

Planting Seeds of Peace

By Patti Teel
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No matter what your religion, this time of year is likely to include some type of celebration. And while we all have a great deal to celebrate, like you, I dream of a peaceful world. Envision a world where we don't have to fear for our children's safety, because each inhabitant on Earth reveres life.

While it may seem as if we're not doing anything to contribute to world peace, by helping our children to discover and maintain inner peace, compassion, and acceptance, we are doing something very powerful, real, and important. Peace starts with each individual. Each child whose heart is filled with inner peace, compassion, and acceptance will grow up to become a beacon for peace on Earth, Goodwill to man.

Inner Peace

During the busy holiday season, it's especially important to help children to find peace within themselves. But if we want our children to have inner peace and to be relaxed and carefree, as parents, we need to look closely at ourselves. Children learn by example and they are deeply affected by our emotional states. When we are frantic and frustrated, we affect everyone around us, especially our children. Kids have the uncanny ability to see through "do as I say" and go straight to "do as I do." And like adults, when children are restless, agitated, and frustrated, they are likely to behave in a quarrelsome, critical, irritable, and aggressive manner. Or they may express their inner discomfort with self-conscious, anxious behavior.

Help your children to develop an 'inner calm' by making your home a sanctuary from the overstimulation of the outside world. Have a quiet household at night, limiting television, computer, and video games. Make family 'quiet time' a part of every evening: read or tell stories, listen to soothing holiday music, or give each other a gentle massage. Teach your children relaxation skills such as stretching, deep breathing, and guided imagery. Relaxation can be a delightful form of play and it's easy to incorporate the holidays in imaginative ways. For example, on Teel's *The Christmas Dream CD*, children are directed to stretch and relax by curling up like snowballs, to move their arms and legs slowly in and out like snow angels, and to open their mouths widely to catch snowflakes.

Don't over schedule your children and cut back on the tasks and activities that overwhelm them. For example, avoid long trips to the mall with young children; short spurts of shopping will be more fun for everyone. You may decide that you'd rather spend less time shopping, give fewer gifts, and participate in more activity based celebrations and activities that you can share with your child. For instance, spend time with children making cards, decorations, and cookies.

While routines are likely to be thrown off during the holidays, it's important to maintain a consistent bedtime, allowing plenty of time for a relaxed bedtime routine. Don't let holiday parties or activities interfere with your child getting a good night's sleep.

Compassion

Genuine compassion is a wish for the well-being of other people and for every living being in the universe. Again, as parents, we need to be role models for our children. Just as children pick up on our emotional states, they also emulate the way we treat others. When a waitress or a sales clerk takes a little longer than you'd like, your children will notice whether you are understanding, or demanding.

Compassion comes from a feeling of empathy—an ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and understand how they feel. Help children to realize that in the important ways, they are no different from other children all around the world—and that the Earth is home for all of us.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

You can cultivate empathy and compassion by telling your own stories about children in other parts of the world, emphasizing that they share the Earth with us and have the same feelings, fears, hopes, and dreams.

Encourage compassion and empathy by providing opportunities for your children to help others. Opportunities abound: have your child draw pictures and help you deliver food to a housebound friend, encourage them to donate some of their clothes, toys or books, or regularly visit an elderly person who needs companionship.

Acceptance

Choose holiday activities and celebrations that suit your child. Don't try to change your child's temperament; accept that he or she may be naturally timid and soft-spoken, or boisterous and loud. An activity level that might be comfortable for one child could be overwhelming for another—even within the same family. By accepting and respecting our children, we teach them to be non-judgmental and accepting of others.

Like our children, we have our own temperaments which will influence how we choose to celebrate the holidays. You may enjoy everything about the holiday season: parties, decking the halls and shopping may not be overwhelming to you. However, you may have a child or a spouse who prefers a quieter holiday season. By accepting and being sensitive to each individual family member, parents will be able to create a joyful holiday season for their entire family.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.