



## Unplug the Christmas Machine

Tips for decreasing the stress and increasing the joy of Christmas

by Carol Topp, CPA

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- Consider what you really enjoy about the Christmas season. Remember your childhood Christmas holidays. What traditions, activities or occasions were particularly pleasurable to you? What brings you peace and joy? List them and focus on them during December.
- Eliminate activities that do not bring pleasure, that add stress or detract from the spiritual focus of Christmas. You can forgo Christmas cards, baking, parties or even decorating a tree.
- Talk to your children and spouse about realistic expectations and the real reason for the season.
- Ask your children for ideas on how to make Christmas more Christ-centered. They may surprise you!
- Teach your children to recognize advertising slogans that emphasize spending, consumerism and a false sense of perfection for the holidays.
- Support stores that delay Christmas displays until after Thanksgiving. Ask the “early birds” to delay their Christmas displays.
- Give children what they really want for Christmas. It’s not another toy or electronic gadget. What they really want is time with parents and the family, reliable traditions, realistic expectations about gifts, and an even pace to the holiday season.
- Tell your children that since Jesus received only three gifts, they will receive only three gifts. Try to give one toy, one book or CD, and one new outfit of clothing.
- Have a budget for your gift giving. Plan what you will spend per person and stick to it. Don’t be distracted by sales or eye-catching displays.
- Consider buying only for children and not adults. Ask your extended family to exchange names instead of buying for everyone.
- Put aside count-down calendars or “letters to Santa” wish lists if they promote greed and over-emphasize the gift-aspect of the holiday.
- Consider buying one gift for an entire family such as a movie night gift basket or tickets to their local zoo or a local play.

- Pay for gifts in cash. Studies have shown that we spend up to 20% more when we use debit or credit cards instead of cash.
- Have a plan for Christmas Day and the days after to ward off boredom. Make sure one of the toys is something that can be played with together such as a board game or puzzle.
- Talk to your children about proper behavior *before* you enter a store. Be clear about your expectations of how they will behave (no whining, begging, pleading, etc). Explain that you are shopping for someone else (not them) or for necessities, not toys.
- If your children receive an over abundance of toys (from grandparents or relatives), hide some away and pull them out in February or even as late as the summer.
- Consider with holding some gifts until Epiphany (the 12<sup>th</sup> day after Christmas) which is traditionally when the Wise Men arrived with their gifts for the baby Jesus.
- Consider asking your children to donate a nearly-new toy that they rarely play with to a homeless shelter or Toys for Tots campaign.

Carol Topp ([CarolToppCPA.com](http://CarolToppCPA.com)) is a Certified Public Accountant, author and personal finance teacher. She was influenced to unplug her Christmas machine 18 years ago after reading a book titled *Unplug the Christmas Machine* by Jo Robinson and Jean Staeheli.