Holidays with children work best when everyone’s expectations are realistic. This festive time is more enjoyable if you keep the pace of activities relatively slow, don’t stray too far from daily routines, and remember your own values, aligning activities and purchases with those values. Keep in mind that children remember experiences and relationships far longer than they remember material items!

Taming the “Gimmies”

Children of all ages fill their heads, and their parents’ ears, with countless ideas of all the gifts they want. Here are some coping tips for weary parents confronting these gift lists:

- Create a “wish book” with a limited number of pages (such as 5). Your child pastes pictures of desired items in the book, with one wish per page.
- Talk realistically with older children about your financial constraints so that you can work out gift solutions together. This decreases their disappointment and your debt.
- Limit TV and/or tune into stations with fewer or no advertisements. Also, consider renting holiday videos without commercial messages.
- After your children create their “want” lists, suggest that they make a “give” list of possible presents they can give to others.

All this said, keep your own expectations realistic about just how much “taming of the gimmies” you can achieve. We live in a media-saturated culture where children, and adults, can’t escape intense commercialism. Do what you can, and exercise as much patience as possible.

Holiday Activities with Children

Keeping hold of the deeper meaning of the holidays is a tough task. Help children connect with their spiritual selves by offering alternatives to thinking only about buying and getting for themselves.

- Encourage children to make, not buy, gifts. Working on a project in secret adds to the excitement of surprises and heightens the joy of giving.
- Give children the gift of time. Adults say their fondest holiday memories are of fun activities with a caretaker, such as making holiday food or decorations.
- Every year, ask each child to make a holiday decoration. It’s fun to reflect together on how their artwork develops from year to year. Display these in a special place.
- Plan a special trip to create a tradition: see lights, attend a play, a concert, religious services.
- “Adopt” a needy child through one of the many organizations that do such work, and allow your children to participate in corresponding with the child and organization.
- Encourage family members to write short notes of appreciation for one another or about the meaning of the holiday. Open the notes at a special time, separate from the general gift-giving frenzy.
- When families are blended/step, growing, or changing, ask your children to plan how they would like to spend their time.

Happy Holidays

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