

Bringing joy to the holiday season

For the past two years I have been a scrooge in December. As a mother, wife and perfectionist, December is the time when I, like many other women are overwhelmed by the tasks at hand; putting up the decorations, selecting and wrapping all or most of the gifts for immediate and extended family, arranging the family travel or visit schedule and keeping track of the many activities and events that happen this month. I have grumbled through December, complaining about my burdens and snapping at my husband and children along the way.

This is not the image or memory that I want my children to have of me or of this time of year. In the book Unplug the Christmas Machine-A Complete Guide to Putting Joy Back into the Season (Robinson & Staeheli, 1991), the authors list four things that children really want for Christmas (or any holiday occasion):

1. A relaxed and loving time with the family.
2. Realistic expectations about gifts.
3. An evenly paced holiday season.
4. Reliable family traditions.

How can we give these four things to our children? We must start by looking inward. We must find a way to simplify this time of year for ourselves so that we can project to our children a sense of calmness, peace and love.

- Begin by eliminating some things from our “to do” lists. (Our houses don’t have to be spic and span, we don’t have to attend every community holiday event or party and we don’t have to buy or make gifts for everyone we know.)
- Set firm priorities to give your children the attention they need.
- Talk with your children about their gift expectations. Plan a special family activity that children can look forward to after opening gifts.
- Limit commercial TV time. TV commercials have a powerful influence on children’s toy expectations.
- For babies and very young children who don’t yet have expectations for holidays, decide now what you want your children to expect during the holidays.
- Holiday store decorations and commercials begin at Halloween. Kids have weeks to build up their expectations and then it’s all over in an hour. Within your home, you can curtail this by limiting your holiday activities and decorations to closer to the holiday.
- Our holiday traditions do more than anything else to instill fond memories in our children. Keep them and value them, and our children will too.

Here’s hoping that we can all bring a sense of joy to our children this holiday season!
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