

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Put the HAPPY back in HAPPY HOLIDAYS



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Holidays can be very emotionally charged for many families. We all have our own expectations of what we wish to create for our families. Some of that is based on our own experiences as children. Are we

re-creating the magic we had as children, or what we wish we had? Then, we add our partner's expectations to the equation. On top of that, our intentions may be different than our children's intentions. For the parents, perhaps Christmas is a day of family and spending time together watching old Christmas movies. For the children, maybe they are expecting to invite their friends over to play with all their new toys. Holiday time with children, a time for joy and sharing, can become a war of wills with hard to manage big feelings. It's important to be thoughtful, have intention, and make values based decisions around your holiday traditions for your family.

Talk with your partner to create your holiday vision of what's important to both of you. Discuss expectations you each have. Talk about Presents vs. Presence. Presents involve shopping, wrapping, time, money, etc... Presence involves spending time together, traditions, volunteering, service, etc... What's most important to each of you?

If your children have the "gimmie, gimmie, gimmies", remember, isn't part of the holidays about wishing... wishing for peace, love, and joy, wishing for health and happiness in the new year, and yes... even wishing for the latest and greatest Xbox or American Girl doll! Try not to make your child feel bad for asking for what he/she wants.

Remember when your child is asking and asking for yet more and more, it may be helpful to recognize that our children are bombarded with brilliant advertising and marketing. The commercials and catalogs are incredibly enticing! Even adults get sucked into thinking

they must have certain items. As the parents, we are responsible for our children's media consumption. Even with limiting consumption, parents still need to have conversations with their children about marketing and advertising. Also, try not to place judgment on the gift the children want. Even if it's \$300, don't judge.

Use the "Wish List" to your advantage! Allow your children to put anything they want on their list. That's why it's called a "Wish List". Part of the fun of the holidays is wishing and wanting. It's fun to wish! It gets better! The list is year round! Anytime, anything may be added to it. Make sure they know that they are merely providing you with a list of their wishes. Remind them that not all wishes come true! You'll be amazed at how many meltdowns will be diffused when you tell them you'll absolutely add it to their wish list when you get home.

When you find you need to set a limit around something they really want and you are not going to buy it for them, empathize with your child using a genuine and kind tone. "I can see why you'd want the newest Xbox. It can do so many cool things and it has all those new games to go with it!" Sometimes children just need to feel heard and understood. If you feel you must set a clear limit after using empathy, it might sound like this: "It sounds like you REEEALY want the new Xbox. I'm unwillingly to spend that much money for a gaming device. I'll support you if you would like to save for it or we can look on Craig's List for a used one."

Sometimes during the holidays, we witness entitlement with our own children. This can grate on even the most loving parent. We need to model gratitude and appreciation year round. A good place to start is around the dinner table. Whenever you feel like it, go around and have each person say something they are grateful for that day. You may want to keep a Gratitude Journal as a family. Have an encouragement feast! Everyone goes around and says one thing they like, love, respect, or appreciate about a family member. Everyone in the family will have the opportunity to be the recipient of loads of appreciation! It feels so good!

If you are one of those parents that get caught up in the moment and goes a little overboard with the gift buying, you can encourage your children, after unwrapping their gifts, to donate some of them to an organization that needs them. We did that with our kids for years at Christmas and their birthdays. They had a great time unwrapping the gifts and then loved to pick out the ones they would give to less fortunate children. Instead of having your children open endless gifts from extended family members, request only books or pajamas to be given with the knowledge that they will be donated to an organization for children.

I have to admit, I do like to buy gifts! But, do any of us really need one more toy? How about giving the gift of non-toys? Some of the best memories are made by thinking outside the box for gifts. Here are some ideas:

- *Classes - music, dance, horseback riding*
- *Membership - zoo, children's museum, science museum*
- *Subscriptions - Sports Illustrated for Kids, American Girl, Family Fun*
- *Events - Blazers game, concert, theater*
- *Activities - bowling, miniature golf, ice skating*
- *Date night - Michaels craft store, then home to do craft together*

Receiving is fun for children, and we can also encourage children to give. Have your children make a Giving List. Who do we want to give to this year? Who do we appreciate? What do we value? How do we want to show our gratitude? Your child may include family, friends, teachers, neighbors, coaches, community service workers. You can adopt a child or family for the holidays. List them and then help them decide what they want to do for each one. Of course, they will automatically think of buying them gifts. Help them see that there are additional ways to show we care:



- *Homemade gifts such as bookmarks, photo frames, jewelry, baked goods, dog toys and flowers from the garden*
- *Gift of time such as gift card for Jamba Juice and library visit, coupon for day hike to Silver Falls, trip downtown to Saturday Market*
- *Gift of service such as a book of coupons, i.e.: Good for one hug, Good for playing a game of your choice, Good for helping me garden, volunteering at a food pantry*
- *Gift of affirmation such as cards, poems, letters, and drawings*

We all know that the holidays can be stressful on so many different levels. Many people struggle financially, some struggle emotionally and the stress of providing a magical holiday experience for the family can take its toll. I've been guilty of running around like a maniac in the few days before Christmas buying all sorts of unnecessary extras. As my children have gotten older, I wish I could have all that time and energy back and simply concentrate on what I've discovered is most important. The holidays are just around the corner and it's not too late to put the Happy back in Happy Holidays!

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