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Realife Family Times with
your family!

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Employee & Family Resources

Your Student Assistance Program

Nov/Dec 2002

Holiday Opportunities to Teach Life Lessons

The most indelible life lessons our children learn are those we, their parents, model. Not what we tell them but what we live, day after day. How we spend our time, earn and spend money, treat them and others. Paradoxically, during the very season when we most want to model love, peace, and generosity, crazy schedules and hopelessly unrealistic expectations can sabotage parents' best intentions. It doesn't have to be that way. Beware of subtle saboteurs disguised as holiday "traditions."

Do you want your children to . . .

- . . . be loving, involved family members?
- . . . not focus on material things or develop a consumer mentality?
- . . . experience the unique satisfaction of giving, to develop generous natures?
- . . . be polite and well behaved at home and with friends during holiday activities?
- . . . learn about and understand particular spiritual beliefs?
- . . . become socially responsible and active?
- . . . make decisions thoughtfully, not impulsively?
- . . . be content and happy within themselves,
- . . . be healthy, physically and mentally?
- . . . be tolerant and accepting of others?

Then . . .

- . . . don't let holiday hustle and bustle interfere with family time. For every party on your calendar, schedule equal time for special family activities.
- . . . switch the season's emphasis from material trappings (gifts, food, designer clothes, entertaining, decorations, toys) to simpler pleasures (a midnight walk in the snow, a holiday sing-along with friends).
- . . . resist the temptation to buy and wrap gifts for your kids' friends, teachers, etc. Help your children develop a list of affordable gifts to buy or make. Let them contribute their ideas, time, and money. (And start now. Nothing deflates a generous heart more than a last-minute, stressful shopping trip.)
- . . . have realistic expectations. Avoid dragging your kids to formal dinners and long holiday programs. Don't put them on display in uncomfortable "dress-up" clothes they have to keep spotless. Avoid too many sweets, and don't skip naps (theirs or yours!).
- . . . take the opportunity to discuss ideas about right and wrong, responsible choices, and spirituality with your kids. Don't expect holiday videos and TV programs to impart your values.
- . . . get your children involved. They probably aren't even aware of the checks you send your favorite charities. Decide as a family what special volunteer activity you could do together during this season when many people are alone, sick, or hungry.
- . . . resist the temptation to dash to the mall at the last minute for a few extra holiday gifts. (Give that time to your kids instead.)
- . . . whatever you do, don't give your children every "thing" they think they want. (You can hardly overdo unconditional acceptance and love.)
- . . . beware of the holiday table! Where is it written that we must buy, prepare, serve, and consume too much food during the holidays? Set an example of moderation. Beware holiday stress! Relax; your calm and positive thoughts will carry over to your children.
- . . . during this season, look for opportunities to interact with people of other cultures and faiths.

What do your children really need from you?

Beyond food, clothing, and shelter, children really want and need few things from their parents, not only during the holidays but every day. Here are ten priceless gifts you can give your children by deed and example: 1) time, attention, meaningful conversation; 2) respect; 3) kindness, generosity, fairness, truthfulness; 4) humility; 5) guidance, not lectures; 6) a focus on people, not things; 7) opportunities to give, to develop a sense of contributing to the world; 8) opportunities to spend time with extended family and friends; 9) meaningful traditions; 10) opportunities to try and fail.

The only cost for these gifts is your time and effort. This year, discard some of the material trappings and busyness of the holidays. Give your children something priceless.

Problems? Call the Student Assistance Program and arrange to see a counselor. Contacts are confidential within legal limits and available at no cost to students and family members. Counselors are on call 24 hours a day. (515) 244-6090 or (800) 327-4692. Website: <http://www.efr.org/youth/sap.shtml>