

Managing Gift Expectations this Holiday Season

With visions of shiny new toys dancing in their heads, children can easily get carried away with the “gimmies” during the holidays. For tips on how to manage holiday gift expectations, read on and check out our links below for further information.

Making a List and Checking it Twice

Are your kids making a list, and checking it twice? Is it a long list, filled with expensive toys and gadgets? Are they writing letters to Santa, comparing notes with friends, hoping for Xboxes, ipods, or Wii's? Are they watching commercials on television, at the movies, on billboards about the latest, greatest trendy toy?

While gift giving can be fun, and the holiday season is meant to be festive, it can be tiring – and expensive – if the focus of our holiday season is too much on getting. To help you manage your child's gift expectations around the holiday season, it's a good idea to start talking to your child early about realistic expectations for receiving gifts. If you talk about these expectations now, it might prevent some tears later.

One thing you can do to help them temper your child's expectations of gifts and avoid disappointment, is to clearly explain that a wish list is not a list of items he can expect to receive. It's okay to say, “you may not get everything on your list. It's great to let me know the kind of things you like this year. I can tell your aunts and uncles if they ask me what to get you. But what's important is to be appreciative and thankful.”

You could also ask your child to choose one or two of her favourite items on his list, and discuss any items if they are outside of your budget or comfort zone. For example, if your daughter says her number one wish is a puppy but you have allergies in the family and cannot have a dog, it's okay to discuss this with her in advance to avoid disappointment.

Meaning of the Season

One way to help move the focus on the holiday season away from the “gimmies” is to talk to your child about the meaning behind your holiday celebrations. If religious traditions are part of your holidays, spend time talking about them with your child. Make note of what each family member's role is in the tradition. Children are usually interested to know how their roles will change as they get older.

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You could also watch family movies or television specials together that show there is more to the holidays than just getting gifts such as the classic, "The Grinch who Stole Christmas," or "It's a Wonderful Life." You could talk about the meaning of the season to your family, and emphasize that the holiday is not about how many gifts are under the tree, but rather about sharing time together with friends and family.

Creating Family Traditions

Another way to shift your child's focus away from the "gimmies" is to spend time on family traditions that don't involve gift giving. Perhaps your family would like to continue or start some traditions or family activities that you can all participate in. Children love to be involved in the planning process, whether you're decorating the house or planning a party. Even talking about your own childhood experiences of the holiday season can help move the focus of the season from presents to people and relationships. Did your family always have a special meal or a favourite food during the holiday season such as egnog? Did you make any gifts at school that your parents treasured? Were you allowed to open one gift early? Did any of your friends have family traditions that you admired and would like to adapt to your family traditions? Would your children like to suggest some family traditions that you could start?

Giving Back to Others

Part of your family traditions could also focus on the spirit of giving. There are lots of ways to involve your child in giving, whether a toddler or a teenager. You might ask your child to make a list of people she would like to give gifts to, and then you could talk about what kinds of gift would be most meaningful to each person. Grandma, for example, might absolutely love a handmade card and a one-of-a-kind keepsake ornament made by her four-year-old granddaughter. Your teen's best friend, on the other hand, might prefer a handmade card and a pair of purchased earrings she saw at the mall. If your child is older, he might be able to go over his list and determine his budget for the gifts he wishes to give. You could talk about what extra chores he might do around the house to earn the money to help pay for the gifts.

There are many crafts and ideas for inexpensive handmade gifts that children of all ages can make. You could spend an afternoon baking cookies that can be decorated and boxed up for neighbours or friends, babysitters and teachers. Your child could make photo collages for grandparents; handmade recipe books for aunts and uncles; photo calendars that you can make on the Internet. Your older child might make a book of Gift Certificates for mom or dad – gift certificates such as "good for one room cleaning," or "good for one chore of folding the laundry."

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Other ways you and your child could focus on giving is to volunteer to make and deliver a hamper for a lower-income family through the [Winnipeg Christmas Cheer Board](#) or similar organization. Or buy and wrap some gifts for a local donation charity or drive. Maybe have your child pick out some extra treats at your local grocery store for the food bank box, or make care packages for any neighbourhood students, young adults or seniors alone for the season.

Setting an Example

Finally, one of the best ways to show your child that the holiday season means much more than getting things, is to set a good example. Make a realistic budget for the gifts you wish to give, and do your best to stick to it. Perhaps you, too, could make some homemade gifts for loved ones. As for your own wish list, you could point out that although you might like something expensive such as a home gym or a new car, it's not in the family budget. When you go shopping for gifts, you could bring your older child and point out price comparisons, and find teachable moments to discuss value and budgets. If you are an impulse shopper, it will be hard to for your kids to understand that they need to save and budget.

Making Memories

Talking to your child about what to expect will help her understand that she can't have everything she wants. Giving your child everything she wants, even if you can afford it financially, runs the risk of developing selfishness and a sense of entitlement that will be difficult to break in the future. Managing disappointment is an important life skill, and although it can be hard, it will benefit your child in the long run, a gift that you can give your child that will last a lifetime. Just remember that your child's future memories will encompass the season, the activities, the festivities, and not the number of toys received!

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