

Don't get Mad, get Generous by Michael Grose

Christmas in Australia is a full on time of the year. It's busy, intense, hectic, but also fun.

It's very different to a northern hemisphere Christmas, which is a lot slower and laid back. The colder climate over there promotes a slower pace as families tend to spend more time indoors. It also helps that the school year doesn't end at Christmas like it does in Australia, where the festive season becomes a multi-purpose finish line as end of school concerts, work festivities, home improvement projects and other end of year activities all vie for your attention.

It's little wonder most of us feel worn out, even on edge at this time of year. It doesn't help that we live in an age of high consumption, which adds a financial pressure that you can do without.

Here are some ideas to help you focus on what really matters – you and your family. Your kids will benefit too from a slightly different approach.

Develop a sufficiency mindset

Whenever you think that you haven't bought enough presents for someone, remember that most people (kids and adults) have too much stuff already. "That's enough!" is a handy mantra at any time, but particularly appropriate for the festive season. There's a tendency for appreciation to diminish in direct proportion to the amount of gifts received. Sometimes the less they receive the more kids appreciate what they get so set aside any feelings of guilt if you think your (Santa's) present list is a little down this year.

Spend time with people who matter most

There is a big expectation to mingle, gather and party at this time of year, which can make the lead up to Christmas exhausting. Consider politely declining some invitations to Christmas catch-ups (such as drinks with your second cousin whose name you can't even remember) so you can save your best self for the important people in your life, the family and friends with whom share the closest connections.

Balance 'me' time and 'you' time with 'them' time

The holiday season is a great opportunity for families to spend some time together away from the egg timer conditions of work, school and other activities. The opportunity to reconnect is invaluable however that doesn't mean you must spend all the time with the gang. Take time out for yourself and also carve out some space to reconnect with your partner, if applicable. This may require you to avoid feelings of guilt when kids tell you they are bored. Resist the temptation to fill the activity void with endless adult-organised outings, trips and treats and instead, give them the chance to self-occupy, which is a supreme life skill.

Develop a holiday routine for you and your kids

I've heard many people say that the best thing about holidays is that there's no routine. I'm a little sceptical as most kids just can't cope without a routine at all. Adapt your usual routine to suit your family circumstances during the holidays. For instance, if your children are below school aged (and even those at school), they will benefit from a bedtime routine, albeit a little later than usual, rather than an anything goes approach.

Practise a spirit of generosity

Study after study demonstrates the importance of the development of generosity to personal happiness. Jonathon Rauch author of *The Happiness Curve* says most eloquently, "Those people who give freely of their time and of themselves have unlocked one of the central keys to lasting human happiness." There are many ways to be generous at this time of the year – open up your home to that lonely neighbour you haven't seen for a while; encourage children to donate a regular portion of their pocket money to a worthy cause such as The Smith Family; RSPCA Guardian Angel, or – my personal favourite – substitute a real gift in your kids' Christmas stocking with a gift of a chicken, goat or water donated to a village in a developing country through an organisation such as Oxfam. This is a good reminder that we live in a land of plenty and we have plenty to be grateful for.

Christmas and the festive seasons are to be treasured, yet it's easy to become so overwhelmed that we don't experience the joy and sense of renewal that should come our way. Fortunately, it only takes a few tweaks to bring our focus back to what really matters. Enjoy and savour this special time of the year.