

## YOUR PRESENCE IS THE PRESENT

*Contributed by Heidi Roth, RDN, CHHC*

The holidays are here, and many of us are rushing around to buy presents. In fact, maybe we truly are only “rushing around” virtually, as it has become so easy to order gifts online and have them delivered the very next day. While giving and receiving gifts is part of the fun, maybe we need to shift our thinking a little to the different types of presents we can give. One of the most valuable gifts that we can give to others (and to ourselves) is our full, undivided attention.

Think about the last truly meaningful interaction you had with a loved one. How do you feel when that person really shows up for you? No multi-tasking, no glancing at a screen, just you and the conversation. In our highly distractible world, this kind of focus is rare, which is why it feels so special.

Eleanor Roosevelt is often credited with saying, “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift - that’s why it’s called the present.” What would it look like to bring a little more presence into our daily lives? And could that be a gift not only to ourselves but to the people we care about the most?

Being present is more than sharing the same space. It’s showing up emotionally and mentally, setting aside distractions, and offering our focused attention. We’ve normalized divided focus: answering emails at dinner, scrolling during a child’s soccer practice, chatting with a friend while our minds jump ahead to tomorrow’s to-do list. People feel the difference between someone who’s just physically there and someone who is truly engaged.

Kids understand this instinctively. When they say “watch me,” they don’t mean “buy me something”; they’re asking for your presence. Adults need the same thing too, even if we ask for it in different ways. We want to feel heard, valued, and reminded that we matter enough for someone to be fully there with us.

### Ways to Be Present for Others

Small, consistent actions go a long way:

- **Put the phone away.** Especially at the table or during a conversation, make eye contact and let the other person finish their thought before you respond.
- **Perform small acts of kindness.** Hold the door, give the compliment you’re thinking, write the quick note “just because.” Tell someone specifically why you appreciate them.
- **Share what you love.** Think about what brings you joy– then do that for someone else. A favorite walk, a recipe, a playlist, an extra container of soup on a chilly day.
- **Show up.** Be the friend who initiates plans, not just the one who responds. Attend important events like recitals, games, and celebrations. Show up on time.

It’s hard to offer presence when your nervous system is revved up. The holiday season piles on– gatherings, shopping lists, travel, extra tasks– and we end up running on fumes. The good news: you don’t need a new job or a silent retreat to feel present again. You don’t need to move to a cabin in the woods or the top of a mountain. You can do it anytime, anywhere!

### Try These Simple Resets:

- **Breathe.** Set a two-minute timer and inhale for four counts, exhale for six. Longer exhales nudge your nervous system toward calm.
- **Check in with yourself.** Ask: Am I tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or over-scheduled? Take care of yourself just like you would a toddler– it makes all the difference in how you show up!
- **Find a quiet minute.** Sit without multi-tasking and notice the changing weather outside the window.





- **Take a noticing walk.** Take a brief walk outside and look for three things you've never really seen before. An interesting tree, a crack in the sidewalk, a rock wall.
- **Honor your limits.** It's okay to say no, leave early, or simplify a tradition that drains you more than it energizes you.
- **Take a "Presence Pause."** Before you enter a room, pick up the phone, or walk into a gathering, take one breath and set a tiny intention: "Be here."
- **Bookend your day.** A simple morning check-in (How do I feel? What matters today?) and an evening wind-down (What did I notice? What am I grateful for?) keep you grounded.

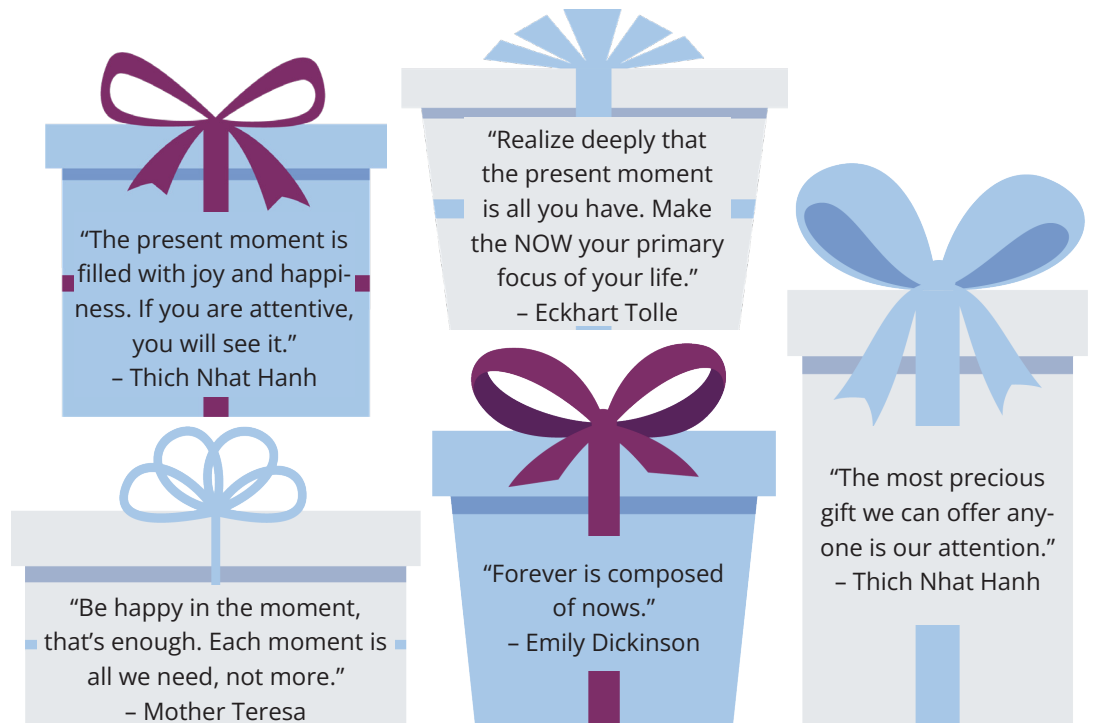
Keep in mind, presence doesn't always mean "enjoying the moment." Sometimes it looks like staying with discomfort without numbing or escaping— naming what you feel, and letting it move through. When we do that with a little kindness toward ourselves, we recharge in a way that helps us be there for everyone else.

## Final Thoughts

As the holidays speed by, don't forget you already have the best gift there is. Your full attention. Your genuine interest. Just showing up, fully, for yourself and the people you care about. That's the good stuff!

If you want a simple holiday experiment, try this: choose one conversation each day to be fully present for. No multitasking, no advice unless asked, no quick fixes. Just attention, curiosity, and care. Notice how it changes the feel of your day.

### *What will you do to stay present this holiday season?*



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