

Parents Page

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I WISH WE COULD PUT UP SOME OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT IN JARS AND OPEN A JAR OF IT EVERY MONTH.
~ HARLAN MILLER

MAKING THE HOLIDAYS LESS MATERIALISTIC

KIDS HEALTH.ORG

The “gimmies” are all around us during the holiday season. It can be hard for kids — and parents — to look beyond all of the product-driven hoopla and remember what the holidays are really about.

It's not the gifts but what's behind them that's important — the spirit of giving. Help your kids learn the fun of giving. Giving back is not only a chance to help others, it's also one of the biggest gifts someone can give themselves.

Here are ways to curb materialism in your kids and reinforce the real reason for the season:

1. TEACH KIDS TO QUESTION MARKETING MESSAGES

TV commercials and advertising target kids of all ages. And everything looks ideal, like something they simply have to have. It all sounds so appealing — often, so much better than it really is.

This fosters unrealistic expectations and can lead to disappointment. After imagining their “wish list” items all around them, it's hard for reality to measure up when they actually open their gifts.

Explain to your kids that commercials and other ads are designed to make people want things they don't necessarily need. And these ads are often meant to make us think that these products will make us happier somehow. Talking to kids about what things are like in reality can help put things into perspective.



2. FOCUS ON FAMILY TRADITIONS

Traditions that focus on family or friends can be a great way to put meaning back into the holidays. Talk about which family traditions your family loves the most.

Find out what the holidays mean to others. Have your kids talk to a grandparent, parent, uncle, or aunt about how they spent the holidays growing up.

Build some new traditions. If you don't have any family traditions, it's never too late to start.

3. TEACH KIDS TO GIVE OF THEMSELVES

Volunteerism, especially around the holidays, offers an ideal opportunity for families to have fun and feel closer to each other at the same time. Community Service helps show kids that giving your time, effort, and kindness is more rewarding than just expecting to receive lots of presents.

Also, if volunteering begins at an early age, it can become part of your kids' lives — something they just want to do. It can teach them:

That one person can make a difference. A wonderful, empowering message for kids is that they are important enough to have an impact on someone or something else.

The benefit of sacrifice. By giving up a toy to a less fortunate child, a child learns that sometimes it's good to sacrifice. Cutting back on recreation time to help others reinforces that there are important things other than ourselves and our immediate needs.

Tolerance. Working in community service can bring kids and teens together with people of different backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, ages, and education and income levels. They'll likely find that even the most diverse individuals can be united by common values.

To be even more appreciative of what they have. By helping others who aren't as fortunate, kids can better see all the remarkable things to be grateful for in their own lives.

Choose to help an organization or group that fits with your family's values and the things you believe in:

Sponsor another family in need or purchase some presents for less fortunate children.

Let your kids pick out and wrap the gifts themselves.

Talk to your local animal shelter. Many distribute staples like pet food to low-income pet owners over the holidays and need volunteers to help.

Give back to the elderly in your area. Help out at a nursing home; visit with older people who could use a little extra joy and company around the holidays; bring gifts or meals to those who are homebound; or lend a hand to elderly neighbors with decorating, cooking, or wrapping presents.

4. TEACH KIDS TO CONSIDER GIVING GIFTS OF TIME.

For example, their grandmother may welcome their help in learning how to use a computer program. Or their little sister may want to learn how to knit. Have family members create special gift certificates (e.g., “two free car washes,” “five free specially prepared meals,” “10 free loads of laundry,” etc.). These days, when everyone's so stretched, a gift of time can be more meaningful than one that costs big bucks.

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/holidays-materialistic.html#>

5. BE A GOOD HOLIDAY ROLE MODEL

Show your kids that the holidays can be joyous and fulfilling, not just a stress-ridden time that revolves around marathon shopping trips. Emphasize early on that it's not about tons of presents, but giving and receiving a few heartfelt gifts.

By starting early with traditions that emphasize the true meaning of the holidays and the caring thoughts behind gift giving, you can help to mold your kids' perspectives on the holiday season and what it means to both give and receive all year long.

We are told that Christmas should be the happiest time of year, an opportunity to be joyful and grateful with family, friends and colleagues. Yet, according to the National Institute of Health, Christmas is the time of year that people experience a high incidence of depression. One North American survey reported that 45% of respondents dreaded the festive season.

Why? Is the Grinch in full force during the season? Is it because of the dark winter weather that increases the incidence of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)? Certainly those may be some reasons, but it appears to have more to do with unrealistic expectations and excessive self-reflection for many people.

For some people, they get depressed at Christmas and even angry because of the excessive commercialization of Christmas, with the focus on gifts and the emphasis on “perfect” social activities. Other get depressed because Christmas appears to be a trigger to engage in excessive self-reflection and rumination about the inadequacies of life (and a “victim” mentality) in comparison with other people who seem to have more and do more. Still others become anxious at Christmas because of the pressure (both commercial and self-induced) to spend a lot of money on gifts and incur increasing debt.

Other people report that they dread Christmas because of the expectations for social gatherings with family, friends and acquaintances that they'd rather not spend time with. And finally, many people feel very lonely at Christmas, because they have suffered the loss of loved ones or their jobs.

So what should you do, if you're among those who get depressed at Christmas? Mental

The Christmas season has become a difficult time for many people in our society. For those of us who don't have difficulties at this time of year, it's an opportunity to reach out to those who become depressed. For those who are depressed, it's an opportunity to take action to think, feel and act in ways that breaks free from the past.

CHRISTMAS IS NOT A TIME NOR A SEASON, BUT A STATE OF MIND. TO CHERISH PEACE AND GOODWILL, TO BE PLENTHOUS IN MERCY, IS TO HAVE THE REAL SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS.
~ CALVIN COOLIDGE

CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTIONS: TO YOUR ENEMY, FORGIVENESS. TO AN OPPONENT, TOLERANCE. TO A FRIEND, YOUR HEART. TO A CUSTOMER, SERVICE. TO ALL, CHARITY. TO EVERY CHILD, A GOOD EXAMPLE. TO YOURSELF, RESPECT.
~ OREN ARNOLD

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