than any gift you stretch your budget to buy. What do you remember about childhood holidays? "I can still smell the Hanukkah candles," one father says. "What stands out is the beauty and light of the menorah, and my family. I can't remember any of the gifts." Our childhood memories of this season usually come back to us in a sensory/emotional bundle—the scent of gingerbread linked with the happiness of decorating cookies with family. With all the thought that we put into purchasing gifts for our children, it seems revealing that they so rarely stay in their memories for long.

Anyone who has ever pondered holiday gift giving realizes that the anticipation of unwrapping presents trumps the experience of actually having them. It's our celebratory activity and the expectancy of joining together in an expansive mood that creates an abundance of good feeling. The most valuable gift we can give our children is loving time together—looking in store windows, making decorations, or simply singing favorite songs.

The idea that time with us is the real gift children need isn't hype. Recently a preschool teacher asked at circle children how were they feeling. She asked those who exclaimed they were happy that day what made them feel that way, and they all said the same thing, "My mommy." Mothers, fathers, grandparents, and all those who care for children with love emanate an energy that allows children to feel safe and happy in the world.

At this time of year, when spring is still a promise, the winter holidays renew our belief that life holds more beauty and possibility than we can ever imagine. That's why we try to warm our hearts by beautifying the world around us in ways that come alive for children. Recently some young children making colorful paper chains for the holidays sang to their creations, "You are so beautiful, I love you. I know you are alive."—an example of the full sensory, spiritual holiday feeling we want children to experience.

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