

NEWSLETTER

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GIFTS FOR THE CHILDREN

What to give the kids for the holidays?

Let me suggest gifts for your children that you will not find at the mall or on-line. These gifts require your time and thoughts but not your money, and represent what I deeply believe today's children need from their parents.

o THE GIFT OF TIME WITH YOU. Parents today are worried about whether they spend enough time with their children. Chances are you don't. Parents in a recent study reported they spend less time with their children than their own parents spent with them. About a third of children of employed parents say they don't have enough time with their parents, especially their fathers. This is an indictment of how busy we all are these days and how difficult it is to balance our work/family selves, not an indictment of mothers who work as children with working mothers are no more likely to feel they don't have enough mother time than those whose mothers stay home.

Make an early New Year's Resolution: I WILL SPEND MORE TIME WITH EACH OF MY CHILDREN. For older children write down on a holiday card what you intend to do, "In the year 2001, I pledge to take you out to lunch every Saturday." For the younger children who won't understand a pledge card, just do it!

Set aside some attentive time every day for each child. Find time for reading to and with your children. Take walks together. Do projects together like grow an herb garden or make a book of snapshots for Grandma.

o THE GIFT OF SHARING. We live in a consumeristic world with much too much emphasis on material things. One way parents can combat the effects of consumerism is to involve their children from an early age in learning the joy of giving to others.

Give every child the opportunity of GIVING, not just getting, this holiday season. Be sure to buy and wrap at least one toy for a child less fortunate than your own--and involve your child in the process. Invite older children to help decide where the family charity dollar should go this year. Bring the kids along when you take food to the

Community Food Bank. Don't forget to say, "You got so many presents today, which toy would you like to give away to a child who doesn't have any toys?"

o THE GIFT OF RESISTING PRESSURE FROM TV AND PEERS. At the risk of appearing too Grinch-like, I find it disturbing to watch materialistic moppets hardly able to talk with the "Gimme's." They are programmed to ask for every heavily-promoted toy they see on TV or in a friend's hands. They are encouraged by fiendishly clever advertising to know about and want every Pokemon. (I speak from experience--I just spent the weekend with my 5-year-old twin grandchildren.)

Point out to your children how advertising manipulates people. Resist pressures yourself and model responsible shopping behavior looking for value and WHAT YOU NEED not what some Madison Avenue suit decides you should want. Raise your child to be his or her own person who can resist peer pressure, or at least minimize its effects on buying.

o THE GIFT OF PEACE AND QUIET. I have absolutely no scientific proof but it seems possible that all the bells and whistles and flashing lights our kids are exposed to from morning to night can frazzle their brains. Why do Elmo and Barney have to talk? Why do educational toys blare obnoxious noises and light up when you get it right?

It seems to me that the environments of our young children are too noisy, too cluttered, too chaotic, and too fast-paced. Turn down the volume, limit the number of things, slow down the pace, and go back to simple pleasures like singing songs together in a rocking chair.

o Finally, THE GIFT OF YOUR LOVE. Never be so busy you don't have time for a hug. Never let the sun go down without telling each of your children that you love them. And find time for each other--the gift of a loving, stable marriage is beyond price to a child.