

Ahhh, the joy of sharing during wonderful gift-giving times: holidays, birthdays, and more! What's on your shopping list? Toys, clothes, electronics, books,

DVDs, or...? Your friends and loved ones will be happy with the gifts you give. Did you know you can give even more without spending a penny? Check out the following avenues for meaningful gift-giving:

PARENTS: Give your child's teacher PERMISSION TO FAIL. Most educators try diligently to do their best. But teachers in inclusive classrooms may be unsure of themselves as they learn new strategies to include and support children with disabilities. In addition, they may often feel an extreme amount of pressure to do things perfectly. As the parent of a child with a disability, I learned many years ago that what worked with my son at one time, or in a particular environment, didn't always work the way I thought it would at other times or in other environments. My husband and I frequently need to try new things at home, *knowing we'll make mistakes*. We need to give educators (and anyone else who works with our children) the same PERMISSION TO FAIL that we give ourselves. When parents let educators (and others) know it's okay to make mistakes, so long as they're willing to keep trying new things and do whatever it takes to be successful, educators can relax and do a better job. So with kind eyes, a warm

Meaningful Gift-Giving

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow
www.disabilityisnatural.com

smile, and a gentle touch on the hand or shoulder, say something like, "I'm not a perfect parent, and I don't expect you to be a perfect teacher. It's

okay if you make mistakes, and I support your efforts as you try new things. Let's keep working together and help each other figure out the best ways to ensure both you and my child are successful and feel good about everything!"

EDUCATORS: Give mothers and fathers the gift of RESPECT FOR PARENTAL EXPERTISE. Parents of children with disabilities have years of experience—they *are experts!* Recognize that combining your professional expertise with parents' intimate

knowledge of their child will result in success for you and the student.

PARENTS AND EDUCATORS: Give children with disabilities the gift of RESPONSIBILITY. When we expect children to be responsible, they know we trust them and believe in them. Being responsible can take many forms, such as: doing chores at home, making their own decisions (small and large), actively participating in their IEP meetings (including writing goals), finding their own jobs, and...the list is endless! When we *expect* a child to be more responsible, we send the message that we believe she's competent and able, and then *she* will believe she's competent and able. This is a gift that can change a child's life, now and in the future!



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PARENTS: Give your child a VACATION TO KIDLAND. The daily routines of too many children with disabilities are governed by disability-related services. *Many don't have time to be kids!* So give your precious son or daughter a two-week break (or more) from home visits, speech/physical/occupational therapies, and other special services. Let him choose what to do with the hours in Kidland: sleep, watch a DVD, play with friends, do nothing, sit for hours playing a computer game, or spend dynamite time with mom and dad. Grown-ups take two week vacations from work.

Why shouldn't kids get a vacation from the *work* of therapies and special services? Think how you and other family members will enjoy this vacation, too! (And, who knows, you might just decide to extend the vacation indefinitely!)

CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES: Give someone the gift of FRIENDSHIP. Too many people with disabilities are seen primarily as *recipients* of help and assistance, and they're surrounded by professionals and paid staff. But people with disabilities—just like people without disabilities—need friends and companions, *and* they need to be “givers,” not just “recipients.” Someone in your community needs your friendship and support! And the best way to “get a friend” is to “be a friend.” So make connections through church, community groups, or volunteer organizations, and find that person who needs you for a friend. When you give the gift of friendship, you give yourself a gift at the same time!

The only gift is
a portion of thyself.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

MOMS AND DADS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: Give yourself the gift of SERENITY. Many parents are on the never-ending merry-go-round of services, IEPs, therapy goals, interventions, and more. When all this “disability business” is combined with being a wife/husband, having a job, and parenting *all* your children, disaster is in the making. Perpetual stress, exhaustion, and burn-out can create chaos in our lives, as well as in the lives of our loved ones. Everyone loses! Resolve to live a more peaceful, calm, serene life—be

good to yourself and those you love. You don't have to “do it all!” What can you stop doing? What can you let go of?

Parents around the country are discovering that cutting

back on “disability business” has enabled them to rediscover a “normal” life. On a regular basis, ask yourself, “Will this [therapy, services, or whatever] really matter six months, one year, or five years from now?” We're often so caught up in the daily grind that we fail to look at the long-term outcomes. Do whatever it takes to simplify your life so you can enjoy time for yourself, and with your precious children and sweetheart.

Make SIMPLICITY part of your daily life, in all areas—not just disability issues. Clear out the clutter in your house, your car, your life. Say “no” more often, so you don't overextend yourself or your children. Turn off the TV. Play a game with your family one night each week. Play some music and dance together. Cook together, then clean up together. Read a book together. Let everyone pile in one bed and cuddle together!

Give the gifts that truly matter—meaningful gifts from your heart and soul.