



10 Ways to Give the Gift of Presence to Yourself and Others

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People want to be seen and heard. Instead of giving others presents, give them your presence. Giving your full attention to another person can be an amazing gift—and don't forget yourself in the process. Do you attend to other peoples' needs and wants and forget about your own? You can also be present to your own wants and needs.

1. Be in the Now by Practicing Mindfulness.

Notice your physical sensations. Ground yourself in this moment—pay attention to your feet on the ground, the sensations on your fingers. Open to your environment. Tune into your five senses. Be aware of how you are doing this very moment. Take the time to actively check in with yourself throughout the day. Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. Pay attention to how other people in your life are doing. Check in on your loved ones. Ask others how they are doing.

2. Actively Listen.

Be present to other people, and let them know you see and hear them. Give them your full attention. Listen without thinking of what you'll say in response. In addition to verbal communication, use multiple forms of nonverbal communication (eyes, body language, nods when appropriate) to let others know you are listening. Limit splitting your attention between the person and your phone. It is hard to tune into others or yourself when you are bombarded with distractions—phone, the internet, your to-do list, and so on. Be present to yourself as well by listening to your gut and intuition. Take the time to ask yourself, "How am I doing right now?"

3. Take Downtime by Honoring Wants and Needs.

Be present to your wants and needs. Ask others what they want and need. During the holidays people are often overscheduled and busy. Mindful downtime can be useful—take a break or do something not to get a result but just to chill. When others are overdoing it, try offering a gentle nudge to take a break. Notice when you are Hungry, Angry/Anxious, Lonely, or Tired (HALT). If hungry, don't get hangry—eat. If angry, take some space. If anxious, recognize what you can and can't control. Know that you can start the day over at any moment; you don't have to wait until tomorrow. Remember, worrying about yourself or others doesn't change anything—planning and implementing steps can enact change. If lonely, seek connection with nourishing and supportive people or pets. If tired, take a nap when you can. Teach other people HALT so they can honor their own wants and needs.

4. Engage in Self-Care.

It isn't selfish to care for yourself. It's necessary! Self-care doesn't need to be a whole day's task; consider the micro things you can do to show yourself that you matter—enjoy a warm cup of tea or coffee, or take a little longer in the bath or shower than you usually do. Do something you usually don't make the time for, even though you know you always feel better afterward. Model self-care to others by engaging in it yourself. A great way to teach children about self-care is for parents to engage in it themselves. Teach others that it isn't selfish to take care of themselves. Do something with a loved one that is also one of the things you do for your own self-care. You get to (1) engage in self-care for yourself, (2) spend time with someone who is nourishing to you, and (3) model both an act of self-care and its value.

5. Allow Time for Play.

Spend time having fun by yourself or with someone else. There are many ways to have good, old-fashioned fun. Do something that only kids typically do—make your own holiday cards, create a holiday decoration using play dough or beads. Play outside—stomp on leaves, make a snowball, get a little wet in the rain, get warm when the sun is out. Be present to how others are doing and if they need a little pick-me-up, have a dance party for a song or two.

6. Work on Boundaries.

You can't give what you don't have left to give. Set good boundaries with others and yourself. You don't have to always be a "yes" person; "No" is a complete sentence. Modeling boundaries is useful for others to see in your life too. This time of year, it can be hard to balance yours and others' needs. Consider your emotional and physical health in the choices you make and actions you take. You can take a pause before responding to a request, especially a text or email. You can think something over. Boundaries are a two-way street; before you ask someone to do something, consider whether you are overstepping. When you notice others are spread too thin, help them or let them know what you notice.

7. Focus on Strengths and Pride.

It can be easy to notice those things we don't like about others or ourselves. Try to balance the negative with the positive. Acknowledge your own strengths when you see them in action. When you see strengths in others, tell them. It is okay to be proud of yourself and let others know when you are proud of them. Raise people up, including yourself.

8. Practice Kindness and Express Love.

Reflect on how you would like to be treated or the things you wish others would do for you. Do them for another person or yourself. Don't always do for others and not for yourself. Today, do one kind act for another person that doesn't get you anything in return, and do one kind act for yourself. Remember, even when you are angry with someone who upset you, you can still love them. Tell the closest people in your life you love them frequently. Engage in self-love by telling yourself you love yourself. Write little notes of kindness and place them around your house and car as little reminders. You can also put a love note in a loved one's bag, purse, backpack, or lunchbox.

9. Take a Break from Social Media.

Focus on others and yourself without the use of social media. Communicate with others through a call, a text, or a face-to-face visit. Turn off social media for even a few hours. We rely so heavily on social media that it is nice to do things offline sometimes. Consider going out into nature for a walk, playing a board game, writing a card or letter and mailing it to someone, printing and framing a picture from your phone.

10. Take In the Good.

Alone or with someone else, engage in what you consider a positive, pleasant and/or beneficial activity that will fill you up and nourish you. Take time for a short practice called HOT. Have a beneficial experience. Go and seek out a pleasant experience. Open to the beneficial experience. While doing it, really notice your senses, thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. Take in the beneficial experience. Take extra care, time, and effort to savor the sweetness of the experience, absorbing it like water gets absorbed into a sponge. Bring someone along while you are engaging in HOT and teach them how to savor the sweetness of the moment.

Try any of these ten ways to be present to yourself and others. During the busyness, stress, and demands of the holiday season, it is especially important to be present. Presence can be a gift that is much more valuable to yourself or others than something you can buy. When you are aware of engaging in any of these gifts of presence, notice what it feels like, savor it, and take it in. Take the time to be present for yourself and another person today. Notice how it feels when you do this.



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An expert and pioneer in bringing mindfulness-based approaches to youth, she is author of *Be Mindful and Stress Less*, *The Stress Reduction Workbook for Teens*, and *Be Mindful Card Deck* to Teens. She also the author of *Mindfulness for Teens*, to complement the MBSR-T program. She provides intensive ten-week online trainings worldwide, and works with teens and families individually and in groups. Her work has been featured on *The Today Show* and *CNN*, and in *Reuters*, *The New York Times*, and *Tricycle*. Visit her website at www.stressedteens.com.

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