



# The Gift of Soft Eyes During The Holiday Season

by Kenda Riggs

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“You have to be calm in order to enjoy being calm.” ~ Dr. Stuart Shanker

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**D**uring the holiday season, there can be many feelings of warmth, love, joy, and excitement, as we gather with family and friends, spend time decorating our homes and classrooms, watch holiday shows, and listen to festive music, while sharing food together and spreading holiday cheer. However, the holiday season can also be a challenging time for people, as it may bring many stressors including busy schedules, time commitments, expectations and financial burdens. This time of the year can also be a time of sadness, loneliness and reflection, especially when grieving the loss of a loved one, life changes, or coping with sad news related to physical and/or mental health.

As you enter the holiday season, there may be both positive and negative stressors around you, which can bring a mixture of emotions. Energy is high at schools with student excitement, which can also bring increased stress to the classroom. Whether a positive or negative stressor, it is important to recognize that the holiday season brings more stress. From eating different foods to increased caffeine and alcohol, staying up late to shop or wrap presents, or trying to run errands that you just don't have the time to do, these are all hidden stressors that come around this time of year. There can be more overt stressors as well, such as increased traffic when driving or shopping and time pressures to clean, decorate, shop, or attend scheduled events that you may be invited to. These hidden and overt stressors can all impact your thoughts and emotions.

At this time, I invite you to pause and simply try to slow down. Slowing down may seem incredibly difficult when you have to get everything done, but there are ways to deliberately slow down to help reduce your experience of stress during this holiday time. Slowing down can help you reset, which can then help you have a clearer mind to continue your holiday planning.

- If you decorate a tree, try to schedule time to

truly enjoy the decorating process, rather than trying to fit decorating in just to get it done.

- If you decide to bake, schedule time for this to truly enjoy the smells and tastes of the festive process of baking homemade treats. If you decide to buy your Christmas goodies, that is wonderful too, and if you don't get treats, that will be okay too!
- If you wrap presents, take your time while being mindful of cutting the wrapping paper, folding and taping one piece at a time.
- When you need a break, breathe in the fresh, cool air outside. Even if just for a few moments, step outside, breathe in and breathe out. Truly embody the feeling of being.

It is important to be responsible for your own well-being during the holiday season, to pace yourself and be aware of your own energy levels. Too often, many teachers go into the holiday season completely exhausted from all these stressors and are just too tired to truly enjoy time off for the holidays. Therefore, it is up to you to monitor where you spend your energy, as conserving energy is actually most important at times of high stress! Even though it does not always feel like it, you do get to choose how you would like to spend your energy. This may mean things are done differently this year, with increased flexibility around holiday traditions. Prioritize your time and what you want to do, not what others expect of you.

It is, however, also essential to nudge yourself forward if you are feeling sad and down during the holiday season. You can become easily isolated from others by delaying getting ready for the day, not going to visit family or friends, and choosing unhealthy ways of coping with loneliness. It is important to remain connected with people through a visit, phone call, text, email, FaceTime or Zoom. Reach out to others to say a warm hello or share a story to help

combat feelings of loneliness. Social connectedness promotes health and well-being and can help you stay positive, even when you just feel like you want to be alone.

### The Gift of Soft Eyes

One of the biggest gifts that you can give yourself and others during the holiday season is the gift of **soft eyes**. When experiencing stressors during the holiday season, our thoughts can be busy, and our emotions can feel more intense. This means that people often feel more agitated and frustrated. Soft eyes help you view others and yourself with compassion rather than judgement and help you notice that this behaviour during the holiday season (including your own) may be stress behaviour, rather than deliberate one. Viewing others with soft eyes helps you see the whole picture, therefore allowing you to not react to what you see or hear. With soft eyes, life is viewed with an open heart and mind, a sense of connection with the world around us, and an awareness of what others (and ourselves) may be going through.

**“Embracing the gift of soft eyes is not only a gift to others but a loving gift to ourselves because when we become more understanding of those around us, we embody a calmness that goes deeper.”**

~ Dr. Stuart Shanker

Although you may not be aware, it is important to remember that every single person may have something they are carrying this time of year. This can be worrying about a sick family member, a custody situation with family, financial strains, past trauma or an overburdened schedule. Soft eyes help us view people with much-needed compassion and give an encouraging word or gentle response if they seem stressed or have emotional responses. Too often, teachers in particular portray a happy face, even when there may be many other emotions that they are carrying inside.

One of the easiest ways to reduce stress is with gratitude, by showing appreciation for those you love and care about. During the holiday season, try to be grateful for what you have. The holidays should be a time to restore energy and balance in your life. Focus on finding your calm, as *you have to be calm in order to enjoy being calm*, which comes easier when we

embrace soft eyes. Take time to reflect on the important things in life and embrace the gift of soft eyes this holiday season.

During this holiday season, and every day...

***“May we remember to be kinder. May we remember to be gentler. May we teach our children to listen with their hearts, And by so teaching, may we listen for our own heart’s song. May we smile more, breathe more deeply, walk slower, and help sooner. On matters of principle, may we stand in the water like a rock, And in matters of love, may we follow the stream like a petal. May we not waste a minute, but never hurry. May we not be distracted, but always open. May our lives be uncluttered but filled with memories.”***

**- George Kaufman**

Warmest wishes to you and your loved ones this holiday season. If during the holidays you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please call 811, go to your local emergency department, or contact your local Doorways Walk-In Clinic.

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### References

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