

# Holiday Tools #1: A Hot Chocolate Break



Each Tuesday during the winter holiday season, I'll be posting suggested tools – social and emotional tools – to help achieve peace and joy in the midst of the hustle and bustle. These should add to your sense of calm. And they should be simple enough to incorporate into even the busiest holiday schedule. Here's the first of the winter holiday tools.

## **For Your Children: Hot Chocolate Breathing**

Last winter, I learned this simple technique to use with kids

from a teacher and have utilized it for myself and E ever since. It's particularly helpful during the winter holiday season. Deep breathing, or abdominal breathing, reduces anxiety and fatigue and can increase overall health. During the month of December, whether you are preparing for Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, the Winter Solstice or any other celebration, it can be a time of high anxiety for both you and your children. So to begin this month of holiday tools, I offer you a simple practice to deal with the emotional ups and downs that often accompany this time of year.

Practice hot chocolate breathing with your children at the beginning of the season at a time when all is calm. Pretend to hold your hot cup of cocoa in both hands in front of you. Breathe in deeply the aroma of the chocolate. And then blow out to cool it in preparation for drinking. Do this to the count of five to give your child practice. Then, look for chances to do it daily. Children will hopefully enjoy the practice and your whole family will benefit from the addition of a stress management tool in your daily routine.

Post this picture on your refrigerator or on a family bulletin board as a reminder. Perhaps your children will become familiar enough with the practice that they will request a "hot chocolate" break?

**For You: Deeper Breathing**

Most of us are in a pattern of shallow breathing from the chest. In our busy days, it's difficult to remember to breathe deeply from the abdomen. You can use cues in your daily life to remind yourself about simply taking deep breathes. Consider it a gift to yourself to help you manage the stress of the season.

1. Use the hot chocolate breathing with your kids and you will benefit too!
2. When you go outside at any point in the day, take deep breaths of fresh air.
3. When you open the refrigerator or any door in the house, use it as a reminder to take a deep breath.
4. When you make physical changes from sitting to standing, from standing to sitting, use it as a reminder to take deep breaths.
5. Keep an essential oil in a tissue on your desk (eucalyptus or peppermint both will open up your airways) to encourage breathing in the aroma.
6. If your belly either aches or calls to you in hunger, use it as a reminder to breath from your abdomen.
7. And if you feel stress rising in you, use it as a reminder to breathe.

We can all use more stress management techniques to help us deal with the competing demands of our parenting role, the needs of our household and other responsibilities in our lives. Though this practice will only require a little thinking and one minute each day, it has the potential to positively impact the quality of your holiday season.