

“Is This Normal?”

A Gentle Emotional Check-In
for Parents After the Holidays





A Gentle Introduction

January can feel different.

For many families, this month arrives quietly — after excitement, gatherings, breaks in routine, and a lot of emotional energy. You might notice your child feeling more sensitive, more tired, more irritable, or harder to soothe.

You might notice yourself feeling the same way. This doesn't mean something is wrong. It doesn't mean you missed something or need to fix anything right now. January is often a settling month — a time when bodies and emotions are finding their way back to steadier ground after a lot of change.

This short resource is simply a check-in.

A place to pause, notice, and breathe — without diagnosing, planning, or rushing ahead.

You're not behind.

And you don't have to figure everything out today.

Warm Regards,

Michael

What Many Parents Notice in January

After the holidays, many parents notice subtle shifts in their children — and sometimes in themselves, too.

This often looks like:

- Big feelings showing up more quickly
- Lower frustration tolerance
- More tears, irritability, or emotional reactions
- Increased clinginess or need for reassurance
- Pulling back, seeming quieter, or wanting more space
- Resistance as routines return
- Fatigue that lingers longer than expected

For some children, these changes are obvious.

For others, they're quiet and easy to miss.

None of this automatically means something is wrong.

It often means bodies and emotions are still recalibrating after a season of excitement, disruption, and extra stimulation.

Many families notice these patterns ease as January unfolds — especially when things are allowed to settle at their own pace.

Why This Makes Sense

January often follows a stretch of heightened stimulation.

There may have been:

- Changes in routine
- Extra social time or time away from home
- Later bedtimes
- More excitement, anticipation, or emotion than usual

Even when these experiences are positive, they ask a lot of the nervous system. When things slow down again, bodies and emotions don't always shift back immediately.

Instead, they may:

- stay more reactive for a while
- need extra reassurance or rest
- have a harder time with transitions and expectations

This isn't a setback.

It's a recalibration.

Many children — and adults — move through this phase as their systems return to steadier rhythms.

Nothing needs to be rushed.

Support often looks less like fixing, and more like allowing things to settle gently over time.

What Usually Doesn't Help

When children seem more emotional or unsettled, it's natural for parents to want to make things better quickly. Many well-intended responses come from care — and still don't always land the way we hope during this phase.

This often includes:

- Rushing feelings away
- Trying to “fix” emotions immediately
- Offering repeated reassurance that doesn’t seem to stick
- Pushing positivity or logic before feelings settle
- Over-explaining or asking too many questions in the moment

These responses aren't wrong.

They just don't always match what a child's nervous system needs right now.

When emotions are running high, explanations and solutions can feel overwhelming — even when they're true and kind.

Often, children don't need emotions to disappear. They need space for them to move through — with steady presence alongside.

This page isn't about blaming, and definitely is not suggesting you start doing things perfectly.

It's simply an invitation to notice what may add pressure, even unintentionally, during a settling season.

What Helps Most Right Now

During a settling season, support often looks quieter than we expect. What tends to help most right now is less about doing more — and more about softening the pace.

Many families find it helpful to focus on:

- Predictability over productivity

Keeping routines simple and familiar can feel regulating, even if everything isn't back to "normal" yet.

- Connection before correction

Staying close, listening, or sitting alongside often helps more than fixing or explaining.

- Slower transitions

Allowing extra time to shift between activities can reduce friction for everyone.

- Rest — physical and emotional

Earlier bedtimes, quiet time, or fewer demands can support nervous systems as they recalibrate.

- Letting feelings move through

Emotions don't need to be solved to pass. Being present is often enough.

These supports don't require perfection. They're small, steady ways of creating safety while things settle.

Even one gentle adjustment can make a difference.

A Simple Parent Check-In

You don't need to change anything to use this page.

It's simply a pause — a moment to notice without judgment.

You might gently reflect on:

- When do emotions seem to show up most easily right now?
- Are there certain times of day that feel harder or more tender?
- What seems to help things settle, even a little?
- Where might slowing down ease pressure — for your child, or for you?

There are no right answers.

This isn't about tracking or fixing.

It's about noticing patterns with kindness, and letting that awareness guide your next small choice — if and when you're ready.

Sometimes, understanding what's happening is enough to create relief.



When Extra Support Can Be Helpful

For many families, this settling phase passes with time and gentle support.

Sometimes, though, it can be helpful to check in with extra support — not because something is wrong, but because guidance can make things feel steadier.

You might consider reaching out if:

- Big feelings feel intense or frequent over an extended period
- Daily routines become consistently hard to manage
- Your child seems stuck in distress rather than gradually settling
- You're feeling unsure, overwhelmed, or depleted as a parent

Seeking support doesn't mean you've missed something.

It doesn't mean things are getting worse.

It simply means you're noticing that extra perspective or reassurance could help.

Support can look many different ways — a conversation with a trusted professional, a school support check-in, or a space to talk things through without pressure.

If you ever find yourself wondering whether support might be helpful, that curiosity alone is enough reason to ask.

There is no deadline for deciding.

A Reassuring Closing Note

January is a settling month.

There is no finish line to reach, and no timeline you need to follow.

If things feel uneven right now, that doesn't mean something is wrong. It often means bodies and emotions are still finding their rhythm again.

You're allowed to move slowly. You're allowed to pause.

And you're allowed to ask for support — or simply let things unfold for a bit longer.

You don't have to decide anything today.

About the Author

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Michael Kiel is a licensed professional counselor who works with children, teens, and families. His work is grounded in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), behavior analysis, positive psychology, and family systems-informed care, and the belief that emotional growth happens best when pressure is reduced and support is steady.

He created Mindful Living Resources to offer families tools that are practical, gentle, and usable in everyday life.

References

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