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There's something in the air—a soft sparkle, a familiar tune, and that unmistakable feeling that my favorite month, December, has arrived. Wrapped in lights, laughter, and love, it's a season of togetherness. Every year, it's my little tradition to spend time with the people who mean the most to me—my family and closest friends. It's a simple ritual that fills my heart with warmth and gratitude.

And somehow, this month's theme, "Grateful Hearts, Giving Hands", captures exactly how I feel. It's a gentle reminder that the true beauty of the season lies not in grand celebrations, but in the quiet moments of kindness and connection that bring us closer together.

"I may not have everything I want, but I have everything I need." Most of us have grown up surrounded by comfort and abundance. And when the season of giving arrives, we naturally think about what we can donate or contribute to those in need—which is, of course, a beautiful act of kindness. Yet sometimes, the simplest kind of gratitude is the one we forget most easily: to see and truly notice the quiet love and effort from the people closest to us. Giving isn't always about what we put in a box; sometimes, the most precious gift we can offer is our understanding, patience, or love.

Understanding and appreciating others' efforts is often the first step toward cultivating a truly grateful heart. Within a family, when we take time to recognize each other's efforts—a partner's quiet support, a parent's endless care, a child's small act of kindness—we create a home where gratitude flows naturally. In such an environment, love becomes the language we all understand, and our children learn not by what we say, but by how we live—through the way we give, care, and appreciate one another.

Being part of BAMBI allows me to experience this spirit of gratitude in the most genuine way. Here, everyone has such a beautiful heart—each person gives their best to support one another and give back to the community. Whenever challenges arise, someone always steps forward to help, reminding me that kindness truly lives in action. I'm deeply grateful for every bit of help and encouragement I've received; they have become the silent power that keeps me moving forward.

Motherhood is full of challenges, but being grateful helps me focus on the positives in my life and can gently shift my perspective. A grateful heart naturally leads to giving hands. As the Bible reminds us: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Clarisse Raynana  
BAMBI Events Coordinator



JANA CAPEK  
PHOTOGRAPHY

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Every year, December sneaks up on me. One minute I'm helping the kids settle back into routine after the long summer break, and the next I'm wondering how it's already time to wrap up another year. Somewhere between the family routines, work deadlines, the "Mama, where's my ... ?" moments, and the tiny pockets of peace in between, the months just ... disappear.

This issue's theme, "Grateful Hearts, Giving Hands," made me pause for a moment and really think about what carried me through this year. It wasn't the big milestones or the perfectly planned days. It was the small things: a spontaneous hug from my kids, a message from a friend at just the right time, the teacher who noticed something I didn't, the quiet moments that reminded me I'm doing better than I think.

And with that gratitude comes a gentle tug to give back. Not in grand, Instagram-worthy ways, but in the everyday ones we sometimes overlook: checking in on another parent, being patient with ourselves, showing kindness even when we're stretched thin, and teaching our children—through our own imperfect ways—that generosity is a way of moving through the world.

In exploring the pages of this year's final issue you'll find stories that reflect how deeply gratitude and giving back shape family life in Bangkok.

In "Small Acts, Big Impact", Archana Yadav shares her journey of growing up with kindness as a way of life and teaching it to her daughter. In "The Gift of Gratitude", Rachel Ofo reflects on the joys and pressures of year-end gift-giving, offering thoughtful ways for families to shift toward more meaningful, sustainable expressions of love beyond material gifts.

Anatta Zarchi explains in "Balancing Giving with Self-Care", how caring for oneself is an essential act of gratitude and giving which allows us to show up with more patience, presence, and love for our children and family. In "Rediscovering Love After Kids", Kelly shares how through small gestures of gratitude—notes, treats, or shared time—she and her husband transformed routine into intimacy, reminding us that giving and appreciating often go hand in hand.

In "Rethinking 'Thank You'" Sonali Vongchusiri talks about how cultivating felt gratitude within the family transforms everyday moments, helping both children and parents feel seen, valued, and connected. "Leave a Legacy of Kindness", Sheena Low's interview with Somaly Itztein, highlights how leading by example can instill empathy and generosity in the next generation.

Rounding up our thematic content is Readers' Corner featuring Kit Lang's picks of the month, "What I Know for Sure" by Oprah Winfrey and "Last Stop on Market Street" by Matt de la Peña. Both these books beautifully underscore the importance of noticing and appreciating everyday blessings, showing families that gratitude stems from valuing simple moments and acts of kindness.

In non-thematic content we have "Are Beds a Tool of the Devil" by Joe Barker, "Eating for Fertility: The Big Four and Beyond" by Keren Granit, "Restoring Routines After the Festive Season" by Kim Narrandes and "Presence: The Language of Connection" by Claudia Gomes.

In his humorous account of parenting, Joe shares the trials, tribulations, and unexpected adventures of bedtime with young children—where even a simple bed can become a source of chaos and comedy; Keren offers valuable tips on boosting fertility through food and lifestyle adjustments; Kim does the same, but for easing into routines effectively after the festive whirlwind of the holiday season; and Claudia reflects on how cultivating presence with both ourselves and others can transform interactions, deepen joy, and make relationships more meaningful.

As we move through this festive season, let's carry these lessons of presence, gratitude, and giving into every day. By noticing the small moments, appreciating the people around us, and sharing our time and kindness, we create a ripple of joy and connection that extends far beyond our own homes.

On behalf of the magazine team, I wish you all a joyous, memorable and healthy month of celebrations!

Sanam Rahman  
Editor



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# A FAMILY AFTERNOON AT ART 101

As a parent, I am always looking for activities that allow my children's curiosity to bloom and bring the whole family together—something more meaningful than just another trip to the mall or playground. Children see the world in bright colors and shapes, not in rules or lines. I wanted to share a moment with my toddlers where we could see the world that way together. I wanted an experience that was playful yet creative, where we could make a memory that would last longer than a moment.

I sometimes play badminton at the 71 Sports Club and one evening while cooling down after a game, I noticed the place next door—Art 101. Intrigued by the colorful splashes of paint on the café's walls and windows, I did a bit of online research and discovered that Art 101 is a creative space where people of all ages can paint and make art in playful ways. So, I decided it might be the perfect weekend outing for our family.

From the moment we stepped into Art 101 it felt like a burst of energy. The walls were covered in bright, abstract art, cheerful music played in the background and there were bottles of paint in every shade. The staff were welcoming and explained the different types of painting experiences available—spin painting, pour painting, splash painting, and even pendulum painting. Each technique has its own magic. We could choose our colors, experiment with textures, and let our imaginations run wild. Before we started, the staff handed us soft slippers and light protective coats to keep our clothes safe from the inevitable paint splashes. The whole setup felt playful and easy—like we were stepping into a creative lab. They encouraged us to



pick our own paints, which became part of the fun. My children wanted all the colors, but we eventually agreed on our top five favorite colors.

We chose spin painting. My son was just under three at the time and utterly fascinated by anything that rotated or spun—wheels, fans, tops, you name it. So the choice was obvious for us. In this technique, you place a canvas on a spinning wheel and pour paint over it while it turns. My children kept giggling as they

splattered paint, creating something unique each time.

The experience at Art 101 was so special for us; not only for the novelty of painting or the beautiful art we created, but also for the way it brought us together. In a world where we are often distracted by screens and schedules, spending an afternoon laughing while making a joyful mess together felt like a small act of love. For us, Art 101 will always be one of those “things we loved”.





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## Bright Beats

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# SMALL ACTS, BIG IMPACT

Archna remembers how her parents always showed her how to be kind to everyone, and thinks about how she can teach the same lesson to her daughter by focusing on small daily acts of kindness that can have a big impact.



Photo by Leelo The First from Pexels



## About the Author

Archna Yadav is an IT professional, a devoted follower of Lord Radha Krishna, and a proud parent to a spirited, delightfully unpredictable three-year-old daughter. A passionate nature lover, she finds joy in travel, spiritual exploration, and life's little adventures—always embracing new experiences with curiosity, gratitude, and a smile. Hare Krishna!



**B**“Be Kind!” These two simple words have echoed in my life for as long as I can remember. My parents didn’t just say them; they lived them. Growing up, I watched them be kind to everyone—the house help, the vegetable vendor, even strangers who crossed their path. For them, kindness wasn’t a grand gesture, it was a way of life. And unknowingly, they sowed those same seeds deep within me.

As a child, I didn’t quite understand how a small act—a smile, a thank-you, holding a door open—could matter so much. But as I grew older, I realized that kindness has a ripple effect. It doesn’t stop with one person, it spreads quietly, often invisibly, touching hearts and creating moments of unexpected happiness. Through kindness, you not only brighten someone else’s day but also fill your own heart with a sense of peace and joy that no material reward can ever match. Kindness doesn’t need preparation, money, or a special occasion. It’s in the smallest details, offering your seat to someone elderly, listening to a friend without interrupting, or simply greeting your colleagues with genuine warmth. It’s about treating everyone with respect, whether it’s your boss or the person who cleans your workspace. It’s about being considerate, even when no one is watching.

I’ve come to believe that the most beautiful form of kindness is the one that comes naturally—the kind that’s part of your daily rhythm. When you choose to be kind, even in moments of irritation or stress, that’s when its true power shines.

Kindness begins at home! Now that I am a mother, I find myself reflecting more deeply on how my parents shaped my understanding of kindness. As parents, we all wish to pass on the best habits to our children—honesty, respect, gratitude, but kindness, I feel, tops that list. It’s the foundation upon which all other virtues stand.



*Photo by capturenow*

Children learn more from what they see than from what they hear. No matter how many times we tell them to “be kind”, they truly learn when they see us practicing it ourselves. That’s why my husband and I make a conscious effort to model kindness in our everyday life. Whether it’s thanking our house help sincerely, feeding cows, or sharing food with someone in need—we make sure our daughter witnesses these little moments. Of course, she loves to feed cows more than anything. And, Sometimes, we even talk about those acts later, in a gentle, reflective way. “Did you see how happy the guard looked when you gave him that Diwali sweet box?” I’ll ask her. These small conversations

help her connect the act with the feeling, the happiness that kindness brings to both giver and receiver.

## **THE POWER OF SMALL ACTS**

There’s a common misconception that kindness means doing something huge—donating large sums, volunteering for weeks, or changing lives dramatically. But the truth is, most of us make an impact through little gestures that seem ordinary but are incredibly powerful. Holding the elevator for someone rushing in, offering water to a delivery person, writing a thank-you note to a teacher—these things take mere seconds but can change someone’s mood for an entire day.



*Photo by Vlada Karpovich from Pexels*

I remember once at a grocery store, my daughter saw a little boy drop his candy so she offered him one of hers. That day, I realized how much children absorb the kindness they see in action.

What's beautiful about kindness is that it has no boundaries. It transcends age, language, culture, and religion. It's the universal language of love—something that connects us all, regardless of who we are or where we come from.

### **KINDNESS AS A LEGACY**

When I think about what I truly want to leave behind for my daughter, it's not just a good education, success, or comfort. It's the value of being kind—to people, to animals, and to the planet. Because kindness, once rooted deeply, never fades. It becomes a part of your identity. There will be times in her life when she'll face rudeness, disappointment, or hurt. In those moments, I hope she remembers that responding with kindness isn't a sign of weakness, but of strength. It takes courage to stay gentle in a world that can sometimes be harsh.

I've also learned that kindness doesn't always have to be outward. Being kind to yourself is equally important. Forgiving yourself for your mistakes, giving yourself time to heal, speaking to yourself with compassion—these are forms of kindness too. When we fill our own cup with self-kindness, it naturally overflows to others.

### **RAISING A KINDER GENERATION**

As parents, we have a beautiful opportunity to raise a generation that values empathy over ego. Imagine a world where every child grows up believing that kindness is their superpower—where they choose compassion over criticism, inclusion over isolation.

At home, I encourage small acts, like sharing toys, saying thank you to teachers, or checking in on grandparents. My daughter gets to pick a daily act of kindness to do—it could be feeding cows, or giving a candy or snack to our security guard. She enjoys it, but more importantly, she feels the joy of giving.

And every time she does something

kind, I remind her, "See how happy you made someone? That's the magic of kindness."

### **THE JOY OF A KIND HEART**

I truly believe that kindness is contagious. It has a way of coming back to you when you least expect it. Once, on a particularly tiring day, a stranger offered me their seat. That small gesture changed my entire mood, and reminded me how powerful empathy can be. It showed me that every small act counts. You never know what someone is going through, and sometimes, your little gesture could be the light they need that day.

In a world where you can be anything, be kind, because kindness costs nothing but means everything. It's a gift we can all give freely, yet its impact lasts forever.

So, as I continue to raise my daughter, I hope she carries forward this gift, the gift of kindness, with an open heart and gentle spirit. Because small acts, when multiplied by millions of kind hearts, truly have the power to change the world.





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# THE GIFT OF GRATITUDE

Gift buying can make the end of the year a very expensive time. Rachel encourages us to think about what non-material gifts we can give, and suggests that making treasured memories together might be better than buying the latest toys.

Photo by baseimage



## About the Author

Rachel Ofo moved from the US to Bangkok in 2016 and spent six and a half years there. She has a daughter, whom she loves dragging around on various adventures like hikes and fishing trips. In her free time, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and trying new restaurants. She also enjoys being out in nature.



Well, we're nearing that time again—the end of the year. Is it just me, or does it seem like every year passes a bit faster than the one before? It feels like last night I was getting ready for my January wedding anniversary, and all of a sudden, I'm drafting my final article of the year. But alas, time waits for no one, regardless of whether we're busy, behind, or just plain tired.

The end of the year means similar things for a lot of cultures around the world: party time. Celebrations include Pancha Ganapati, Kwanzaa, Christmas, and Hanukkah. One common practice with most of the December celebrations is gift-giving. Gift-giving at this time of year accounts for a big chunk of spending. According to the National Retail Federation, US consumers plan to spend nearly \$900 per person over the December holidays, with the majority of that going on gifts (1). And even for someone like myself who doesn't celebrate a specific end-of-year holiday, it's still easy to get wrapped up in all the flashing sales December brings, so I might just grab an Amazon deal here or an unbeatable department store discount over there. Saving money and buying something that will bring a smile to someone else's face is a win-win.

Who doesn't love a thoughtful gift? Who doesn't enjoy feeling loved, thought about, and considered? There's no doubt that receiving and giving gifts are a huge part of this time of year. However, it's also important to remember that gift-giving may not always be the best way to express love. Without dampening the mood around the festive season, it's important to highlight the less cheery sides of gift-giving. Here are some cons I've heard from various families surrounding the popular tradition:

- Sometimes a gift feels more obligatory than optional. This means people feel almost forced to give gifts. It may turn into an



Photo by Ron Lach from Pexels

event to just finish and make it through, rather than enjoy—a routine of opening, thanking, and setting to the side.

- Due to rising costs of living, expected gifts may create unnecessary debt. The number of stories I've heard of budgets being exceeded and the anxiety that followed is higher than you'd probably guess.
- Attitudes surrounding gifts may be of entitlement rather than appreciation. It's normal to expect a gift, especially when it's been a tradition. However, issues arise when the expectation turns into a belief that these gifts are deserved.
- Consumerism and waste are huge issues. We've all seen photos of mountains and mountains of clothes, toys, and trash all mixed up, dumped, never to be gotten rid of. We want to work hard to reduce the amount of waste we add to our planet.
- The holiday season has been known to create an unhealthy

demand for both those working to pay for the gifts and those working to create and deliver the gifts. Burnout and anxiety can be a result of this demand.

These cons aren't meant to guilt anyone who wishes to buy gifts, but to serve as a reminder. In societies where we're encouraged to buy and spend, despite actual needs, sometimes reminders are nice. In Bangkok, one can't travel between two BTS stations without passing two or three malls. Shopping culture is huge. I remember some days traveling to three or four different malls in search of gifts to take back home. Every mall was unique and offered its own special charm. This isn't a slight to Bangkok. Honestly, I loved the options and variety. However, one thing I'll note is 90% of those gifts I so frantically trekked around busy Bangkok to buy are no longer in sight, or use. Did I have to buy them? No. Most of the time when I traveled back home, all my family wanted to do was sit down



*Photo by Nicole Michalou from Pexels*

and hear about my adventures in Thailand. So how do we train ourselves to move away from something many of us have been conditioned to do?

- Practicing contentment. This means taking a few minutes and thinking about the things that bring you and your family joy. Think less about items and more about the experiences you've shared. Toys and gifts can break the more they're used. Memories get stronger the more they're thought about.
- If you must buy, aim for gifts that will last through changing years and changing interests. When my daughter was maybe two years old, I bought her some good-quality building tiles. Five years later, they still get used regularly with no breaks—so far. It may also help to buy gifts throughout the year, as opposed to at one time, when prices can be marked up—despite alleged sales.
- Recycling, refurbishing, and regifting are fun ways to get more use out of a pre-loved item. The project can be fun for the family and will help create less waste and more memories.
- Use the first ten months of the year to really get to know those around you and figure out their wants and desires apart from material goods. My husband knows I love the outdoors and wilderness. He recently surprised me with a wilderness training course, and that was one of the best gifts I've ever received because he paid attention to my interests over a couple of years. This experience was worth more to me than a new pair of hiking boots or backpack.
- Give your time, your attention, and possibly an ear. My daughter loves toys, but she loves me sitting with her and a library book, doing different voices for

all the characters, even more. An easy way to incorporate something like this is to create a new tradition not centered around gift-giving. An example would be waking up Christmas morning to play a game the family has voted on. This still keeps the morning anticipation and time spent together.

Obviously, my list is short and sweet, and you may find other ways for your family to express their appreciation for each other. Find what works and adjust what doesn't. Lastly, remember the saying isn't, "there is more happiness in giving material gifts than there is in receiving." Instead it simply highlights the happiness that comes with giving. This could be your time, your love, and yourself. Just be there with those who love you for your presence, not your presents.

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#### References

1. The National Retail Federation, 2025, Consumers to spend the second highest amount on record according to NRF holiday survey. Available online at: [NRF | Consumers to Spend Second-Highest Amount on Record, According to NRF Holiday Survey](#)



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# BALANCING GIVING WITH SELF-CARE

Anna explores ways in which busy parents can make time for their own self-care, boosting the whole family's mood.

Photo by Valeria Ushakova from Pexels



## About the Author

Anna works for New Counseling Service (NCS), an internationally recognized mental health center in Bangkok with a diverse team of licensed counselors. NCS has provided counseling services in Thailand and surrounding regions for over 20 years, with therapists specializing in a wide variety of issues such as anxiety, depression, work stress, relationships, and more. [ncsbkk.com/ncs/](https://ncsbkk.com/ncs/)





Photo by Ahmed from Pexels

While caring for their children and families, it's easy for parents to get lost in their responsibilities and neglect caring for themselves. Some may think this is a necessary sacrifice, but did you know that self-care is beneficial not only for your own well-being but for your children's as well? Counselors Johanna and Rex—the founders of NCS with over 40 years of experience—and counselor Savinee—who specializes in working with young children—share their insights on the importance of self-care for parents.

### WHY SELF-CARE MATTERS FOR PARENTS

First and foremost, self-care is vital for preventing burnout. You may be able to keep going for a while despite the exhaustion, but once you reach the point of severe burnout, you may not be able to care for your children in the way you want to. Taking care of yourself helps you reduce stress and stay energized, healthy, and grounded, both emotionally and physically. This in turn improves your ability to take care of your family. When a parent is clearly exhausted, children often become unsettled and may act out. Self-care enhances a person's ability to communicate and

manage conflict, which is essential in emotional regulation and expression. A tired parent is more likely to "explode" or vent their negative emotions towards their children. Being in a good state of mind helps you to respond with patience and understanding.

While taking care of yourself may feel counterproductive, it's actually an act of strength that supports the whole family's well-being. Additionally, children tend to mimic their parents' behavior. Thus, by seeing you practice self-care, they too learn to be kind to themselves. As Johanna and Rex say, "In general, a happy parent equals a happy child."

### THE MAIN BARRIER TO SELF-CARE

The main thing that often discourages parents from practicing self-care is guilt. Parents tend to view children as the center of their universe, causing them to view their own well-being as less important, so that taking any time for themselves makes them feel guilty. This can also be true for parents with demanding jobs and responsibilities. When you don't have a lot of time left for your children, you may feel guilty not spending all that time with them.

This is when asking for help comes in—whether it's getting a nanny, joining playgroups, or asking family members for support. You may feel guilty because caring for your child is supposed to be your responsibility, but asking for help isn't a sign of weakness—it's a sign of strength. Finding your balance with the help of others doesn't mean you're a bad parent—it means you're doing what's best for your child's care under the current circumstances.

### RECOGNIZING THAT IT'S TIME TO SHOW YOURSELF SOME KINDNESS

There are various techniques you can use to practice kindness towards yourself, but before we get there, there's something else you must achieve first: self-awareness. Without self-awareness, you wouldn't even think to make any changes. Recognizing that you need to show yourself more kindness allows you to actually put helpful strategies in place.

Our biggest tip is this: being aware of your mood is the key to recognizing that it may be time for some self-care. Feeling irritable, grumpy, angry, frustrated, or moody are all signs it's time to take a step



back. These feelings reflect ongoing exhaustion from neglecting yourself.

Feelings of resentment for having to take care of others all the time may arise even while you experience guilt at the thought of having some time for yourself. This is especially relevant for mothers taking care of newborns—a challenge that involves 24/7 care and many sleepless nights. This can cause your world to become very narrow, which is why it's important to find solutions that help you balance caregiving and having time for yourself.

Parents may also need to re-evaluate their roles and responsibilities. Should the other parent step in more? Should external help be brought in? What strategies work best for your family?

### **SELF-CARE STRATEGIES: BEING KIND TO YOURSELF TO BETTER SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY**

Once you develop the self-awareness to realize that you may need more time for yourself, there are certain techniques you can use to manage your time and energy.

#### **Plan your schedule each week:**

If you're sharing caretaking duties

with someone else, it's good to do this with them so your expectations, needs, and responsibilities are aligned and you don't need to figure things out day by day or even hour by hour.

**Plan time for self-care:** It's hard to spontaneously do something for yourself when caring for young children. As part of your weekly planning, give yourself an allotted time for self-care activities like seeing your friends, getting coffee, practicing your hobby, or even just time alone to read, watch TV, or sleep.

**Mommy/daddy day off:** A strategy some families use is to have a day where one parent is "off" from parenting duties while the other parent takes charge. Then they can swap later on. An issue with short breaks is that sometimes you don't have enough time to fully recharge, but with this technique each parent gets a full day to rest and come back refreshed and energized.

**Playdates, playgroups, nannies, and family help:** Playdates are a good way for parents from different families to alternate getting rest. Playgroups are also great as they are regularly scheduled, which makes

them easy to plan around. Finally, it may be helpful to have a nanny on-hand or to ask family members—who will probably be thrilled to spend time with your child—to help out!

### **CONCLUSION: VIEWING SELF-CARE AS ESSENTIAL**

Children in balanced, peaceful environments tend to flourish. Balanced parents tend to have more balanced children. Parents with a positive sense of well-being create a higher sense of security for their children, which is a key component in building self-esteem. As guilt is a main obstacle in practicing self-care for many parents, try to remind yourself that children mimic your thoughts and behaviors. Seeing you neglect your self-care could inadvertently teach them that being kind to themselves is not important, which could cause them to struggle with this growing up, potentially leading to burnout, anxiety, and depression. Finally, we hope you remember that while being kind to yourself benefits the whole family, being kind to yourself just for your own sake is also important. However, if this is something you currently struggle with, it's more than OK to use your family's well-being as a driving force to be kind to yourself.





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# REDISCOVERING LOVE AFTER KIDS

Parenting can make love feel like it's on autopilot. But by practicing gratitude in small everyday routines, Kelly and her husband began to notice the love that still exists in the little things.



Photo by 10012164 from Pixabay



## About the Author

Kelly is mom to Freya and Daisy and recently went back to work as an early years teacher. She previously worked as a primary educator and literacy specialist. Kelly loves reading fiction books, listening to true crime podcasts, and watching Disney princess movies.





*Photo by Ahmed from Pexels*

Recently, my husband and I have discovered day use hotel rooms as a luxury date. We enjoy a relaxed hour at the hotel breakfast buffet, and then check into a room for the day. We leisurely sip coffee and peruse the breakfast offerings without demands for sticky, syrupy pancakes or projectile fried rice. We spend the day lounging on the dreamy hotel linens, watching trashy television, and having uninterrupted conversations, before returning home for dinner and bedtime. Inevitably, our chat turns to our daughters, keeping up the house, traveling to see family, our jobs. The usual mundane chatter that has become routine as we go through our days of working and raising kids.

You may have heard of the “roommate phase”, a period of a relationship that’s characterized by a lack of romance and intimacy and the feeling that you are simply cohabitating with your partner. It’s all too common after having kids. Sometimes all I want after a long day of working and parenting is the mindless predictability of scrolling my phone while my husband enjoys the same. Despite this, I also crave connection and the easy intimacy

that used to be our norm.

First of all, my husband is truly a one of a kind father and husband. He has a wild imagination for play and never hesitates to change a dirty diaper or have long comforting chats with our daughter. And yet somehow after a long day it is all too easy to snap about the dishes. While there is no quick fix to this temporary relationship stage, in my search for reconnection I continually stumble upon one word—gratitude.

As we frequently tell our kids, words matter. Frequent thank yous and messages of appreciation, especially for small routine things, can go a long way. My husband and I love writing little notes of appreciation and hiding them around the house. It takes minimal effort to quickly scrawl a note, but the warmth and affection felt as a direct result can turn around a stressful day. My husband and I also love to spoil each other with food and treats. I would definitely say our love language is food, and we frequently pick up our favorite cookies, pastries or salty snacks to share. A few extra minutes to make a coffee for your partner shows you care.

Another way to show gratitude is to be intentional about time spent together. Consider setting aside an hour of screen-free-time after the kids are asleep to share a glass of wine or simply cuddle up and talk. Schedule regular date nights at home; order some fancy takeaway, and watch something that isn’t Gabby’s Dollhouse. Starting a new hobby together can also rekindle connection. Playing boardgames, listening to podcasts or audiobooks, or starting a new exercise routine are all easy ways to unwind together after a long day.

It’s easy to suggest ideas to show your spouse you are grateful, but in practice it takes conscious effort to break from routines. I am by no means an expert—some days I feel in touch with my partner, but some days we roll into bed with barely a meaningful word exchanged. Gratitude softens the edges of routine and opens space for warmth to return. Whether it’s a luxury day or night away, or a quiet moment shared at home, intention and gratitude remind us of the love and affection that we share.



# PLAYGROUPS & ACTIVITIES

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Wonderkids	Wonder Woods Kids Café & Co-Learning Space
Little Seeds	The Tiny Seeds International Pre-School
Kiddiezilla	Market Place Nanglinche (3rd Floor)
Kiddieville	Playville
Little Steps	Future Steps International School Bangkok
Little Panda	Nancy Language School
Little Treehouse	Little Treehouse Nursery
Saturday Nana	Storytime Preschool Bangkok
Yenakart	Noddy by Elizabeth International Playgroup
Little Tots <b>new!</b>	Tiny Tots International Learning Centre
Niko Niko <b>new!</b>	Sukhumvit (See registration for details)



## ACTIVITIES

Name	Location
Toddler Music	Skyview Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit24
Football	Noah Futsal
Little Athletes <b>new!</b>	Noah Futsal



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# RETHINKING "THANK YOU"

Sonali thought that gratitude would have to wait until parenting felt less challenging. Then she discovered that expressing gratitude in the tough times actually strengthened her relationship with her children and made the tough times easier.

Photo by RDNE Stock Project from Pexels



## About the Author

Sonali is a parent coach, speaker, and founder of Forward Together Parenting. She's been where you are with her own sensitive, strong-willed kids and has worked with thousands of parents worldwide. Her work is dedicated to sharing how you can confidently parent, have fun, and create lasting change that feels good.





Photo by Katrin Bolovtsova from Pexels

Yesterday, I taught my kids how to make rubber-band bracelets. At the end of the day, each of them came to me and said some form of, "Mom, thank you for showing me that." Each of them. My eight-year-old daughter, who I knew would like it, and my tween and teen boys. It stopped me in my tracks, in the best way possible.

Their words filled me up. They gave me energy. And I realized again how deeply being appreciated fuels me. And my awe at their words filled them up, too. This spontaneous, unprompted gratitude did not come naturally. At least not for my family.

For a long time, I thought going without appreciation was part of being a mom. That maybe when our kids are grown they'll come back to us and say thank you for those home-cooked meals, the late nights, for carting them around from activity to activity. But over the years, I've worked hard to teach my kids—and myself—a different way: to not just say thank you, but to want to say thank you. I wanted my family to notice and feel the impact of gratitude on both the person being thanked and the person expressing gratitude.

Because when we let "thank you" become something felt instead of something said out of habit, it can transform an ordinary moment into something extraordinary. Moments of appreciation fill both people with warmth; it energizes them, and allows both people to feel seen.

### WHY GRATITUDE STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS

At the core, I see gratitude as a form of deep acknowledgment and deep consideration. It tells the other person: "I see you. I see your effort. You matter to me. Your presence and actions impact me."

When gratitude is part of the emotional rhythm of a family, my experience has shown me it reduces defensiveness and builds trust and safety. Children who feel appreciated are more open to feedback, more willing to repair after conflict, and more likely to offer kindness in return. They also have a solid and secure sense of who they are and what they contribute to the world. And adults who feel appreciated tend to parent with more patience, empathy, and perspective.

When you say thank you to your child for their honesty, for their courage, or simply for being them, you're doing more than teaching manners. You're saying: "You belong. Your presence matters. All of you is treasured." This builds safety and trust, and at the same time your appreciation actually strengthens their ability to regulate and connect.

And when your child thanks you, and you say, "Thank you for saying that," you let them know that their appreciation reaches you. They realize that their words have power. This shared sense of being seen and valued is what deepens connection. Gratitude becomes a small, daily bridge between you and your child.

### THE DEEP NEED TO BE APPRECIATED, EVEN IN HARD MOMENTS

I like to think of the need to be appreciated as a core emotional need. It's easy, especially on busy days, to notice what's missing, what hasn't been done, what's wrong—and leave unnoticed what is going right.



I remember feeling baffled at the concept of appreciation several years ago. How can I find something to appreciate when my kids are screaming over a toy truck and they both claim they had it first? I had it in my head that I needed things to calm down first, and then I'd be able to appreciate them.

It actually worked the other way for me. The more I sent my kids the message that I didn't appreciate their behavior, the more the fighting and defensiveness increased. Despite my efforts and desire for my family to feel good, it wasn't teaching them right from wrong—it was telling them parts of them were wrong.

One day, at my wits end, while my kids were fighting, instead of saying, "Stop arguing," or "Why did you take it?" I heard myself say, "I'm so glad that I'm here with you both right now."

The screaming stopped. The defensiveness fizzled. I could literally feel their bodies relax as they stopped bracing for criticism

from me. As their eyes turned to me, I felt them soften and become more receptive to my guidance as I knelt down next to them.

So in moments where I didn't like what was happening I started saying, "I'm so glad that..." and challenging myself to finish the sentence.

"I'm so glad that you're telling me that." Even if they were telling me something tough to hear.

"I'm so glad that you know it's important to express your emotions." Even if they were screaming, because it made guiding their behavior with my next sentence so much easier.

"I'm glad that this happened because..." When I was secretly wishing it hadn't happened. This phrase allowed me to see the importance of every experience, even the challenging ones.

"I'm so glad that I'm aware I'm feeling unappreciated." For myself when I felt taken for granted.

And I could feel my energy shift from rejecting and resisting to appreciating. It taught me that gratitude isn't only for easy days when everything goes as planned. What I've experienced is that it's most transformative on hard ones.

While these "I'm so glad..." statements don't fix conflict or struggle, they do bring down defensiveness in a way that feels magical. They remind us that I'm not against you, I'm with you, and that it's not that I appreciate parts of you and not others—I appreciate all of you and all of you matters, even when I don't know how to help you, how to respond, or there isn't a clear right or wrong.

## THE FELT SENSE OF GRATITUDE

I like to think of "thank you" as not just words but as a feeling. You can say thank you out of habit, or you can feel it. And when you feel it, there's a sensation in your body. For me, a heartfelt thank you, either when I'm giving it or receiving it, feels like a flower blooming inside my chest. When I bring that felt





sense of gratitude into my voice and my eyes, my energy changes. My children don't just hear my words, they feel my appreciation of them.

And I believe that's true for all of us. And this is what we all really want for our kids: not just to say thank you, but to feel grateful. To want to feel it. To know what it feels like in their body when they acknowledge the good in someone else, in a moment, or in themselves, and to want to feel that feeling and want those around them to feel that feeling, too.

That feeling is what anchors them. It's what helps them appreciate the good even when it's tough, even when they have challenging experiences. This is what makes gratitude not just an act of manners but a way of being.

### RETHINKING "THANK YOU"

So now that we know what we want—a felt sense of gratitude—how do we get there? I've found the smallest tweaks in "thank you" can take it from words to a feeling.

When your child says, "Thank you," it can be easy to reply automatically with, "You're welcome." I've found that when I reply with, "Thank you for saying that," instead, it helps them feel how powerful their words are. It teaches them that their gratitude meant something to you. It feels like we're in this gratitude loop together.

Here's a quick summary of some easy ways to amplify appreciation:

- Instead of: "You're welcome," try: "Thank you for saying that."
- After your child shares, before responding to what they said, try: "I'm so glad you told me."
- Use "like" to communicate gratitude: "I like that you're my kid."
- Appreciate tough moments with "I'm so glad..." statements: "I'm so glad we're talking about this."
- Appreciate their tough moments: "Thank you for your courage in hearing that." Perhaps after you shared something to correct their behavior. You've heard of "connect then correct". Think of this as the next step: connecting after correcting.

### THE DAILY PRACTICE OF THANK YOU

Gratitude doesn't require big moments. It's built through small ones, which are often the ones that might otherwise go unnoticed. Those moments add up. They create an atmosphere of appreciation, a rhythm of thankfulness that reminds everyone that all parts of us belong here, even the parts of us we struggle with. All of us is treasured.

Gratitude isn't about being perfect or pretending things are fine. Felt gratitude is about being real and honest with ourselves and others—it's not forced positivity. It's about finding the goodness that's already here and naming it, so that it can grow.

And sometimes, it's as simple as saying, "Thank you. I'm so glad you're here."

So, thank you. I'm so glad you're here reading this article. And I'm so glad I got to share these ideas around gratitude with you.

# LEAVE A LEGACY OF KINDNESS

This month Sheena is interviewing her friend Somaly about her work helping refugees in Cambodia and finding out what lessons it taught her young children.



## About the Author



Sheena is a mother to three-year-old August, runs Super Fly Honey, a brand that makes technical activewear for pole dancers around the world, and dreams about writing children's books. After three years with a lot of yoga, deep friendships, purposeful retreats and IFS therapy, she realizes that becoming a mother is actually a superpower.



Our children are so lucky that they receive so much, but I was wondering how do we practice the act of giving in a way that truly sticks for the next generation?

Somaly Itzstein, my Australian expat friend living in between Bangkok and Siem Reap, and her inspiring grassroots campaign in Cambodia immediately came to mind. What had started as a personal quest to honor her own family's history—her parents were refugees who fled the Pol Pot regime—soon became a powerful lesson in empathy for her children, Kavi (five) and Cha Cha (two).

### **WHAT WAS HAPPENING, AND WHAT DID PEOPLE URGENTLY NEED?**

Somaly: Due to the shooting and bombing at the Cambodian/Thai border, families were forced to leave their homes with very little and became effectively homeless. They urgently needed basic necessities and tarps (tarpaulins) to make shelters for themselves.

### **WHEN DID YOU REALIZE THIS WASN'T JUST SOMETHING YOU WANTED TO DO, BUT SOMETHING YOU HAD TO DO?**

Somaly: The specific moment was the first day of supply shopping. I had my daughter with me, in a tuk-tuk absolutely full to the brim with food supplies. As I was making a video, showing all the stuff we'd bought with the donated money, I started to choke up; I was feeling so overwhelmed with the support of everyone behind me.

That was when I knew, this was what I had to do. Knowing that my parents' generation had had next to nothing to help them through their crisis, I knew that I had to help my people. It felt like history was repeating, and this time, I could do something.



### **THAT'S AN INCREDIBLE UNDERTAKING FOR ONE PERSON. HOW DID YOU EVEN START? DID YOU HAVE A FUNDRAISING GOAL?**

Somaly: I actually didn't have a fundraising goal. One night I couldn't sleep, so I wrote a Facebook post about my thoughts and feelings, aiming it at my Cambodian community back in Australia. I put up my bank details and asked if anyone would like to contribute.

When I woke up the next morning, I already had AUD\$1,000 in my bank account! I was in complete shock! Within a few weeks, I reached AUD\$10,000. I guess everyone felt what I was feeling: this is what happened to our parents and grandparents, we must help!

### **WITH AUD\$10,000 AND TWO SMALL KIDS, HOW DID YOU TURN THAT MONEY INTO AID AND GET IT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE?**

Somaly: I found a group of expats who weren't affiliated with any NGOs, and we formed a team. We combined our knowledge and resources to buy supplies and find campsite locations.

All the donations came to my bank account in Australia, I exchanged funds as they came in and went to buy supplies from the local market. Buying local helped the market sellers earn a living, too. Win-win!

We bought hundreds of kilos of rice, noodles, and dried fish, plus tons of assorted clothes, soap, laundry detergent, and sanitary pads. We also bought loads of toys and school supplies.

The biggest challenge was finding the campsites that had the least help. My team searched for the more isolated campsites; we took a few detours, but we finally found them. I was lucky to have a transportation contact who helped immensely with vehicles to take us and the supplies all over the provinces.

### **HOW DID YOU EXPLAIN THE SITUATION TO YOUR CHILDREN?**

Somaly: We explained that these families basically have nothing, no food, no homes. Because we as a family are so lucky to have so much, it's the right thing to do to share our things and buy stuff for people who aren't as lucky as us.

Kavi understood this. It wasn't the first time he'd seen the



## WHAT DID IT MEAN TO YOUR PARENTS, WHO WERE REFUGEES THEMSELVES, TO SEE THEIR CHILD AND GRANDCHILDREN ACTIVELY TAKING ON THIS CAUSE?

Somaly: This project definitely connected three generations. My parents fled horrifying times, and to see this happen all over again was just so shocking. They just can't believe that they are seeing this tragedy again in their lifetimes. That is why I'm so drawn to help. Knowing that my parents had to go through this when they were teenagers, I could not sit by and do nothing.

Being a daughter of Asian parents, I rarely hear compliments or validation. But my mum said something I've never ever heard her say before: "I'm proud of you." She even shared all my social media posts, captioning them, "I'm so proud of my daughter. Love seeing you help our people." In my 38 years of life, I never thought I'd see the day my mum would say those words to me. UNBELIEVABLE!

## ANY LAST MESSAGES?

Somaly: Nigel and I have always felt that we needed to show our kids how privileged they are, because sometimes their behavior is not appropriate. Because of my background, we wanted to physically show Kavi how other people live and teach him gratitude and respect.

We started off with letting him give small change to homeless people on the street or introducing him to local kids to play with. Living in Cambodia, I'm hoping I can teach my children not only my family's history and culture, but also to be grateful for what they have and to be kind to others, especially those who have less.

*Photos courtesy of the author*

underprivileged. We've traveled around Cambodia a fair bit, so Kavi understands that some families and kids don't have the same things that we do.

## KINDNESS IS LEARNED BY DOING. WHEN DID THE IDEA REALLY "CLICK" FOR KAVI?

Somaly: We didn't think Kavi could be kind. We'd see him being selfish with his sister, not sharing or playing nice.

But as he kept seeing me bring different supplies home, he'd ask me, "Mummy, is that for the Khmer kids?" He'd say, "That's cool, Mummy. I have this already, I want the Khmer kids to have it too." That was the "click" for Kavi. Knowing that he has a lot of things already, and to want others to have the same as him.

He brought that same energy and empathy to the campsites as well. He was always the first to say, "Can I give the toys to the kids?" or, "Can I help give that to the Khmer

people?" It always made my heart flutter to see him so caring and giving to people he had never met before.

## THIS KIND OF WORK IS INTENSE. WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART AND WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Somaly: The most challenging part was definitely adding to my mental load. I already had the full mental load of the kids and household, and now I was adding managing donations, organizing supplies, coordinating transport, and communicating with community leaders.

I'm lucky my husband Nigel is so supportive. He knows my family's history and how connected I am to my motherland. We've also been volunteering at a local government school with English classes, and we've involved our kids during their sports day activities. Seeing our kids play barefoot with all the other Khmer kids is such a joy to watch!



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# ARE BEDS A TOOL OF THE DEVIL?

While beds are usually a source of rest and relaxation, Joe shares how his children's beds have proved to be more of a curse than a comfort.

Photo by Pavel Danilyuk from Pexels



## About the Author

Joe and his wife Diane moved to Thailand in 2018. Since the arrival of their son Martin in 2021 and daughter Alice in 2024, Joe has been a stay-at-home father. The whole family enjoys BAMBI playgroups and Thai beach holidays. Find Joe on SubStack: BangkokDad bangkokdad.substack.com/



W  
“What?!” I snap in response to a polite good morning. I’m doing my best to hide it, but my wife may have spotted that I’m a little surly at breakfast this morning. I’ve had the kind of night that makes me question why we ever go on holiday and leave the security of our familiar beds and bedtime routines. In fact, I’ve had the particular kind of night that has me questioning whether beds and bedtime as a whole might be a devilish creation designed to test humankind. Certainly, full of the very sourest of the milk of human kindness, I can think only of bad bedtime experiences. Let’s take last night as an example.

### FUN AND GAMES

It’s 3am and I’m questioning my life choices while thinking longingly of my warm, comfortable bed. In what I can only assume was an act of premeditated mischief, Marty had a bad dream and woke Alice up with his screaming. Although he is now asleep, I’m left kneeling by Alice’s travel crib trying to soothe her to sleep. A few moments ago, I thought I’d succeeded, but alas, the click of the hotel door brought her to furious wakefulness.

Desperate to avoid waking Marty with her cries, I rushed back to her side. Now it feels like I’m playing a gentle, but extremely frustrating, game of whack-a-mole. Every time I think she’s drifted off, she pops her giggling head back over the side of the crib and drops her teddy on my head. I then tenderly lie her down and watch hopefully as she snuggles into her mattress. Just as I dare to think about shutting my eyes, I get a bear to the face and see Alice grinning down at me. It’s very cute but I’m not really enjoying it.

After an hour or so Alice tires of this game and starts making determined efforts to climb out of her crib. As her demands get noisier I give in and lift her out. She promptly curls up on the floor but seems more interested in wriggling and climbing on me

than in sleeping. By 5am she’s finally exhausted the fun of the hotel floor and decides to sleep. Now, at last, I can close my eyes and try to find a comfortable spot on the concrete floor. My eyelids start to droop, but mere seconds later, Marty wakes up, and by the time I’ve taken him to play with Mummy, Alice is sitting up and asking about breakfast. What, I loudly demand of a disinterested world, is the point of a hotel bed if I don’t get to use it, or a travel crib that Alice prefers to climb out of than sleep in?

### HALF-SIZE HOUDINIS

Alice is not the first of our offspring to display a penchant for climbing

out of their bed. As a two-year-old, Marty seemed determined to escape from his crib. Of course, we assumed that cribs were designed to contain two-year-olds and that his attempts to escape would prove futile. Nonetheless, once his first screams told us he was awake and trying to lever himself over the bars, we would race to his room to lift him out before he did it for us. Nothing has ever gotten me out of bed faster than knowing that if I didn’t hurry, Marty was going to try to hurl himself headfirst onto a hard wooden floor.

One day we were slightly too slow and a slightly stunned looking Marty was found sitting beside



Photo by Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels



*Photo courtesy of the author*

his crib. Suddenly the race had real consequences, and even the slightest of sounds would have me running to Marty's room, ready to catch our aspiring escapee. Once again, beds were tormenting us.

### **BAD BED BUYS**

Sleep deprived and panicking, we decided to buy Marty a bed, preferably before he fell out of his crib again. With speed rather than careful consideration as our main motivation, we made what may be the worst purchase of our parenting journey: a five-foot children's bed. We reasoned that he was too young for an adult bed, and that instead he needed something with a side bar so that he couldn't roll out, while also being low to the floor so that when he did roll out, he wouldn't hurt himself. While we waited for IKEA to deliver our new bed, collect the screwless flatpack they sent us, and finally deliver a bed with all the right components, Marty slept on a mattress on the floor.

The night I proudly showed Marty the bed I'd lovingly put together for him, he screamed and screamed and screamed—and not with joy. We hurriedly dragged his mattress back in and he slept happily on the floor. After a few days, he stopped screaming at the sight of the bed

and he'd even let us tuck him into it, but as soon as we left the room he'd crawl back to his mattress and sleep there.

In four months, the only person to spend a night in that bed was me. A sick Marty needed constant hugs and soothing, so while he tossed and turned feverishly across his oh-so-comfortable adult mattress, I tried to squeeze six feet of daddy into five feet of a child's bed. An agonising and futile endeavor. Alice will not be getting a children's bed—when she starts hurling herself out of her crib, we'll give her a nice safe, cheap, mattress on the floor.

I think these simple examples demonstrate just how fiendishly beds can torment poor parents, but in the interests of fairness, I must consider the good side of beds.

### **BEDS, BEAUTIFUL BEDS**

At the end of another long day of parenting I yearn for my bed and can think only kindly of beds and their comforts, but to truly appreciate the joys of a good bed we need to see it through the eyes of a child. Where we see sheets, pillows, and glorious sleep, they see a world of adventure.

For Alice, the side of a bed is as daunting as any mountain, and try as

she might, she simply cannot scale its imposing heights, so she pleads to be helped onto this forbidden playground. Once there, she throws herself on the pillows with ecstatic glee, and rolls giggling in the duvet. Then it is time to run: backwards and forwards, around and around, on this thrillingly bouncy surface, while daddy leaps desperately from side to side ready to catch her when she misjudges a step and falls off the bed. Finally, there is pushing and throwing as a joyful Alice is ever-so-gently hurled in breathless excitement onto the piled cushions and covers.

Marty, of course, loved these same games as a toddler, but as a stately four-year-old such things are beneath him. Instead, he bounces for himself on and off our bed, testing the springs and floorboards to what we fear will be the point of destruction. No gentle throwing for him; he demands to be violently flung onto the bed in a windmill of flailing limbs. "Again, again!" he yells in hysterical delight.

This is not all that a bed has to offer: it can instantly become a pirate ship, a flying bus, or a sanctuary in a sea of lava. Then in a flash, it is dismantled and becomes a den, where we hide from the Dread Wardrobeosaurus, the most fearsome of all the bedroom dinosaurs.

### **A FINAL JUDGMENT**

Undoubtedly beds can be a source of great joy, but does that joy outweigh the misery and suffering that beds and bedtimes can bring to parents? Or perhaps the issue here is the children rather than the beds. Am I unfairly blaming innocent beds for the fiendish nature of my children? Then again, are not those children themselves the result of a moment of bed-based madness? Is that the final proof of beds' devilish design or would that be taking my argument that beds are evil too far? I'll leave you to decide...



# CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS



Want to have fun, work together with other great parents, brush up on your professional skills, and do something for the BAMBI community? This is your chance.

BAMBI is run by a group of lovely and dedicated volunteers, and from time to time, a number of critical roles need to be filled to ensure ongoing service to our members. BAMBI is a fun and welcoming community of like-minded parents trying to support and improve the parenting experience for all families in Bangkok. If you have some time and passion to spare, come and join us. To apply or if you have any questions about these volunteer opportunities, please email [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org), detailing which position(s) you are interested in. Please note that as per BAMBI's constitution, interested candidates are required to have an active membership at the time of applying.



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# PRESENCE: THE LANGUAGE OF CONNECTION

Being truly present when we're with others can deepen connection and transform relationships. This festive season, Claudia reminds us that our presence may be the most meaningful gift of all.



Photo by capturenow



## About the Author

Claudia Gomes is an expert in emotional intelligence and intercultural awareness, and an ICF-certified Level 2 transformative coach. With 19 years of international experience in Spain and Thailand, Claudia is an expert in bridging cultures and fostering global collaboration. She has spent the last 15 years in Bangkok. [contact@claudiagomes.coach](mailto:contact@claudiagomes.coach); [linkedin.com/in/claudiagomes-coach/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/claudiagomes-coach/)





*Photo by Ivan S from Pexels*

I believe the end of the year has this special power over us, the power of reflection. It invites us to look back and notice how we've been showing up in our relationships. That's exactly what I found myself doing this December: observing how present I was with others throughout 2025, and who I've been in my daily interactions.

When I speak about relationships, I don't mean only the romantic kind. For me, a relationship is any form of interaction with another human being—in the elevator, on the street, at work, with family, friends, colleagues, business partners, or even strangers. Every encounter is an opportunity for connection.

I can say I'm proud of myself in this area of my life. I've been working on it for many years, and I can see how much I've shifted, both in how I relate to others and how people respond to me. Is presence everything? Not everything, but definitely a pretty important part. It makes a real difference when you are able to be fully with the person in front of you. You know how that

feels, when someone is truly there. And you also know how it feels when they're not.

At this time of year, families come together, emotions run high, and logistics often get in the way of peace. I had to learn to work on my presence, and I'd love to share some reflections and practices that might help you strengthen yours, not only for the holidays but all year round.

### **WHAT IS PRESENCE?**

Presence is the ability to focus on the present moment, without worrying about what's next or replaying the past. It means paying attention to what's happening right now: noticing details, sensations, breathing, tone, and energy. It's not only a mental activity but a full-body experience. Presence includes your awareness, your empathy, your eye contact, your calm breath. It's the moment when your mind, body, and emotions are aligned.

In my work with leaders and families, I've found that presence is one of the hardest things to cultivate. It

requires deep self-awareness and emotional regulation. You can't fake presence. People can feel when you're there, and when you're not.

### **WHY PRESENCE MATTERS**

When we're not present, we are more prone to mistakes and misunderstandings. Our minds wander to "What do I need to buy for dinner?" or "How will I handle that tomorrow?" or "Why did I say that earlier?" Training your mind to stay here and now is essential to connecting with what is truly happening, rather than only focusing on what's in your head. Human beings have three fundamental relational needs: to be seen, heard, and valued. When you're not paying attention, you miss the subtle details that could have deepened a conversation or healed a moment of disconnection.

As a coach, I've learned how transformative presence can be. When I give 100% of my attention to a client, not only out of respect but as part of the process, I become a mirror. My role is to reflect back



what I'm seeing, hearing, and sensing so that the other person can see themselves more clearly. It's powerful. It changes lives. Presence transforms everything.

## THE HOLIDAY MIRROR

The end-of-year season can range from moments of beauty and connection to tension and conflict, sometimes all within the same evening. Presence can help manage expectations, reduce misunderstandings, and deepen joy. It allows you to see situations more clearly and respond rather than react. When you're able to pause before speaking, you create space for empathy and truth to arise.

When emotions are running high, logic and objectivity tend to disappear. Conversations become reactive, and misunderstandings grow. If you notice yourself getting carried away, take a few deep breaths—three to five is enough. Deep breathing slows your nervous system, grounds your energy, and brings you back to your senses. From there, you can choose your words calmly rather than defensively.

## SIMPLE PRACTICES FOR EVERYDAY PRESENCE

What we focus on can literally rewire our brain, a process known as neuroplasticity. But attention is a limited resource. Use it wisely. Emotional states can also affect focus, and vice versa. In relationships, this means choosing quality over quantity. It's not about how many hours you spend together, but about how fully you show up in those moments. Here are some ways to improve the quality of your time together.

**Take a moment of silence before a conversation:** Pause to reconnect with yourself. Bring your mind, body, and emotions into the same space. Feel what you're feeling, without judgment.

**Put your phone away during meals or quality time:** Be with what's in front of you. Savor your food. Look at the person you're with. Presence is an act of love.

**Practice active listening:** Listen to what is being said, and what isn't. Notice tone, gestures, pauses, and body language.

## Reflect back what you sense:

"It sounds like this meant a lot to you." Presence isn't just silence; it's engagement

**Ask real questions:** Instead of "How are you?" try "How are you really?" or "What has been on your heart lately?" Presence is about curiosity, not performance.

These simple acts can bring your relationships to a healthier, more authentic place. They help you show up as yourself, and allow others to do the same. When you care without an agenda, you create freedom. You step out of old patterns and family conditioning and into conscious, compassionate connection.

## PRESENCE WITH YOURSELF

Being present with yourself is, to me, the most important thing. Knowing who you are, respecting yourself, living according to your values, and communicating your needs, these are the foundations of genuine presence. Working on yourself, understanding your past, releasing old beliefs, and healing emotional wounds are what make your presence consistent and grounded. Presence begins from the inside out. The more connected you are with yourself, the more present you can be with others.

Presence can be the greatest gift of this season, and the beginning of a new way to live. Family moments can feel different. Relationships can be rebuilt. The way you connect with others can truly transform.

And remember, self-awareness isn't a straight line. There will be ups and downs. You're not alone on this path, and there are professionals ready to support you in your journey of self-discovery.

*Here I am!*







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# EATING FOR FERTILITY: THE BIG FOUR AND BEYOND

Getting pregnant can be a tougher challenge than many people expect. Keren shares the best scientific advice for maximizing your fertility and improving your chances of a successful, healthy pregnancy.

Photo by Matilda Wormwood from Pexels



## About the Author

Keren Granit is a dietitian based in Bangkok, specializing in family and pediatric nutrition. She helps parents confidently guide their children's eating habits, from picky eating to healthy growth. Passionate about evidence-based, practical advice, she shares resources and guidance at [EatWithKeren.com](https://EatWithKeren.com).



Fertility isn't something that starts the moment you decide to conceive. Long before ovulation tests, clinic appointments, or treatment plans, your body is constantly receiving signals that affect how your reproductive system functions. Hormones, metabolism, inflammation, and even environmental exposures all play a role in determining how easy or difficult it may be to get pregnant or sustain a healthy pregnancy.

What makes this field so promising is that many of these factors are modifiable. Scientific research from the past five years has identified a set of clear, evidence-based habits that can meaningfully support fertility. These are not quick fixes or miracle supplements. Instead, they're rooted in nutrition, environment, and lifestyle patterns that shape the hormonal environment in which conception happens.

Among the many topics studied, four stand out as particularly well-supported: the Mediterranean diet; folic acid; reducing alcohol and smoking; and lowering exposure to common hormone-disrupting chemicals like per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), Bisphenol A (BPA), and phthalates. These "Big Four" pillars form the strongest foundation for anyone trying to conceive.

### **THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET: WHERE THE EVIDENCE IS STRONGEST**

If there's one dietary pattern that stands out in fertility research, it's the Mediterranean diet. Over the past decade, and especially in the last five years, multiple meta-analyses and cohort studies have consistently linked adherence to this way of eating with improved fertility outcomes. Women who follow a Mediterranean-style diet tend to have higher rates of conception, shorter time to pregnancy,

and better results in assisted reproduction treatments like IVF and ICSI.

The Mediterranean diet isn't a strict plan or a trend. It's a pattern centered on vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and extra virgin olive oil as a primary fat source. Fish and poultry appear in moderate amounts, while red meat, processed foods, and added sugars are kept to a minimum. This pattern is naturally rich in antioxidants, fiber, and healthy fats, all of which contribute to metabolic and hormonal stability.

Why does it matter so much for fertility? One key reason is inflammation. Chronic low-grade inflammation is linked to poorer egg quality, ovulatory issues, and implantation problems. A Mediterranean pattern helps keep inflammatory markers low. It also supports insulin sensitivity and stable blood sugar, which is crucial for ovulation and reproductive hormone balance. For men, diets rich in

omega-3s and antioxidants are associated with better sperm quality, motility, and morphology.

You don't need to overhaul your kitchen overnight to benefit from this pattern. Shifting towards it can start with simple swaps: replacing white bread with whole grain; choosing olive oil instead of butter; opting for grilled fish instead of processed meats; and adding more colorful vegetables and legumes to your meals. Over time, these choices shape a more supportive hormonal and metabolic environment for conception.

### **FOLIC ACID: A SMALL NUTRIENT WITH A BIG IMPACT**

While entire dietary patterns shape fertility in powerful ways, some specific nutrients have a uniquely well-established role. Folic acid is at the top of that list. For decades, it has been recommended to anyone who could become pregnant to help prevent neural tube defects. But growing evidence shows that its



*Photo by Karola G from Pexels*

benefits start well before pregnancy begins.

Supplementing with 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid daily at least one month before conception has been associated with better ovulatory function, improved egg quality, and lower risk of early miscarriage. It's a simple, inexpensive intervention with high impact. Natural food sources, like leafy greens, legumes, and fortified grains do contribute folate, but supplementation remains standard because it ensures a consistent intake at levels proven to support early pregnancy.

Unlike many supplements that promise much more than they deliver, folic acid has decades of clinical data, guideline endorsements, and real-world impact behind it. If there is one supplement to prioritize pre-conception, this is it.

### **ALCOHOL AND SMOKING: THE BASICS THAT STILL MATTER**

Some factors are so well established that they don't need pages of explanation, but they still belong in any serious discussion of fertility. Alcohol and smoking—whether traditional cigarettes or vaping—

have been repeatedly shown to impair fertility in both women and men.

Alcohol can disrupt ovulation and hormonal balance, increase time to pregnancy, and raise the risk of miscarriage. Smoking and vaping affect egg quality, reduce ovarian reserve, and damage sperm production and motility. Even moderate use can make a difference, particularly when conception chances each month are already limited.

For many people, cutting back or stopping these habits before trying to conceive is one of the most impactful things they can do, and it sets a strong foundation for a healthy pregnancy as well.

### **HORMONE DISRUPTORS: THE HIDDEN FERTILITY BLOCKERS**

While smoking and alcohol are familiar territory, what many people overlook are the chemical exposures that quietly interfere with hormones. These are known as endocrine disruptors—chemicals that mimic or block natural hormones, essentially confusing the body's signaling system. They're not rare industrial substances; they're present in many everyday products.

Three of the most discussed in fertility research are PFAS, BPA, and phthalates. PFAS, sometimes called "forever chemicals", are found in nonstick coatings, stain-resistant fabrics, food packaging, and some drinking water. BPA and phthalates are commonly used in plastics and personal care products. Over the past few years, a growing number of studies have linked higher levels of these chemicals to reduced fertility, longer time to pregnancy, lower embryo quality, and impaired ovarian or sperm function.

The evidence isn't just mechanistic; it's increasingly supported by human data. Women and men with higher PFAS levels, for example, tend to have lower fertility rates, and couples undergoing IVF show lower success rates when exposure levels are higher.

The good news is that personal exposure can be reduced with practical steps. Using glass or stainless steel containers instead of heating food in plastic, choosing fragrance-free personal care products, limiting nonstick cookware when possible, and eating fewer highly packaged foods all lower contact with these chemicals. While we can't control all environmental exposures, we can meaningfully reduce them in daily life.

### **BEYOND THE BIG FOUR: WHAT'S EMERGING**

While the Big Four have the strongest evidence behind them, other factors are emerging as meaningful fertility influencers. One area gaining attention is ultra-processed foods (UPFs). Recent prospective cohort studies have found associations between high UPF intake and increased infertility risk. The explanation is likely twofold: these foods tend to displace nutrient-rich options, and they often come with higher exposure to packaging-related chemicals. Reducing their frequency—not eliminating them entirely—can



*Photo by Esra Korkmaz from Pexels*





Photo by Aflo Images

support both overall health and reproductive goals.

Nutrient-wise, a few players are worth mentioning. Vitamin D has been linked to improved fertility outcomes, especially in people with deficiencies or conditions like PCOS, although the evidence isn't yet strong enough to make it a universal recommendation. Omega-3 fatty acids support anti-inflammatory pathways and are associated with improved sperm quality and embryo development. Meanwhile, compounds like CoQ10 and inositol show promise in specific contexts, particularly in cases of PCOS or low ovarian reserve, but they remain adjunctive rather than foundational. These emerging factors can be seen as layers to build on, not substitutes for the basics.

### **LIFESTYLE HABITS THAT STRENGTHEN FERTILITY**

Nutrition and environmental exposures are only part of the story. Lifestyle factors also influence the hormonal and metabolic environment for conception. Sleep,

for example, plays a surprisingly important role. Irregular or insufficient sleep can disrupt ovulation and lower fertility, while getting roughly seven to eight hours a night helps regulate reproductive hormones.

Chronic stress can also interfere with fertility through hormonal pathways. While stress alone does not cause infertility, managing it through approaches like mindfulness, CBT, or structured mind-body programs has been shown to improve emotional well-being and may increase the likelihood of conception, particularly in people undergoing fertility treatment.

Movement matters too. Regular, moderate physical activity supports insulin sensitivity, metabolic health, and egg quality. Intense or excessive exercise can have the opposite effect in some people, so balance is key.

### **BRINGING THE SCIENCE HOME**

Fertility isn't something that switches on when you decide to conceive. It's shaped by months of quiet, daily

signals your body receives from food, environment, and lifestyle. The most powerful, well-studied actions don't rely on expensive treatments or complicated trends. They're accessible and evidence-based.

Start by building your plate around real food, adopting a Mediterranean-style diet pattern that supports hormonal balance and egg and sperm quality. Take folic acid daily, reduce alcohol and smoking, and cut everyday exposure to hormone disruptors like PFAS, BPA, and phthalates where you can.

If you have the energy to go further, look at cutting down ultra-processed foods, checking your vitamin D and omega-3 status, and taking care of your sleep, movement, and stress. These changes don't guarantee pregnancy, but they stack the odds in your favor. They support reproductive health, general health, and pregnancy outcomes. Whether you're trying naturally or preparing for treatment, these are actions that matter now.

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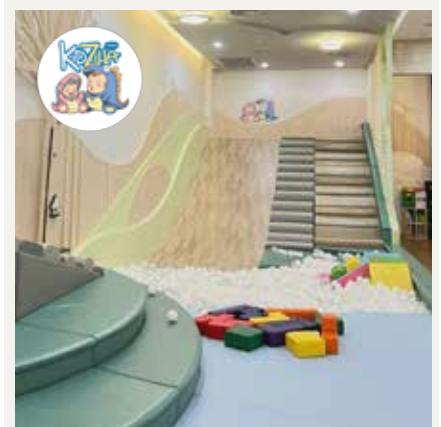


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# BOOKS TO INSPIRE

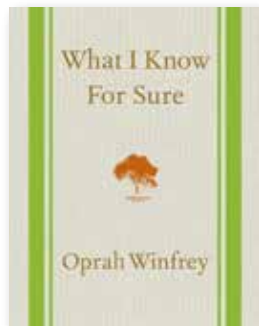
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## WHAT I KNOW FOR SURE

*By Oprah Winfrey*

As the festive season invites reflection and generosity, Oprah Winfrey's "What I Know for Sure" offers a heartfelt reminder of the power of gratitude and kindness. Through short, soulful essays drawn from her life, Oprah reflects on joy, resilience, and the quiet beauty of everyday moments.



Her words remind us that true happiness comes not from what we receive, but from what we appreciate and share. She celebrates acts of kindness—listening deeply, forgiving freely, giving wholeheartedly—as the threads that strengthen families and nurture connection.

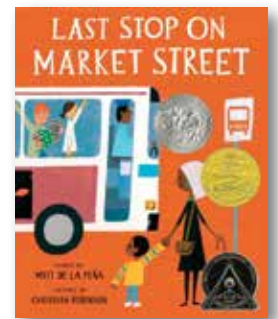
In a season often filled with hurry and expectation, "What I Know for Sure" gently calls us back to what matters most: presence, compassion and love. Oprah's wisdom inspires us to carry the spirit of the holidays into our daily lives, turning gratitude and giving into lasting habits that illuminate every season with meaning and connection.

First published by Flatiron Books in September 2014, "What I Know for Sure" gathers Oprah Winfrey's most cherished reflections from her long-running column in *O, The Oprah Magazine*. A copy can be found in the Neilson Hays Library non-fiction section.

## LAST STOP ON MARKET STREET

*By Matt de la Peña; illustrated by Christian Robinson*

In "Last Stop on Market Street" Matt de la Peña and illustrator Christian Robinson deliver a heartfelt story about seeing the world through the lens of gratitude. The book follows young CJ and his Nana on their Sunday bus ride across town, where CJ's simple questions about why they don't have a car and why others seem to have more open the door to Nana's gentle wisdom about beauty, kindness, and appreciation.



Through rhythmic, tender prose and vibrant artwork, readers are reminded that gratitude often grows in unexpected places in shared moments, community, and acts of service. Robinson's illustrations bring warmth and color to an ordinary cityscape; transforming it into a world alive with connection and meaning.

Perfect for families navigating challenging times, "Last Stop on Market Street" is a powerful reminder that joy doesn't come from having everything, but from seeing the light in what we already have.

Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers in 2015, this award-winning picture book has received widespread acclaim, including the Newbery Medal and Caldecott Honor. A hardcover copy can be found in the Children's Corner of Neilson Hays Library.



Prepared by Kit Lang (@mskitlang) for Neilson Hays Library, Thailand's premier English-language library. The Children's Program offers Saturday Story Time, a cozy Children's Corner, and special holiday events. Adult programs include concerts, art exhibitions, book club, and book sales. The library is located in a beautiful historic building with a garden and cafe on site: 195 Surawong Road, Bangkok 10500, Thailand. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook.

# RESTORING ROUTINES AFTER THE FESTIVE SEASON

The holidays are exciting, but the late bedtimes and parties can make it hard to get back into our daily routines. Kim shares her strategies for easing her family's return to school and work schedules

Photo by Alena Darnel from Pexels



## About the Author

Kim is a mother of one whose journey has taken her from the fast-paced boardrooms of Dubai to full-time motherhood in Bangkok. Before founding an agency and consulting for some of the world's leading firms, she served as Head of MARCOMs, overseeing Atlantis and The Royal resorts. Since then, she's applied her expertise, through NGO volunteer work, supporting meaningful causes.





As the festive season winds down, many parents find themselves facing the annual challenge of getting the whole family back into a routine. As an events professional I try to use my skillset to help ease the stress and rush at home with strategy, structure, and a touch of creativity.

The holidays are great—for about a week. Then the glitter goes in places glitter has no right to be, the children refuse to wear anything that isn't a costume, and your once-ordered days look like confetti exploded inside a calendar. Good news: routines are not joyless prisons. They're superpowers that help kids—and drained parents—feel safe, sleep better, and actually get out the door. Here's an event planner's guide to helping kids of all ages slide back into the rhythm after a break.

### WHY ROUTINES MATTERS

Routines reset biological and emotional clocks. Prioritizing consistent bed and wake times improves mood, attention, and learning. Experts recommend making any shifts in sleep patterns gradual—think 10–15 minutes earlier every few days, rather than a one-night shock to the system.

### A STEP-BY-STEP PLAN THAT WON'T MAKE YOU CRY

#### Start early—but not like a drill sergeant

Begin 7–14 days before school or normal childcare resumes. Move bedtimes and wake times earlier in small increments, practice the morning routine once or twice, and reintroduce packed-lunch or homework-time habits. Slow and steady wins here.

#### Make sleep sacred

Create a calm bedtime routine: screens off 30–60 minutes before lights out; wind-down activities—books, bath, breathing; and a dark, cool room. Limiting evening screen time also helps emotional regulation and can make mornings smoother. For older kids, involve them in choosing the wind-down ritual so that they actually stick to it.

#### Visuals, timers, and tiny experts

Younger kids love a picture schedule that shows: breakfast → brush teeth → shoes → go. Timers are magical for making transitions feel concrete not confrontational, just set one for five minutes more and then it's time to move onto the next step.

Practicing your morning routine a few times in advance helps reduce the chaos on day one.

#### Give them ownership

Montessori wisdom reminds us that children need to develop independence and when kids can do small tasks themselves mornings are faster and confidence soars. Let them choose their socks, pack their snack, or set the alarm—with supervision.

#### Emotion first, logistics second—I currently live in this space!

Acknowledge post-holiday blues or back-to-school nerves. Ask, listen, and normalize worries. Small mindfulness breaths, a predictable check-in each evening, or a “best thing from today” round can make transitions emotionally smoother. Some days are harder than others and sometimes letting go of the check-list to just take a minute is fundamental to getting back on track.

Unlike events where every line item gets marked off with a tick, the real-life checklist is more about small, consistent steps. The goal isn't military precision—it's a less frantic, more functional, household that still has the energy for bedtime stories.

# **BAMBI: THE TEAM**

BAMBI is managed by an elected committee of volunteers and all BAMBI members are encouraged to volunteer. Vacancies can be found on the Call for Volunteers page in this magazine and are posted online; you are welcome to contact [vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org](mailto:vicechairwoman@bambiweb.org) with inquiries.

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