



Advent calendars have a way of producing both excitement and anxiety for me. As a child, I loved the anticipation of the chocolatey countdown but as a busy mom, it makes me panic!

Right after Remembrance Day, comes the familiar pressure of preparing for the "perfect Christmas". Finding the right gifts, coordinating decorations, preparing delicious treats, creating unique crafts, flamboyant lights, exciting activities, entertaining, school concerts, Christmas outfits, family time, travelling to relatives, staying within a budget, and on and on goes the pressure. It causes a frantic tornado of **red** and **green** swirling around my brain. I feel like I want to skip it all and go on a solo trip to Mexico!

As the Student Support Facilitator, I frequently see evidence of higher levels of stress (good and bad) with many students (and staff!). Christmas can be a difficult time with shared parenting, health concerns, grief, loss, financial difficulties, job loss, family stress, etc.

Sometimes the "happiest time of the year" is nothing but dread, fear and anxiety. For many children, the structure and predictability of the school day, as well as not seeing teachers and friends for two weeks can be frightening. This is all more the reason to PAUSE, BREATHE and REFLECT.

Christmas is so much more than presents, decorations and entertainment. Take time this holiday season to focus on the gifts that you have been given that are not under the tree. Let's be intentional on building and celebrating the gift of relationships with those in our lives: big and small, young and old. If we have learned anything from these past 2 years, it is that family and friends are really what is most important.



This article was written by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to promote wellness and success in school. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 23 years and is a mother to 4 children; 2 in high school and 2 in university.