



From TDSB Psychological Services to Your Family

Happy Holidays!

As 2020 draws to a close and we look ahead to a new year, we might be feeling a mix of emotions.

This holiday season will not look the same as it has in years' past. We may not be able to celebrate in the same way that we did before. We may not be able to rest and relax as easily as we once did.

This December issue of our newsletter invites you and your family to slow down, savour small moments and focus on gratitude and reflection, through conversation, mindfulness & finding our inner child this winter season.

Check out these conversation starters that you can use to encourage discussions with your family over the winter break.



“WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT THIS YEAR?”

“THIS YEAR HAS BEEN REALLY DIFFERENT. WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT WENT WELL FOR YOU THIS YEAR?”

“IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF THIS YEAR THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE?”



“WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO NEXT YEAR?”



**FROM ALL OF US TO ALL OF YOU,
WISHING EVERYONE A HAPPY AND
HEALTHY HOLIDAY SEASON
AND A BRIGHT NEW YEAR!**

WINTER MINDFULNESS

by Patricia Bellantone C. Psych. Assoc. (Candidate)

As the colder months are upon us, we are embracing the slower pace of winter. Let's consider this an opportunity to celebrate the season of change and move our attention positively inwards. Winter is a terrific time to cultivate a mindful way of living. Use this time to slow down and savour the holiday season. Let us focus on the good, such as gratitude, joy, laughter, love, and the beauty of nature. If anything, this year has helped us shift from a mode of *doing* to a mode of *being*.

The practice of slowing down is a good way to engage in mindfulness.

CULTIVATE MINDFUL AWARENESS

There are many ways to build mindful awareness. Listen to music mindfully, have longer lunches, take longer walks, and wake up everyday with a thankful heart. Practice mindful breathing and stretching to help you and your children remain grounded. Another idea may be to engage in mindful colouring. This allows us to focus on how we choose to apply colours and practice bringing our attention to the present moment.

ENJOY BEAUTIFUL NATURE

Take in and absorb the crisp winter landscapes and invigorating fresh air. Go by a lake and notice the stillness of the water. Experience how calm and serene it can be by the water. Other ideas for you and your family may include bird watching, noticing the frost on the ground, watching the snowflakes fall, or going on a nice hike.

DEVELOP NEW ROUTINES

A changing season is a new opportunity to build new habits. Practice some healthy family routines that you find manageable. Some ideas may include family movie night or board games night, having a relaxing bedtime routine, going on daily walks, or creating nice meals together.

EXPRESS MORE GRATITUDE

Complete a winter break mindfulness journal. Express what you have gratitude for. Reflect on what you have learned about yourself this year, think about the ways you have persevered, and who has helped support you. One activity idea is to create a gratitude tree: Decorate a tree with the things that you are grateful for. Your children can draw people, things, or experiences that they are grateful for on small pieces of coloured paper. These simple activities can be a really nice way to practice mindfulness and enjoy the things that make winter special. Set the intention to infuse relaxing moments for yourself, children, and your family. Less doing, more being.

OUR ARTICLES, TIPS, AND SUGGESTIONS DO NOT CONSTITUTE TREATMENT ADVICE.

IF YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER IS IN CRISIS, PLEASE CONTACT [KIDS HELP PHONE: 1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868) OR THE DISTRESS CENTRE: 416-408-4357

Imagine a conversation between a parent and a teen...



Parent: What's up Sam? What are you doing here sitting by the windowsill by yourself?

Sam: Meh....just wondering about the coming December break....I mean...we have a lot of time on our hands. We can't even meet with our friends and family. This is so boring! I hate it.

Parent: Yeah, I get that. You're feeling bored and annoyed because you can't visit with people during the break. I am feeling some of it too. It's frustrating that the best thing we can do right now is to stay home! I'm thinking about ways we can make the winter break less frustrating and boring. We could try to think of it as a unique December break!

Sam: Unique? Yah, like unique in that we can't do anything any longer!!!

Parent: I meant unique as in, hopefully, we never have a December like this ever again! We can make some new memories during this December like never before!

Sam: (with a bored expression) I'm listening.... keep going.

Parent: I was wondering if we could spend December differently. Sort of like when we pushed our brain to come up with a creative Halloween costume this year.

Sam: Hmmm... yah that was fun! Different... but, how?

Parent: Different like solving a math problem in many ways - it pushes our brain and it can be fun. It also makes us smarter!

Sam: Smarter! What! I don't believe you.

Parent: Yes, this is how we grow, by going through things that feel hard or even boring at first!

Sam: So, you're saying we can always learn new ways of having fun and this helps us grow....What are you thinking?

Parent: It is "our" break, so let's talk through this together. I have a calendar that has lots of ideas for winter break activities. Why don't we look through and pick a few things that you want to do by yourself, virtually with friends, and some as a family. How does that sound?

Sam: Sounds good. Feeling better already!

See page 4 for a Printable Winter Activity Calendar

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES DURING THE WINTER BREAK

Mental Health TO
& Whats Up Walk-In clinics:
Call 1-866-585-6486

Kids Help Phone:
Call 1-800-668-6868 or
Text 'Connect' to 686868

If there is an emergency, call 911

Distress Centres of Greater Toronto:
Call 416-408-4357

Multilingual Distress Lines:
Call 905-459-7777

TeleHealth Ontario:
1-866-797-0000 TTY: 1-866-797-0007



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[@TDSB Psych](https://twitter.com/TDSB_Psych)
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Mental Health Winter Activity and Well-Being Calendar for Families



Brought to you by the
HEARTS & MINDS
Committee



MINDFUL MONDAY

Go on a mindful 'safari'! Go for walk & use your senses to connect to nature. What do you hear? smell? see? feel? Share with others!

Practice mindful eating as a family. Engage all senses - set the table (fancy or simple!), put on some music, minimize other distractions, savour each bite & discuss how the meal tastes!

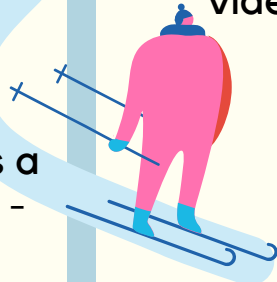


Take a mindful break (in 5 minutes or less!) as a family before bed, using free apps like *Breathe Kids (Butterfly Body Scan)*, *Calm (Mindful Walk with Malika)* or *Smiling Mind (Scrunch & Relax)*



TORONTO TUESDAY

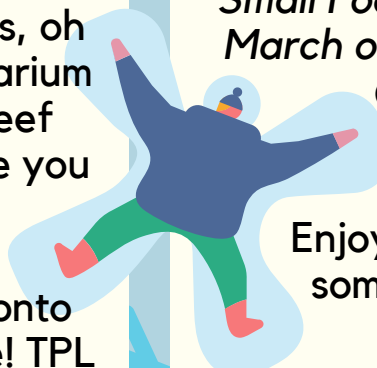
Visit the Royal Ontario Museum at home (for free!). Explore and create with the ROMKids Show, with videos for all ages!



Visit the Toronto Zoo at home (for free!). Explore the gorilla, giraffe & penguin habitats live & talk to a zoo keeper about animal life!

Sharks, jellyfish & rays, oh my! Visit Ripley's Aquarium live feeds & play "Reef Bingo" or "I Spy" while you watch!

You can visit the Toronto Public Library at home! TPL Kids has quizzes, virtual books & fun for the whole family! Escape room anyone?!



WINTER WEDNESDAY

Any snow on the ground today? Head outside & try one of these fun winter games - there is something for all abilities, outdoor spaces & ages!

Go on a winter scavenger hunt together, on a walk, in the car, or looking outside from your window! How many items can you find?

Watch a winter-themed movie tonight! *Happy Feet*, *Small Foot*, *White Fang*, *March of the Penguins*, *Our Planet: Frozen Worlds*, to name just a few ideas!

Enjoy your movie with some winter-themed snacks!

Make a winter craft: Northern Lights art, winter bird feeder or snow paint!



THANKFUL THURSDAY

Do an act of kindness. Shovel a neighbour's driveway; write or draw cards to send to family, friends or a nursing home; help your sibling with their chores; or choose a charity to support as a family.



Make a family Gratitude Jar! Write or draw notes of gratitude, about things, places, events or people you are thankful for. Take a note from the Jar each day and read out loud as a family.

Did you Know?

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PRACTICING GRATITUDE LEADS TO MORE HAPPINESS, LESS STRESS, STRONGER FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & MORE RESILIENCE IN KIDS AND TEENS!

Find more gratitude practices for the whole family here!



FAMILY FRIDAY

Time to get creative as a family! Build a fort or a snow maze, create a photo collage using old photos or newspapers, or make up a dance routine! Assign roles to each family member.

Plan a family game night! You can also organize a virtual game night with family outside your bubble, and play charades, pictionary or online games!

Create a family 'vacation at home'! Choose a theme (camping, beach day, amusement park!) or destination, use your imagination and get creative to transport your home into a mini-vacation!

Organize a room in your home as a family. Decide what you want to keep, donate or throw away.



COMMUNITY SATURDAY

Go for mini 'Winter Parade' (in the car, on bikes or on foot): dress up & take in the seasonal decorations in your neighbourhood!

Head to a local skating rink for some winter family fun! Remember to reserve your spot first!

Find a winter market, festival or event happening near you, or explore a new community - many events are free & fun for all!

SELF-CARE SUNDAY

Cook a comforting meal or bake a special treat together as a family.

Have a family body break! Stretch, dance or move your body any way you like!

Read a story together. Have each member of the family choose either a story to read, a story to tell or a story to listen to!



Click on the links for activity information!