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We are a group offering support and companionship to each other through the early years of parenting.

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BAMBI is a project of the Childbirth & Breastfeeding Foundation of Thailand (CBFT).

Mission Statement

The CBFT is a non-profit networking and resource center dedicated to ensuring the best possible start in life for our babies. We believe that this can best be achieved through:

- Encouraging the appropriate use of technology and medication for all births.
- Promoting breastfeeding for every mother and baby in the community.
- Providing information and training to health professionals involved in maternity care.
- Supporting parents through the pregnancy, birth and postnatal period.

For more information on CBFT, contact:

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bambibangkok



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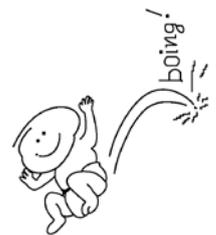
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in the magazine?*



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SCAN TO APPLY



Dear BAMBI members,

Without a doubt, December truly is a magical time, spending Christmas and New Year with friends and family to create such warm and joyful memories and cherished traditions. December also holds a unique warmth for me and my family because we have two adult kids who travel a lot for work and are not at home most of the time. As most families do, we prioritize the connection and cherish the time spent with our loved ones during this holiday season.

It is wonderful to experience the holiday spirit in different places, as it is an exciting opportunity to explore different cultures and witness unique traditions while celebrating in our own ways. But this year, my family plans to celebrate Christmas and New Year in Bangkok just to add a special twist to our celebrations. Having learned from past experiences, we now tend to go with the flow, enjoy the moment, and not have too many plans. This means we can find a lovely balance between being prepared and embracing spontaneity!

My highlights of these celebrations are finding simple joy and making the most of our time together to create special memories with our family traditions. These include our family reunion dinner, where we organize a special dinner with everyone's favorite dishes. We never omit the games night with board games using holiday themes; we love to bake and cook together, exchange gifts, and also volunteer at local events so we can give back as a family. But my favorite one of all is the memory jar, where everyone writes down their favorite moments from the year to read together.

So hopefully we will all be celebrating big and bold this year, having family and friends come together to create and share traditions to add beauty to this season.

We hope you enjoy the holiday season with your loved ones, creating beautiful memories and cherished traditions. BAMBI wishes you joy and warmth this festive season, and as we step into the new year, do keep an eye out for our volunteering opportunities, events, and activities. See you in 2025!

Simran Rajkitkul
BAMBI Honorary President



Simran Rajkitkul

OUR COVER KID



NAME

Theo

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

My parents are from the UK and US, but I was born in Thailand.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN THAILAND?

Since I was born.

FAVORITE PLACE TO GO AS A FAMILY IN THAILAND?

Koh Phangan for its mix of great beaches and child friendliness.

WHAT'S ON YOUR THAI BUCKET LIST?

Khao Sok national park

WHAT DOES BAMBI MEAN TO YOU?

An opportunity to meet other children my age, make friends, and explore everything that Bangkok has to offer!



Sanam Raisa Rahman

Dear readers,

By the time this issue is out, I'll be in the middle of packing for our trip, entertaining guests, and bracing myself for the slew of festivities and out-of-routine shenanigans that'll hit us as soon as we land home. Nothing more exciting and overwhelming like the end of the year, huh?

December reminds me of a snow globe: the beautiful but chaotic swirls symbolizing the whirlwind of activity during the festive season; then the clear calm that sets in afterwards, allowing for some time to pause and reflect before taking on the new year. What does December mean to you?

This month, we explore the theme "Dancing Through December" with plenty of ideas to help you end 2024 on a high note. Our contributors share their favorite ways to celebrate the season, bringing you heartfelt stories, fun crafts, and handy tips to handle the holiday rush and make December truly unforgettable for your family.

First up we have "Clothespin Christmas Stars" by Anelia Van Zyl. Check out how you can jazz up your holiday decor with a simple "starry" craft. Next we have "Cultivating a Generous Spirit" by Kelly Patten, which serves as a reminder of what lies at the heart of this season—kindness and generosity.

Kit Lang tells us which books should be gracing our shelves this month in Readers' Corner—"The Holiday" by Jane Green, Jennifer Coburn, and Liz Ireland, for your fill of holiday romance; and "A Little Bit of Magic" by Susan Bell Flavin, to teach your little ones how showing a little appreciation and gratitude can go a long way.

Sonali Vongchusiri outlines the ways in which your needs and those of your child's can be met during the holiday whirlwind in "Keepin' it Together When the Family Gets Together", and Farizaa Sabreen's "Stress-Free Holidays" offers practical tips to help manage stress during the festive period.

In "A Piece of Pie", Rachel Ofo serves up the perfect recipe for festive fun, showing how time in the kitchen with kids can nurture bonds, build essential skills, and create lasting memories. In "Minimalism Made Easy: Our Family's Guide to Year-End Cleaning", Jeannie Kim shares her family's tried and tested method of decluttering and stepping into a new year with a clean home and content minds.

December is also a time for reflection, and in "A Holistic Guide to Reflection for Families", sharing heartfelt insights on her family's journey over the past year, Ha Trinh shows us how we can pause, reflect, and grow together as well. Also taking the chance to reflect, Joe Barker shares what he's learned and observed this year, delighting us with his usual humor and wit in "Looking Back on 2024".

Moving on to non-thematic content now, and in "Defiant Children—Disorder or Not?" Anatta Zarchi unpacks the complexities of persistent defiance in children, providing helpful information on recognizing oppositional defiant disorder and what you can do to manage it. With valuable insights from dietitian Keren Granit, Sheena Low explores how the food we eat has a direct correlation with how we sleep—a useful read if you'd like to establish a better sleep cycle in the new year.

There are easy ways to balance the holiday hustle with meaningful moments and we hope this month's content helps you do exactly that. On behalf of the entire magazine team, I wish you all a season filled with joy, love, and cherished moments with your loved ones. Here's to a happy and peaceful end to the year!

Sanam Rahman
Editor

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CLOTHESPIN CHRISTMAS STARS

This month, Anelia shows us how to turn the humble clothespin into a shining Christmas star.



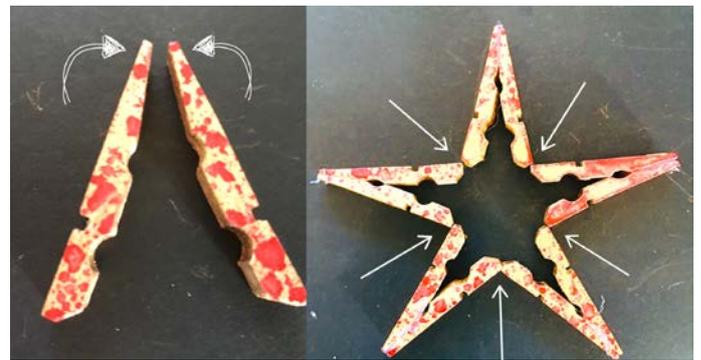
It's that time of the year again! Christmas trees, decorations, home-baked goods, family, friends, and Christmas carols. To get into the spirit of the festive season, why not try your hand at some cute, easy-to-do decorations? These clothespin stars are the perfect ornament to hang on the tree, add to a gift, or use as table decorations. Why not get the whole family together to make this fun Christmas craft? So for now, leave the laundry, get the clothespins, and let's make some stars!

SUPPLIES

- Wooden clothespins—you can use different sizes to make bigger or smaller stars
- Acrylic paint (color of your choice)
- Cardstock (color of your choice)
- Glue gun and glue sticks
- Decorations (pom poms, miniature cones, glitter, bows, and so on)
- Twine or ribbon
- Scissors
- Marker

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Prepare the clothespins: Take the metal springs out of the wooden clothespins. Arrange five clothespins, so 10 halves, in a five pointed star shape, as shown in the picture. Use a glue gun to stick them together.
2. Paint the star: Paint the front and sides of the clothespin star and let it dry completely.



3. Cut out the cardstock: Take some cardstock and trace around your star with a marker. Carefully cut out the star from the cardstock, cutting just inside the lines for a neat finish, then glue it to the back of the clothespin star. Make sure to trace each star separately, as they may be different shapes and sizes.
4. Add decorations: Use the glue gun to glue some tinsel pom poms, miniature cones, or anything "Christmassy" in the center of each star.
5. Make a twine loop: Cut a piece of natural twine or ribbon about 10 cm long. Tie it in a loop and make a bow.
6. Attach the loop and bow: Use the glue gun to glue the loop and bow to the top back of the clothespin star ornament.

Now all you need to do is find somewhere to hang it, sit back, and enjoy your lovely Christmas star!



About the Author

Anelia is a performing artist from South Africa. She has been living and working as a teacher in Thailand for ten years. She also writes educational children's books, makes music, and loves to spend time in the kitchen. Follow her adventures on IG @aneliavz.

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CULTIVATING A GENEROUS SPIRIT

This festive season is an opportunity to teach our kids about generosity and kindness. Kelly reflects on how we can instill these values.

Photo by Karolina Kaboompics from Pexels



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.



As the holidays approach, I usually find myself going through the list of possible gifts for our family. Is it time for a bike for my three-year-old? Does my husband need another wallet? (No, he definitely does not.) And what to get the almost one-year-old whose birthday falls two weeks before Christmas? Does she actually need a Pikler triangle, or is it just the internet that has convinced me of this?

I love gift giving and shopping for presents, so it's easy to get caught up in the consumerist chaos of the holidays. We aren't a religious family, but I still like to remember there's a reason for the season. I want to instill in my daughters a sense of generosity that goes beyond this season of giving and extends to all aspects of their lives.

Living in Sukhumvit, we find ourselves surrounded with fancy shopping malls, luxury spas, and trendy restaurants. It can be very easy to forget that most of Thailand doesn't live in the same reality as us expats. According to the World Bank, Thailand has the highest level of income-based inequality in the East Asia/Pacific region. In fact the wealth disparity is so stark that in 2021, over half of the country's wealth was held by less than 10% of the population (1).

To add to that, the minimum daily wage is approximately ฿360. It's a sharp contrast to our expat bubble, where you wouldn't think twice about spending that on a sourdough sandwich, decadent smoothie bowl, or imported craft beer. So how can your family strike a balance and encourage kindness and generosity in the country we call home?

We can instill generosity in our children by modeling it in our own daily practices. With young children, the first step towards generosity is sharing. Easier said than done as we all know, but practicing sharing toys or food lays the groundwork for developing a generous spirit. Introduce the concept of abundance. "Wow we have so many toys they don't fit on the shelf anymore! Should we pick out a few to share with kids who need toys?" And remember that generosity doesn't have to involve material objects. You can also be generous with your time or your spirit. Sharing a hug when your little sister is sad or helping clean up toys when you have a few extra minutes are easy ways for kids to begin exploring generosity.

The next time you're having a clean out, involve the kids and consider donating rather than reselling. I love the expat sales board as much

as the next mom, and I've scored some amazing purchases—if you're reading this: a huge shout-out to the woman who sold us the comfy rocking chair! However, I'm sure I'm not alone in raising my eyebrows at some of the posts. Will the ฿100 sale change your life? Probably not. Could it help a family in need? It quite possibly could!

Consider donating items in good condition to Home of Grace, Second Chance Bangkok, or Bangkok Community Help Foundation. Another easy way to pass on gently used items is through domestic helpers. Our nanny happily takes bags of clothing or linens to her church to support families in Myanmar.

And while December is the season for giving, generosity is a mindset that we can cultivate all year long. Taking small steps now as a family to model and promote a kind and generous spirit sets children up for a lifetime of giving and helping others.

References

1. World Bank Group (2023) Bridging the gap: inequality and jobs in Thailand. [worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/publication/bridging-the-gap-inequality-and-jobs-in-thailand](https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/publication/bridging-the-gap-inequality-and-jobs-in-thailand)

BOOKS TO INSPIRE

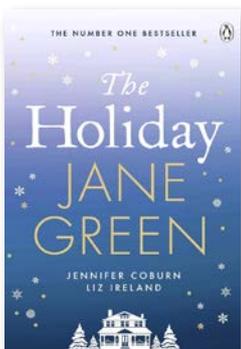
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THE HOLIDAY

By Jane Green, Jennifer Coburn, and Liz Ireland



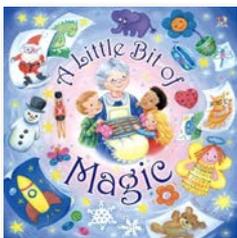
What better way to kick-off the holiday season than with feel-good, festive stories that transport you into the magic of the holidays! "The Holiday" is an entertaining and heartwarming anthology, combining three delightful holiday-themed novellas by well-known authors Jane Green, Jennifer Coburn, and Liz Ireland. Each of the three stories is filled with romance, humor, and the festive magic that defines the season, offering readers a collection of cozy and uplifting tales perfect for reading over your holiday.

Each novella brings its own unique flavor, yet they all share a common thread of love, laughter, and the spirit of togetherness. The strength of this anthology lies in its ability to offer variety while maintaining a cohesive holiday theme. Whether you're in the mood for something reflective, humorous, or romantic, "The Holiday" has a story to suit every festive mood. It's the ideal book to curl up with during the holidays, providing warmth and joy in equal measure.

Published by Penguin Books in 2012, a paperback copy of "The Holiday" can be found in the fiction section of the Neilson Hays Library.

A LITTLE BIT OF MAGIC

By Susan Bell Flavin



The book, "A Little Bit of Magic" by Susan Bell Flavin, is a beautiful story with lots of heart and charm. Although it is not an obvious holiday read, the message from the book embodies the true meaning of the holidays: to give thanks and express appreciation for those you love.

The book tells the story of Hazel, an elderly woman who lives in the little pink house. Whenever a child in the neighborhood was a bit hungry, sad, or a little forgotten, Hazel's house was the place to be. If you were having a bad day, and no one else would understand, Hazel would make it better. The children in the neighborhood showed their appreciation by gifting Hazel artwork, which covered the walls of her home year round—pictures of snowmen, Santas with cotton beards, and paper snowflakes—reminding her of the magic that goes into each child's artwork. Prepare yourself with some tissues before this heartwarming read.

Published by Top That! Publishing Ltd in January 2013. A paperback copy of "A Little Bit of Magic" can be found in the Children's Corner of the library.

Prepared by Kit Lang for the Neilson Hays Library.

The Neilson Hays Library is 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. 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.



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KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER WHEN THE FAMILY GETS TOGETHER

Holidays are great, but they can leave you feeling overwhelmed and depleted. Luckily, Sonali is here to share her holiday manual to help keep everyone calm and feeling good.

Photo by AleksandarNakic from Getty Images Signature



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 Nicole Michalou from Pexels

W

We're heading into the holidays, which means all the exciting things—school fundraisers and performances, holiday parties, and planning trips to see your family back home. You want to say “yes” to everything. Of course you do. That's because you care about making memories with your family that your kids will remember into adulthood. You're going to feel pulled in five directions because you want to meet everyone's needs—your kids' needs, your partner's needs, your extended family's needs, and let's not forget your own needs—even though we all try really hard to not have these.

My intent is that you consider this article your holiday manual for all these needs. Your child's needs matter. Your needs matter. And there are creative ways to meet them all.

GETTING CREATIVE

First, a reframe. When I say there are creative ways to meet needs, I don't mean there's a magic way to clone yourself or make a 30-hour day. There are ways to set boundaries that can actually meet emotional needs like feeling approved of, acknowledged, appreciated, and valued, as well as create a sense of belonging. There are also creative ways to fill those emotional needs in seconds.

Set boundaries by saying “no”

Let's start with how to say “no” kindly. This might be to your children, to your friends and family members, or even to yourself.

- **Acknowledge them AND you:** “I appreciate you asking me. I love doing these things. And I'm swamped this week.”
- **Acknowledge the conflict within you:** “I want to say ‘yes’ and I need to say ‘no’.”
- **Set the stage:** “Mom, the day we land, we are going to pop in and say hello for an hour and then go to the hotel room. I'm telling you now because the kids and I are going to want to stay longer, and I know we'll need a quiet first day to adjust so that we can enjoy all the holiday excitement later.”
- **Handling pushback:** Use “given that” to honor your need. “Yes, I'm disappointed we won't stay longer too. And given that we're all still getting over jet lag, a good night's rest will make it so we can enjoy tomorrow with you.”
- **From STOP to PAUSE:** Instead of focusing on leaving, focus on when and for how long they'll get to do the thing next. “It's 7pm—time for us to get to bed. We'll be back to play with your cousins tomorrow for lunch for two hours. I wonder what games you will

play together tomorrow?”

- **Notice the half-life:** Notice how long you think your child/spouse/you will last at a family event. Then halve that time. So, if you think your child might make it two hours, plan to leave after an hour. From my experience working with sensitive kids and parents, two hours of great family time that ends with a 20-minute meltdown is still depleting; one hour of restful family time that ends well is nourishing.
- **From scarcity to abundance:** Instead of “I can only do this for two minutes tonight”, which focuses on scarcity, try “I have two minutes tonight... so you are about to experience the most phenomenal two-minute back scratch EVER. Ready?!”

Feeling better about saying “no”? Great! Pick one to remember for the holidays.

Fill emotional needs—the fast way

Have you ever bumped into a friend unexpectedly at a shopping mall, and her smile towards you and the way your child giggled with her left you beaming for the rest of the day? It might have only been a 30-second interaction, but it was a game-changing one. The same can happen for our kids. Our kids don't want



Photo by Julia Larson from Pexels

more of our time; what they want more of is us. What I mean by that is they want to feel a sense of our love inside their bodies. And when we're open with ourselves, we want that felt sense of love as well.

Now, let's go into how to create that felt spark of love inside your child's body and your body. I call these "insta-connects" and teach this to parents all the time. I've had parents say things like, "Oh, my grandmother did that—she'd say 'I love you,' and I'd say 'I love you more,' and she'd say, 'That's impossible.' I still remember how amazing it felt."

An insta-connect is a small-yet-impactful interaction between you and your child where your child can feel your love for them in their body—and you feel it too. You put the same thing on repeat. Great times for insta-connects are last thing before bed or first thing in the morning. They are stabilizing and engaging, yet quick and easy, which makes them great for sensitive kids during the holidays when routines have gone out the window. Insta-connects bring that stability and security sensitive kids crave.

The keys to an insta-connect are:

- 1) you feel that spark inside you too; and
- 2) it takes less than 30 seconds.

Here are a few ideas for insta-connects:

- Have a ten-second "I love you" competition with your child to see who can say it more. Of course, your child wins and you sigh in feigned defeat saying, "OK, you win tonight. But tomorrow night, I win!"
- Fill up their necklace with "hugs" (squeeze it) and kisses for them to retrieve later.
- When they ask for "one more hug", respond with "I was just hoping you'd ask me that".
- With your family: hold a hug a few seconds longer than usual.
- With your family: give a really sincere, specific compliment about something/someone they treasure. For example, their child: "I noticed Emma bring over that toy Stephen liked last year. She notices people and has this generosity about her."

CARE OUT, CARE IN

Now that you've got saying "no" and insta-connects down, there's one final thing I want to share with you. Holidays are about being in the energy of care. The reason we want to do the parties and events and help is because we care. So, "care out"—care toward others—is higher during the holidays. To create balance, we also need to up the "care in"—self-care. I see self-care

as not just physical care but caring for all of you—your emotions, your internal experience, and your needs.

Now, let's be realistic, there isn't much time, so here are three insta-connects for connecting with yourself:

- Buy yourself a nice lotion, and when you use it, remind yourself that this is a little extra nurture into you as you give nurture out towards others.
- Instead of saying to yourself, "I need to make this work for the next two hours," when you are at an event that's important yet hard for you to be at, ask yourself, "Given that we're here, what do I need to enjoy the next two hours?"
- Let yourself feel your feelings. You're frustrated but don't think you should be? Express it playfully: "I'm annoyed that oranges are orange"; "I'm frustrated that this couch is comfy." Have fun with this one! You may be pleasantly surprised when your child chimes in with their own hysterical annoyances.

My hope is that these ideas allow you to not only navigate the holidays but also deepen your connection with yourself and those you love. After all, I think that's what we all want when we get together with our loved ones for the holidays.



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A PIECE OF PIE

Rachel reminds us that the festive season is the perfect time to get the kids involved in baking. It's a great chance to build bonds, teach practical math and life skills, and encourage healthy habits—and create delicious food!

Photo courtesy of the author



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.



Photo courtesy of the author

The end of the year brings family, parties, and lots of baking. Sometimes, all three are combined. This means children in the kitchen, which may or may not be as fun for you as it is for them. I got the idea to bake an apple pie for the first time and asked my daughter to help. Of course she wanted to. So there I was afterwards, recipe time doubled, kitchen looking like a snowstorm had hit it, and wondering if it was worth it.

It's always worth it. Introducing children to baking offers many benefits, ranging from physical, cognitive, and emotional gains to building healthy habits and life skills. Baking with children proves to be a handy tool for promoting healthy development, despite the stress of flour tornadoes and sticky fingers.

Fine motor skills and coordination

Baking with children enhances fine motor skills by strengthening the little muscles in their hands and fingers through tasks like measuring, kneading, and even cleaning up afterwards. These activities also improve hand-eye coordination and dexterity, which can help with their writing and functional tasks in daily life. Additionally, the sensory processing involved with handling ingredients is always a win; maybe

Jack Horner was on to something! We love fun learning.

Cognitive development

Baking introduces children to math and science in a fun, hands-on way. Weighing ingredients, counting eggs, and timing the oven practice basic math skills, while mixing and observing reactions, like dough rising, introduces scientific concepts. By adjusting recipes and measuring ingredients, children learn fractions, proportions, and arithmetic intuitively. Baking also encourages curiosity about science, offering a pressure-free environment where children experiment, observe results, and reinforce cognitive development while enjoying themselves and your company.

Emotional and psychological benefits

Whenever my daughter does anything in the kitchen, she ensures that everyone we meet knows about it. Allowing your children to join in kitchen activities offers emotional and psychological benefits for children, fostering creativity, patience, and a sense of accomplishment. Baking can give children a sense of control and boosts self-esteem as they

witness the results of their efforts. Additionally, baking with others promotes emotional bonding, communication, and teamwork, while creating lasting memories. My daughter wants to be included when we're cooking and as an added bonus, most of the time, she's interested in eating what we've made.

Healthy habits

Another baking benefit for kids is the increased awareness of what goes into their meals and their mouths. Children preparing food may have a more willing and positive attitude about trying more nutritious foods, encouraging healthier choices. We're in the process of planting a "winter vegetable" garden. Having my daughter plant the veg, watch them grow, then pick and use them for baking and cooking will hopefully reverse some of the poor eating habits I allowed during her toddler years. It's never too late to begin building healthy foundations.

Lifelong skills

I cook and bake several times a week. This is mainly due to the fact that my mom always invited me and my siblings into the kitchen. And if we weren't around for the



Photo by Julia Filirovska from Pexels

cooking, we were there to clean up afterwards. By the time we were pre-teens, we could whip up some eggs in the morning and noodles in the afternoon with no problem. Knowing how to bake equips children with life skills and fosters independence, as children learn to follow instructions, make

decisions, and manage their time. Also, understanding the importance of cleaning up helps with hygiene. These skills contribute to a sense of self-reliance.

Overall, baking with children offers amazing benefits that extend beyond the kitchen. It's an enriching

activity that nurtures children's overall development, helping them to build life skills and confidence that will help their future selves. So throw on that apron (or not), make some pie, and embrace the beautiful and beneficial mess of baking with the kids!

APPLE PIE

For this pie, I followed the School Night Vegan recipe below, adjusting a handful of ingredients. Be sure to check the website to view the full recipe, along with notes and comments. Also, some may wonder if this recipe is tasty for non-vegans. Trust me, you won't regret this! Top with your favorite ice cream, whipped cream, or just plain cream.

Equipment

- Large saucepan with lid
- Baking tray
- Large bowl
- Knives or a pastry cutter
- Measuring jug
- Spatula
- Rolling pin
- Oven
- 9-inch (23-cm) pie tin

Ingredients

Super flaky vegan pie crust
 360 g plain white (all-purpose) flour
 1 tablespoon caster (superfine) sugar
 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
 250 g vegan butter block type, fridge-cold
 2 tablespoons vodka or white vinegar, ice cold
 100 ml water, ice cold
 2 tablespoons soy milk or any plant milk
 2 tablespoons Demerara sugar
 Vegan apple pie filling
 2 kg baking apples
 Juice and zest of half a lemon
 190 g light brown sugar
 150 g granulated sugar
 5 tablespoons plain white flour
 Pinch flaky sea salt
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Abbreviated instructions

1. Prepare the filling!
2. Make the pastry.
3. Fill and seal the pie! I love doing a lattice top, but you can also just roll your pastry into a circle and top with a full layer. Just be sure to make steam holes.
4. Bake away! Because we pre-baked our pie filling, you'll see this pie doesn't take quite as long as others.

Full recipe

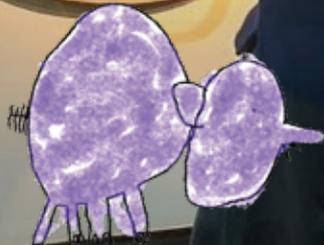
School Night Vegan (2022)
 Vegan Apple Pie by Richard Makin. schoolnightvegan.com/home/vegan-apple-pie/

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STRESS-FREE HOLIDAYS

Holidays shouldn't be stressful and with Farizaa's tips they won't be, leaving you plenty of time to focus on what really matters: family, friends, and fantastic memories.

Photo by Anastasia Shuraeva from Pexels

About the Author

Farizaa Sabreen is a journalist by day and writer by night. She believes that the simplest things in life are the ones that bring the most pleasure. When not writing, she enjoys traveling, photography and cooking. Her first book, a collection of short stories titled "Quest for Silver Linings", was published in 2023.



Photo by Nicole Michalou from Pexels

Holidays mean joy, celebration, and rejoicing with family and friends. However, holidays can also bring stress as preparations and festivities add a significant amount of chaos to our hectic lives. People often feel compelled to travel, attend holiday parties, and shop for gifts. As stress can affect our emotional and physical health, it's time to think outside the box by following these holiday stress reduction tips.

Start planning early and involve everyone

Write down everything you need to accomplish. Decide what has to be done first and prioritize it. Have a talk beforehand with your family members to set the guest list, menus, and activities for the party. Discover what matters most to you and your family. Some folks, for instance, don't really care about the cuisine, but they enjoy getting the whole family together to watch a movie or go for a short trip.

One of the biggest sources of stress around the holidays is feeling like you have too much to do. Accept as much responsibility as you can manage and enjoy; don't add to your workload, otherwise it can wear you out. By assigning chores to everyone, you can spread your workload and ensure that everyone feels involved. This could mean designating one person to decorate and another to wrap presents, or

it might mean inviting guests to contribute dishes to the dinner rather than cooking it all yourself. Alternatively, consider hiring outside caterers and cleaners to reduce the workload.

Make a budget

As money is a major source of stress, it's a good idea to make a budget and follow it. Parents could experience pressure to take out loans or utilize credit cards to pay for decorations, special attire, gifts, and other expenses. So it's wise to look for alternative strategies to cut back on costs. You could, for instance, exchange or borrow decorations from family and friends; make your own DIY Christmas decorations; and purchase items from thrift and secondhand stores. If you can't afford the pricey food at five-star hotels, you could plan a picnic in the park or arrange a potluck party. If you do go out to eat, you could encourage everyone to stay away from the expensive Christmas menus that many restaurants offer, and instead, visit a more affordable restaurant that offers a different type of cuisine.

When it comes to gifts, you could buy for children but not adults, or you could organize a Secret Santa among the adults. Gifts don't have to be expensive—you can find fantastic deals both online and in-store. You could even make your own gifts such as coupons, offer to watch the kids

for the evening, provide breakfast in bed, go to the movies, have a games night, or whatever you know the recipient would most appreciate. Or get a gift that the whole family can enjoy like a coffee maker, a box of chocolates, or a board game that everyone can play.

Ensure your well-being

Taking care of daily obligations while shopping and planning endlessly can be detrimental to your health. It's crucial to set and maintain sensible boundaries to decrease the likelihood of feeling stressed and overwhelmed. Also make an effort to maintain balance and take care of yourself by getting as much water as you can, eating nutritious snacks, and going to bed early during the holidays.

Disconnect from technology

It's important to take a break from technology, including social media, especially over the holidays. As well as being a distraction from spending time with your loved ones, scrolling can lead to stress as you see the highlights of other people's holidays and compare them to your own. Simple joys like sharing a cup of hot cocoa or going for a stroll in the fresh air should take the place of digital entertainment.

Here's to happy, healthy, and stress-free holidays!

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A HOLISTIC GUIDE TO REFLECTION FOR FAMILIES

As the year draws to a close, Ha Trinh reflects on what her family has learned and how they have grown, and guides us to do the same.



About the Author

Ha is a Vietnamese entrepreneur, educator, and mindfulness advocate who has been living and working abroad for over 11 years. She uses her personal journey, including overcoming ADHD, bullying, and racism, to inspire others. Ha is passionate about empowering women and families to thrive through mindfulness and self-discovery.





Photo courtesy of the author

As this year comes to an end, I reflect on how our family has evolved—not only over the past year but through our broader journey living abroad. Moving to a new house, watching Amelie lose her first teeth, and celebrating her first dance performance were special moments. But this year was about much more. I embraced my ADHD diagnosis and started my entrepreneurial journey, which has been both liberating and empowering. My husband thrived in his Web3 leadership role, and Amelie discovered her love for Vietnamese, transitioning from dance to language with grace and excitement.

THE KEY TO OUR GROWTH

The foundation for much of our growth has been mindfulness. It has helped us grow stronger, more resilient, and closer. As a family, we've learned to trust the process, lean into change, and appreciate each other's strengths. And in fact, mindfulness is not just a tool I use personally—it's become a way of life that inspires me to guide others on their own journeys and encourage them to reflect as they prepare for new adventures ahead.

A GUIDE TO REFLECTION

1. The big picture

Ask: Where have we been as a family this year? What key moments have we had?

Reflect: Reflecting on big moments helps connect the dots between where your family started and how you've grown. How have your key moments shaped you and your journey?

For me, embracing my ADHD diagnosis opened doors to understanding myself better. This year, my entrepreneurial journey allowed me to build something that aligns with my values. These transitions defined my path and shaped our family's growth.

Integrate: Create a "memory wall" at home where you display photos or mementos from key moments throughout the year. Use string or sticky notes to link memories to personal growth or lessons learned.

2. What have we given?

Ask: What did each of us contribute to our family and community? Did our

focus or priorities shift during the year?

Reflect: What effect have your contributions had?

This year, my husband's contributions stood out. His work in the Web3 space brought people together, while his focus shifted toward self-fulfillment and health. By prioritizing personal growth, he became more intentional in both his work and our family life. This shift in attention helped shape the way we support each other and the community around us.

Integrate: Use a "family contribution tree" where each leaf represents a contribution made by a family member. This visual can help everyone recognize the value of their efforts, whether big or small.

3. What have we gained?

Ask: Who supported us this year? What actions did we take for ourselves?

Reflect: How has the support we've received helped us to grow? What opportunities did we create with our actions?

Amelie's journey from dance to Vietnamese language shows the balance between external support and her own initiative. Her teachers encouraged her, but it was her excitement and willingness to try something new that led her to this transition. For me, I found new opportunities by connecting with communities that appreciate my values and strengths. We've all learned that while support from others is important, taking steps toward what excites and motivates us is what truly opens doors.

Integrate: Create a "support map" with each family member's name in the center. Use branches to show who supported them and how they created their own opportunities. This visual approach highlights how connections and self-initiative work together.

4. Gratitude for hardships

Ask: What challenges did we face?

Reflect: What lessons did we learn from our challenges? How did we grow stronger through them?

This year, I learned to reframe my ADHD diagnosis from a limitation to a source of strength. Additionally, living abroad for over a decade has not been without its hardships—overcoming bullying and racism were some of the most difficult challenges I've faced. Yet through these experiences, I found resilience and self-worth, learning to trust in my abilities and to let go of the expectations imposed by others. These challenges shaped my strength as a person and helped me grow professionally and personally.

Integrate: Create a "gratitude jar" where each family member writes down challenges they've faced and what they learned from them. At the end of the year, read these as a family to reflect on how hardships led to growth.

5. Agree on the next moves

Ask: What are our individual goals for next year?



Photo courtesy of the author

Reflect: As we look ahead, it's important to support each other's aspirations. How can we support each other in achieving our goals?

My husband's goal for the coming year is to live a more balanced life, focusing on health and fitness. As a family, we'll support him by encouraging healthy habits and creating space for his fitness routines. Knowing each other's goals helps us stay aligned and allows us to offer the support needed for personal growth.

Integrate: Create a "goal board" for each family member. Assign sections for short-term and long-term goals, and add stickers or notes of encouragement as progress is made. This visual reminder keeps everyone engaged in their personal journey while fostering a sense of support within the family.

6. Prepare for new goals

Ask: What strengths and resources do we have going into the new year?

Reflect: As a family, it's important to acknowledge the strengths we've built. Do these strengths point to any opportunities on the horizon?

My husband's leadership and consistency earned him trust and

recognition in his professional community. We have each cultivated resilience and resourcefulness, allowing us to face the challenges of the new year with confidence. Taking stock of what we've gained reminds us of our capacity to handle what's ahead.

Integrate: Have a "family inventory night" to write down your collective strengths, opportunities, and resources. Display these in a shared space so everyone can see what the family has to draw upon as they face new goals.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As we enter the new year, know that mindfulness and your family's strength will continue to guide you. Looking back on this year, I'm filled with gratitude for the courage I found in embracing my ADHD diagnosis and starting my entrepreneurial journey. My husband's dedication to leadership and Amelie's transition to learning Vietnamese reflect the growth we've experienced. We've learned the importance of trusting the process, supporting each other, and celebrating every step of the journey. And we feel ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities ahead.



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LOOKING BACK ON 2024

Joe decides to ignore Christmas and instead focus on the top ten things he's learned or can remember from 2024. Now if only he'd learned to count properly...



Photo by ambermb from pixabay



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.

I'm writing in October and it's hard to get into the festive spirit, plus it hardly seems like five minutes since I last discussed my Christmas memories and dreams. So, this year I'm going to ignore Christmas and instead give you my top ten reflections from the year past.

1. One child—tiring; two children—exhausting

The one thing I must remember from this year is the arrival of Alice, our lovely little daughter. Sadly though, she all too often lies forgotten, quietly staring at her toes, while Martin sucks up all the attention in the room. Where with one child we were just about able to give Marty all the focus he craves without turning into permanently angry, sleep-deprived monsters, with the addition of Alice, Martin is feeling abandoned and I'm getting ever more monstrous.

2. Hunger strikes—again

"Arggggh!" I scream. Has Marty jumped on my foot, poured water on the floor, or thrown one of his favorite toys out of the window? Has Alice vomited down my neck or leaked poop all over the floor? Almost certainly yes in both cases, but before I launch into a deeply satisfying and quite loud account of my children's many, many character flaws, it's worth considering if I'm hungry or not. Turns out most of my parenting rage is caused by my tiredness or hunger rather than Marty or Alice's actions. Not much I can do about the tiredness, but a quick cookie or slice of cheese on toast can do wonders for their behavior, or at least my reaction to it.

3. Nannies are the best

While my wife has been on maternity leave, we've spent nearly three months in the UK. It has been glorious, seeing family and relishing home foods, cooler weather, and the British countryside. But much as I've loved being back, the thing that has become clearest to me is that children are really, really hard work. Who knew?

With both of us off work, we've been just about able to get through each day, but unless a grandparent or gullible friend has come to visit, there hasn't been much time to relax. In fact, there hasn't really been much time for food or basic hygiene. My dreams of living in rural isolation are on hold until the children are old enough to amuse themselves; before then I want a nanny—maybe two!

4. Why? Why? WHY?

Although a valid question, this is not the why in "why did we ever think

children were a good idea?" Rather, it's the delightful conversational style of three-year-old Marty. Why listen to the answer when you can simply repeat the question until Daddy dives frantically for the cookie jar or starts using all sorts of loud and very interesting words? What a welcome relief it is to sit with Alice's delightful giggles and coos after a Marty interrogation. Curiosity is good, but perhaps (just ask the cat) it would be better in moderation. It seems hard to believe we spend so much time teaching children to talk when what we really want is for them to listen!

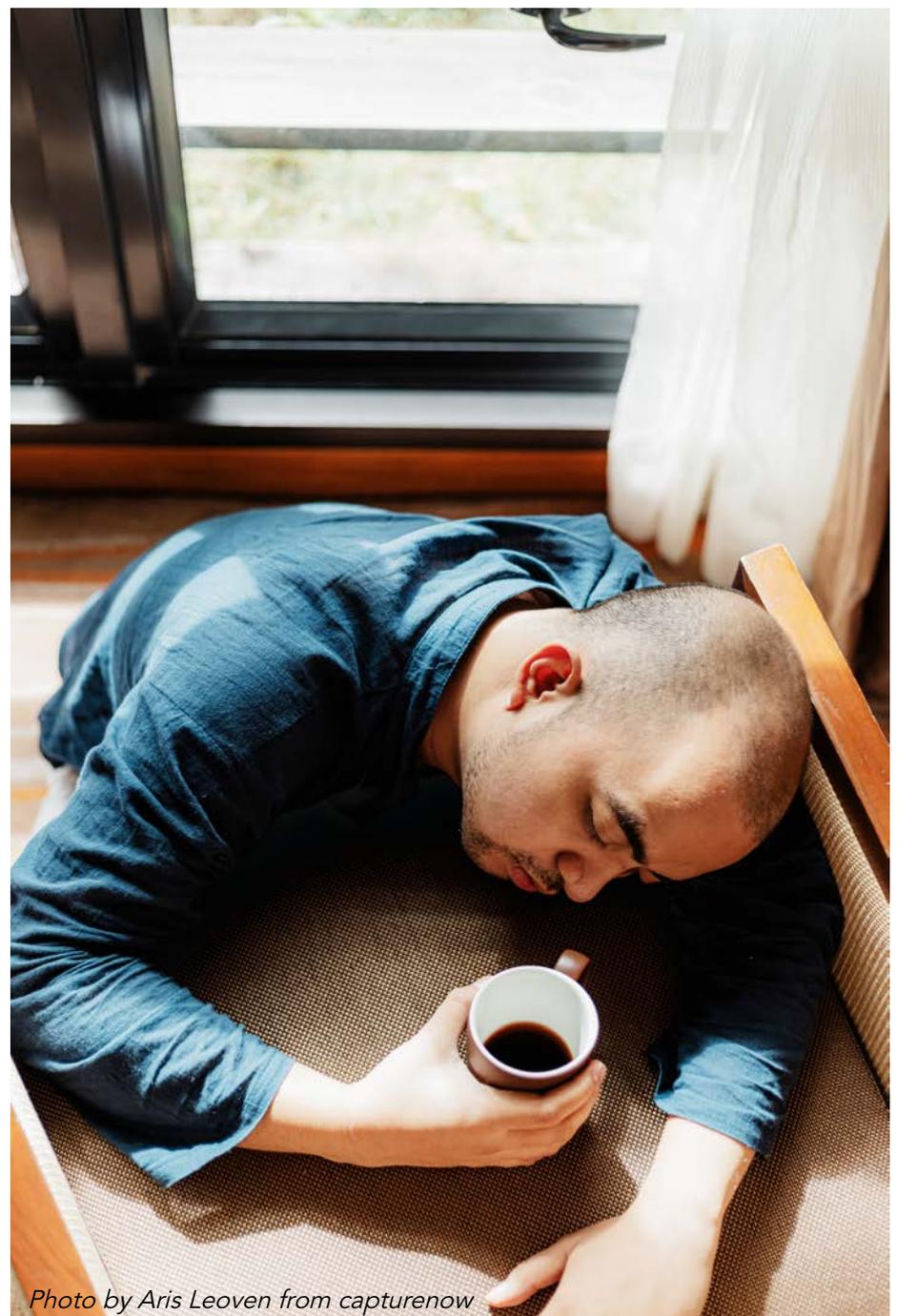


Photo by Aris Leoven from capturenow



5. Keeping it dirty

In an ideal world there would be no swearing. Obviously I intended not to curse in front of my children, but this year I've decided to give myself a break. If other people are going to drive so badly on my roads, if heavy weights are going to hurl themselves at my toes, if my wife and children are going to be so annoying, then swearing is inevitable. So I'm going to try and concentrate on enjoying my foul-mouthed outbursts and their cathartic benefits rather than feeling guilty. Plus, when schools complain about our children's potty mouths, we'll just claim it means something much nicer in another language, and deny any possibility that it's the fault of their permanently incensed father.

6. Scaling new heights

With a second child on the way, what I clearly needed was a new hobby. So this year I joined a group of dads who go climbing once a week. It's been a great excuse to get out of the house and a chance to talk about parenting with other stay-at-home dads. While this can feel like it's mainly me complaining about my family, as the other guys are all

irritatingly content with their home lives, it is great to get advice from dads who've already been through the baby and toddler stages—they've promised me it gets easier. Some gentle exercise, a bit of a chat, some grievances—more imagined than real—off my chest, and I'm refreshed to return to the parenting fray.

7. Wifely woes and horrible husbands

How can someone as competent, practical, and generally amazing as my wife be so bad at cutting bread? Two slices in and the loaf is scarcely usable. This is by no means the only nearly unforgivable failing of my wife. There is the constant hiding of things that I've left conveniently placed and easily found in the middle of the floor. The relentless instructions to not let Marty jump on the bed/climb out of the window/tip water on the floor or do any of the other fun little things that help us get through the day with only minimal risk or chance of structural damage to the house. Above all, there are these exhausting children she keeps leaving me with.

My realizations this year are that I should eat before thinking about how annoying my wife is, and that if I'm finding her annoying, how is she putting up with me? Someone who is in constant need of instruction, rarely tidies anything up, and is either eating or grumpy the whole time. On reflection I'm very lucky to have such a tolerant and patient wife. Now if only I was less annoying...

8. Overambition at its finest

As I come to the last of my top ten musings from 2024, the final lesson learned becomes clear: though I started ambitious, I have proven incapable of remembering more than seven things that have happened this year, so I end 2024 as I started it: a chronic underachiever.

I hope you've all had a great year and have a very merry Christmas.

Here I am!



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RUAMRUDEE 3



MINIMALISM MADE EASY: OUR FAMILY'S GUIDE TO YEAR-END CLEANING

Maintaining a clutter-free family home can be a challenge, but Jeannie and her husband, Ken, take an effective approach that keeps their space clear and the whole family happy.



Photo by Ron Lach from Pexels



About the Author

Jeannie is currently pursuing an honors degree in psychology with a focus on clinical applications. Prior to this, she was an acupuncturist specializing in fertility, stress management, and pain relief in Sydney for 12 years. With her unique blend of Eastern and Western therapeutic approaches and maternal perspective, as feature writer, Jeannie promises a valuable contribution to BAMBI Magazine.



Photo by O_Lypa from Getty Images

Every December, we have a monotonous but important tradition—spring cleaning the whole apartment. This tradition started off, surprisingly, with my husband. He has been a diligent and brutal spring cleaner since he was a teenager, and he loves minimalism—to the point where we lived with no television and no couch for a year because we didn't need them. It can be very frustrating but it's a quality that I admire in my husband, as it shows he doesn't need much in his life to be satisfied and he's an extremely tidy man.

My husband, Ken, is ruthless when it comes to cleaning out what he believes are unnecessary items in the house. He thinks that clearing out junk will not only make the apartment cleaner but also make us feel happier whenever we open typically messy areas, like closets and drawers. His philosophy probably sounds familiar, and so it should, because it's very similar to "Spark Joy" by KonMari, except his clearing out principles are based on practicality and functionality. So, in

this article, I will share my husband's cleaning and clearing routine that he has followed for 20 years.

Three categories

Ken's rule of thumb for spring cleaning is: if you haven't touched it for six months then it's time to chuck it out. Every year, he categorizes items into three piles:

- 1) still using;
- 2) haven't seen anyone touch it for six months;
- 3) looks like it has never been used.

Items that are still in use get cleaned, while items that haven't been touched in six months are packed in boxes and stored in a closet. If, after another six months, they haven't been touched, they are thrown away. There's no rummaging around in the box to see what we might need; instead, we ruthlessly trash the lot. Meanwhile, items that have never been used are immediately disposed of.

Whenever my husband sees an item that he doesn't recognize, he asks

me: "What is this for?" If my answers are along the lines of "I have no idea", the item goes straight to the trash. His logic is that if we don't know what the item is for and it has been untouched for six months, then it's taking up some of our precious space. Because my husband has been doing this for 20 years, the "untouched for six months" pile isn't very big, and this is a godsend since we live in an apartment with limited storage space.

Ken's spring cleaning routine is so ingrained in our lives that it has become second nature. Until we had our son anyway!

Decluttering when you have kids

Spring cleaning with a two-year-old is somewhat trickier since there are more treasured mementos to keep. Unfortunately, for my husband, his methods are still brutal, so we have moments when we keep moving items like gifted clothes and toys for Kai between the "still using" and "haven't touched for six months" piles. Eventually, my husband

gave in to my pleas to keep these treasured items, and they've been stored in a permanent keepsake box.

Other items of Kai's, such as clothes and shoes, get sorted into three piles: keep, throw out, or donate. We obviously throw out heavily stained clothing or broken toys. But clothing or toys that are still in good condition, we either pass on to our friends, or to our nanny, who then gives them to her friends' children.

A systematic approach

If you're feeling inspired and want to follow my husband's systematic approach to end-of-year cleaning, here it is:

1. Work room by room, taking out all the items.
2. Kitchen: throw out all expired products and keep note of how empty the packaging is. If it's relatively empty but expired, then throw out the expired item and put that product on your shopping list. Take note of regularly used items and put them on a monthly "stocktake list". This stocktake list is something to check every month, which is particularly handy for monthly sales, such as on Lazada.
3. Living room: take out all items and place them in three piles: "still using", "haven't touched in six months", or "throw out". Any items that look extremely worn or broken go in the throw-out pile. Any items that are frequently used, such as tissues, are placed on the monthly "stocktake list".
4. Bedroom: take all clothes out of the closet. Clothes immediately go into the "throw out" pile if they are too torn, or if you haven't worn them at all for the past year. If you haven't worn them for the past year, but you feel like you may wear them again over the next year, put them in a "six-to-twelve-month

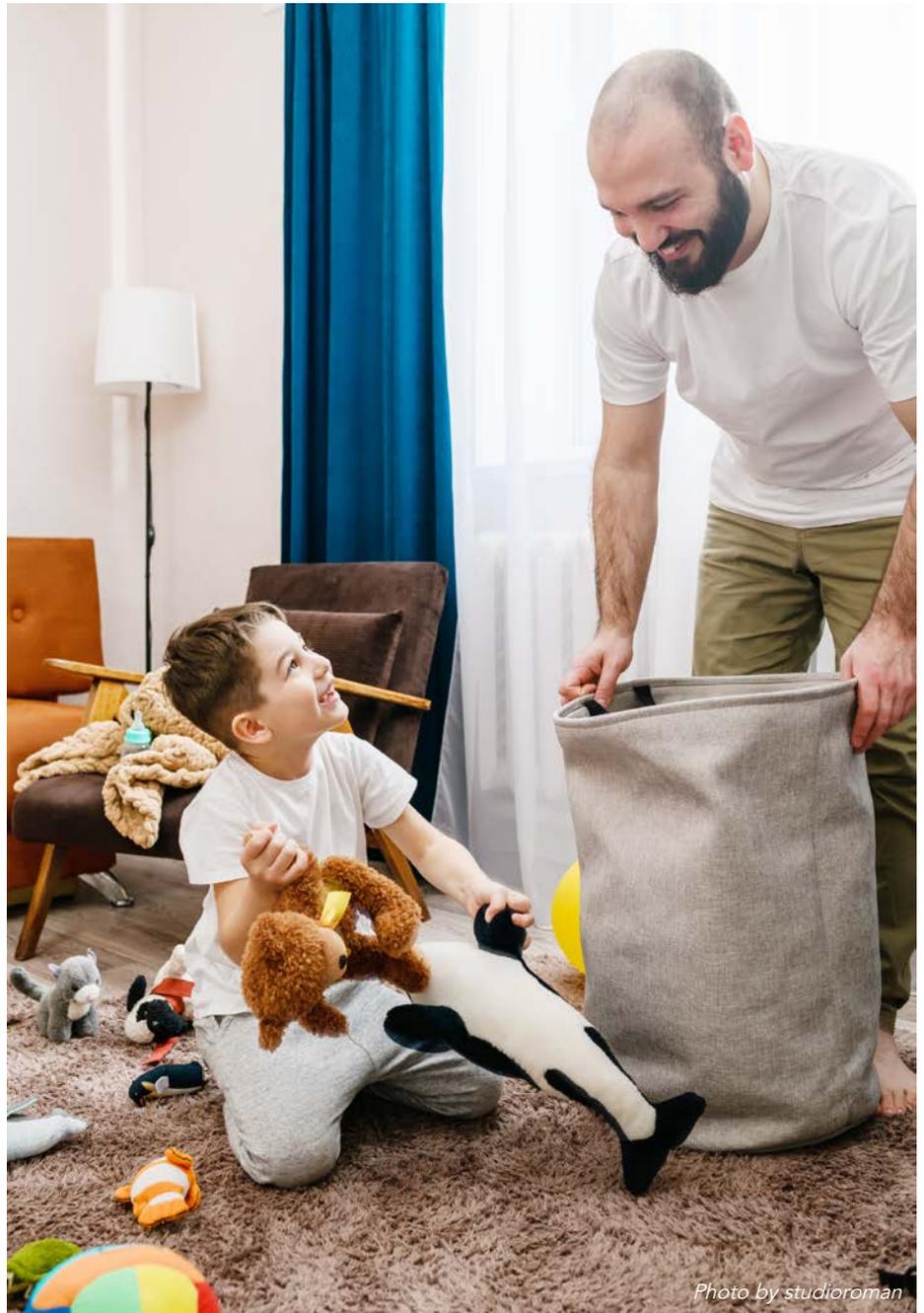


Photo by studioroman

- box". If you don't wear them in the next twelve months, then it's a sign they should be donated, sold, or thrown out. If you still wear the clothes on an occasional or everyday basis, then fold them neatly and put them back in the closet.
5. Bathroom: take all items out of the vanity and drawers. Again, discard all items that are expired or smell "off". My husband also throws out all unused hotel amenities that I have hoarded over the past year—which makes sense because I end up never using them and they always look

out of place in my bathroom drawers.

6. Kids' toys: throw out all broken toys. Donate toys that your kids haven't touched for the past year. Keep toys that they still play with.
7. Kids' bedroom(s): throw out all clothes that are too small and well-worn. Donate all good quality clothes that your kids have outgrown. Keep clothes that they still wear.

I hope your newly decluttered home brings you a sense of calm and cleanliness.



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DEFIANT CHILDREN—DISORDER OR NOT?

Defiance is common in children, but in some, persistent defiant behavior can create challenges for the whole family. Anna shares insight into when and why you might be dealing with oppositional defiant disorder and what you can do as a family to manage it.

Photo by Monstera Production from Pexels



About the Author

Anna works for New Counseling Service (NCS), the first and only licensed mental health center in the heart of Bangkok. 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.

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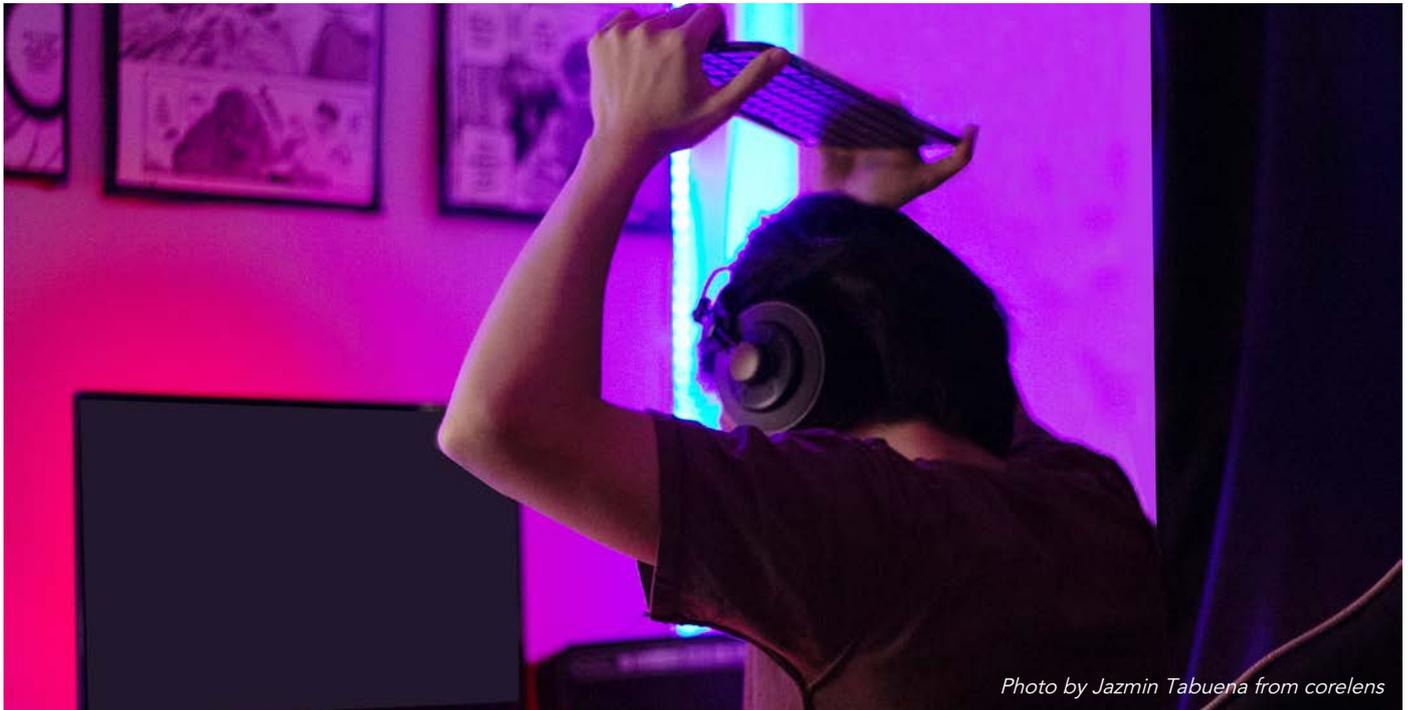


Photo by Jazmin Tabuena from corelens

Rebellious, defiant behaviors are normal in children and adolescents to a certain extent. I know I used to be very defiant towards authority figures when I was younger! However, defiant behavior may reach a point where it becomes difficult for parents to manage and may also affect the child's relationships and ability to function in certain environments or circumstances.

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is exactly what it sounds like. It is characterized by angry, hostile moods and defiant behaviors in children. Here a gray area emerges—many children tend to be defiant or have stages when they are very defiant, so what is classified as a disorder and what is not? And more importantly, at what stage should you seek professional support for yourself or your child?

Recognising ODD

Let's look at some of the facts to make a little more sense of this. ODD is characterized by a pattern of rebellious and hostile behavior towards adults, authority figures, or other people in the child's life. It typically develops around six to eight years old and is more common in boys than girls. ODD can range from mild to severe—some children

might only exhibit these behaviors in specific environments or with specific people, while others may exhibit them constantly.

As with all mental health conditions and struggles, symptoms need to be present for a certain amount of time in order for it to be classified as a disorder. The DSM-5, which is the American Psychiatric Association's "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders", states that there must be at least six months of angry, hostile, argumentative, and defiant moods and behaviors in order to fit the criteria for ODD. The persistence, intensity, and frequency of diagnostics vary for each age group. For example, the criteria for children younger than five would be exhibiting these behaviors on most days for at least six months. For children older than five, the criteria is at least once a week for at least six months. Other criteria, such as environmental and cultural factors, should also be taken into consideration. The DSM-5 is linked at the end of this article, for anyone interested in taking a closer look.

Causes of ODD

So what causes ODD? No definite causes have yet been determined, though there are two main theories:

1. Developmental theory: the child develops ODD due to struggles with becoming independent from their parents or main caretaker.
2. Learning/environmental theory: behaviors that correspond with ODD are either learned from parents and caretakers, or from the child's environment. They could also be a reaction to negative reinforcement, negligence, abuse, authoritarian parenting, and so on.

Another possible cause may be genetics—a child's natural temperament could make them more susceptible to angry moods and defiant behaviors. ODD tends to present alongside ADHD and other mood, anxiety, and conduct disorders, meaning that behaviors associated with ODD are often related to other mental health struggles.

Supporting children with defiant behaviors

The counselors at New Counseling Service (NCS) want to emphasize that labeling should not be the main priority, and that just because a child exhibits these behaviors does not necessarily mean they have ODD. What matters is that the child is given the support they need and that parents have the tools to assist

them, as well as getting support for themselves.

NCS counselors Dave and Savinee tell us that they have worked with many children who exhibit ODD behaviors, but that very few people are diagnosed with it in Thailand. A child does not need to have an ODD diagnosis to get professional support; as long as you feel that something is out of the scope of your ability to handle, or that your child might benefit from additional support, seeking help is always an option and always OK. Defiant behavior could be a result of many things, and it could be beneficial for the child to unpack that regardless of any labels or diagnoses.

Below are some therapeutic modalities that are often used to treat ODD or related behaviors:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps the child learn how to control impulsive, angry, or hostile behaviors and regulate their emotions and how they respond to others.
- Family therapy: if parents or caretaker(s) are the main target of the child's hostile and defiant behaviors, family therapy could help the child learn how to communicate effectively with their family.
- Group therapy: if the child's hostile and defiant behaviors are mostly directed at their peers, group therapy could help the child learn how to interact with others.



- Medication is not used to treat ODD, but it could be used if the child also has ADHD, anxiety, or other mood disorders in which medication is helpful.

Effective methods also depend on a variety of factors such as age and specific behaviors and circumstances.

You might be wondering—do these defiant behaviors usually go away? The answer is yes. Most behaviors associated with ODD are resolved within a few years, as these behaviors are common and expected in children and adolescents. However, they could persist in some cases, mostly where ODD behaviors are correlated with other mood or conduct disorders. It isn't always possible to tell whether something will go away on its own or how long it will take, so as long

as you feel that your child would benefit from external support, therapy is always an option.

As the current hypothesis is that defiant behaviors are a result of developmental or environmental factors, there are things you can practice at home to help your children cope with and regulate their emotions. Setting a healthy example of anger management, speaking to them calmly, and immersing them in a positive and loving environment is always a good idea. Remember that each child is unique and has unique circumstances, so the same thing might not work for every child.

Finally, I want to emphasize once more that defiant behaviors do not necessarily mean that a child has ODD; the focus is best placed on methods of support rather than labeling.

Further Reading

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Oppositional Defiant Disorder Resource Centre (2024) Frequently Asked Questions. aacap.org/AACAP/Families_Youth/Resource_Centers/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Oppositional_Defiant_Disorder_Resource_Center/FAQ.aspx

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FOOD FOR SLEEP

Sleep, glorious sleep—there's nothing quite like it! But did you know that how you fuel your body affects how you sleep? With the help of dietitian Keren, Sheena explores the connection between good nutrition and great quality sleep.

Photo by Cleyder Duque from Pexels



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.



Photo by Monstera Production from Pexels

The end of the year is a natural time for reflection and planning. This makes it the perfect time to consider lifestyle changes you may want to make in the new year for better energy and vitality.

For new moms especially, sleep and nutrition can often take a backseat as the focus shifts entirely to the baby. While that's understandable, we also need to prioritize the mother's health. To explore this vital topic, I sat down with Keren Granit, a registered dietitian passionate about improving health through personalized nutrition. Keren shared her insights on how small dietary and lifestyle changes can make a significant impact on a mom's energy levels, sleep quality, and overall well-being.

The importance of sleep

Sleep is the foundation of everything. It's not just about rest—it's about the body's internal processes that are crucial for physical and mental recovery. Hormonal balance, tissue repair, and even

bone health are maintained while we sleep. For new moms, who often face fragmented sleep schedules, understanding how nutrition can affect sleep quality becomes even more important.

Nutrition and sleep quality

What we eat and when we eat have a direct impact on our ability to sleep well. Eating a heavy meal late in the evening, especially one high in fried or oily foods, can cause discomfort and heartburn, making it difficult to fall asleep. On the flip side, under-eating can lead to energy dips, hunger pangs, or low blood sugar levels that can interrupt sleep.

The key to better sleep is balance. Moms should focus on having well-rounded meals that include complex carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats. This combination helps stabilize blood sugar levels and prevents energy crashes that can leave you feeling hungry or jittery.

For dinner, think whole grains, lean

protein, and healthy fats—a meal that's filling, but not heavy. Foods rich in vitamins and minerals like magnesium (which supports muscle relaxation) and vitamin B-complex (which helps regulate the nervous system) can also play a role in improving sleep quality. Dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and avocados are great sources of these nutrients. Additionally, it's important to time meals carefully. Try to eat your last meal at least three hours before bedtime to allow your body enough time to digest. For those nighttime hunger pangs, opt for light, high-protein snacks like yogurt with nuts, a hard-boiled egg with avocado, or tahini—foods that provide satiety without spiking blood sugar levels.

Hydration, hormones, and sleep

Hydration plays an essential role in regulating sleep, largely through its impact on hormones. Our bodies are mostly made up of water, and staying hydrated is crucial for various metabolic processes, including hormone regulation. If you're dehydrated, it can disrupt the



Photo by Miriam Alonso from Pexels

hormonal balance that helps your body wind down and prepare for rest.

During breastfeeding, staying hydrated is even more essential, as the body adjusts fluid levels to produce milk. However, staying hydrated without disrupting sleep is a delicate balance. Drink water consistently throughout the day, but try to stop about an hour before bedtime to minimize nighttime bathroom trips.

The impact of caffeine and alcohol

Caffeine and alcohol are two stimulants that can have a big impact on sleep quality. While caffeine helps with alertness during the day, it stays in your system for hours and can disrupt sleep if consumed too late. To support better rest, try to limit caffeine consumption in the afternoon and avoid it entirely after 3 or 4pm.

Alcohol, though it might initially make you feel drowsy, can interfere with the quality of your sleep. Your sleep cycle later in the night is disrupted as your body metabolizes the sugar in alcohol, leading to broken sleep. If you enjoy an occasional drink, try to consume it earlier in the evening and in moderation to minimize its impact on sleep.

Emotional eating and sleep

Emotional eating is a common issue many moms face, especially when sleep-deprived. After a long, exhausting day, it's easy to turn to food for comfort. Emotional eating may provide temporary relief, but it can lead to unhealthy eating patterns and further disrupt sleep. One way to address emotional eating is through self-compassion. Acknowledge the challenges you've faced and be gentle with yourself. Instead of immediately reaching for food, pause and ask yourself what

else might help you unwind? A walk, a hobby, or even a few minutes of reflection could serve as healthier alternatives.

Awareness is key to breaking the cycle of emotional eating. Recognize when this habit is affecting your well-being, and take small steps to address it. Sometimes, reaching out for support from a nutritionist or therapist can help identify the root causes of emotional eating and provide tailored solutions.

Track your habits: the power of a food journal

One of the best ways to gain awareness of your eating habits and make small improvements is by keeping a simple food journal. Keren encourages all her clients to track their meals because it provides valuable data to identify areas for improvement. This doesn't need to be fancy—just jot down what you eat throughout the day for a few days.



Photo by Polina Kovaleva from Pexels

By tracking your meals and snacks, you'll start to notice patterns in your food intake that you might otherwise overlook. A food journal provides the data you need to make small, actionable changes. You can start by adjusting portion sizes, reducing certain foods, or eating at more consistent times. This kind of self-awareness makes it easier to gradually improve your diet, which in turn supports better sleep.

The benefits of regular blood tests

Prioritize mindful eating and regular blood tests (at least annually) to maintain health and improve sleep. These tests can detect common nutrient deficiencies in new moms, such as low vitamin D, B12, or iron, which often impact sleep quality. Regular testing offers two key benefits:

- Track health changes over time: This allows you to catch potential issues early.

- Gain insights into your nutritional needs: For example, if a blood test reveals low iron or B12, adjust your diet or take supplements accordingly.

This small investment can significantly impact your energy levels and long-term health.

Small changes, big results

For new moms, the idea of overhauling your nutrition might seem daunting, but starting with small, consistent changes can make a big difference. Start with meal timing or focus on eating a balanced meal at dinner. Once that becomes a habit, you can gradually introduce other healthy changes. Consistency is key as small changes can lead to big improvements over time.

Final thoughts

In today's busy world, it can feel overwhelming to balance nutrition

and sleep, especially for new moms. But treating sleep like a process and giving it the attention it deserves can make a significant difference. Just as we prepare our bodies for the day ahead, we must also prepare for a restful night.

As Keren wisely said during our conversation, "Going to sleep should be a process, not just switching off the lights and hoping to fall asleep. People obsess over their morning routine, but a great day starts with how you prepared for sleep the night before. The small steps you take in your nutrition and sleep habits today will ripple into how you feel tomorrow. It's about setting the stage for how you show up in your life—as a parent, a partner, and an individual."



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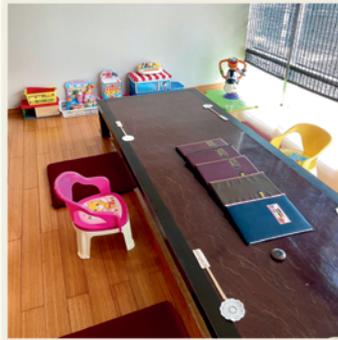
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The views expressed in the articles in this magazine are not necessarily those of BAMBI committee members and we assume no responsibility for them or their effects.

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