

Special Gifts for the Holidays

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Amidst the blitz of seasonal advertising, and commercialism people rush to “buy” gifts. For many this is fun. For some it can be stressful and for others it may cause financial strain.

It helps to remember that quality of life has little to do with material possessions. Quality of life has everything to do with realizing how precious and short life really is. Decide what you really value. Plan activities that are in harmony with your deepest beliefs and values rather than relying on habits, other’s expectations and commercialism. **Seek the spirit of the season rather than the “things” of the season.**

Kahlil Gibran said in On Children: “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.” Consider these gifts that demonstrate the true spirit of the holidays. They don’t require money!

12 Free Gifts to Give for the Holidays

The Gift of Thank You

Take time to thank someone for things they have done for you.

The Gift of Appreciation

It is easy to take people for granted and not take time to tell them how much we appreciate them. For the holidays write a letter or make a call and tell your friends or loved ones how much you appreciate having them in your life and why.

The Gift of Laughter and Smiles

Laughter heals and reduces stress. Clip a cartoon or funny article and send it to someone. Tell a joke. Share your smiles, laughter and cheer with others.

The Gift of Compliment

We may forget to praise those closest to us and nag about what “bugs” us instead. Praise or a simple compliment is a great gift to give.

The Gift of Fun

Make time to have fun and play with loved ones. Don’t put all your responsibilities before them.

The Gift of Your Time

Show you care enough to fit people into your busy schedule. The amount of time doesn’t matter. Offer to attend an event a loved one has asked you to go to and you didn’t want to (i.e., sporting events, play, the symphony, shopping, etc.). You don’t have to make a regular habit of it, but your “undivided and devoted time” can be a special gift.

The Gift of Forgiveness

Humans are imperfect. People hurt us or disappoint us. Holding grudges only hurts you. The past is over. Forgiveness is a functional tool for personal healing. Also, don’t forget to forgive yourself.

The Gift of Listening

Why not give this valuable gift to someone you love or someone who lives alone? To truly listen, concentrate, engage your brain, close your mouth, talk less, put down distractions, and use eye contact.

The Gift of “Signs of Affection”

Be generous with kisses, hugs, pats on the arm and gentle squeezes of the hand. Choose tiny actions that demonstrate the love inside you. Write love notes and put them on the bathroom mirror or in lunch bags. Page ahead several months in a loved one’s calendar or day-timer and write “I love you” in a space.

The Gift of Leaving Alone

There are times when people want to be left alone. Be sensitive to this and give necessary space to others.

The Gift of a Favor

Small favors are sometimes more helpful than huge ones. Do those things you’ve been promising to do. Help someone with chores, or go grocery shopping for a shut-in. Donate used jewelry or unused personal items to nursing homes or shelters.

The Gift of Prayer or a Mindful Moment

Pray for others and let them know they are in your prayers, or let people know you are thinking of them.

May your holiday season be filled with these special gifts as you give them to others.

Hints for Coping with Holiday Stress

1. Put things in perspective. A holiday is just another day on a 365-day calendar, and it is only 24 hours long.
2. Don't think you have to be "jolly" all the time. You may have circumstances that are over-whelming; it's okay. Find a friend to talk to or call EAP for the support you deserve.
3. Remember that even the best of plans can go hay-wire and things don't always run smoothly. You'll set yourself up for disappointment if you expect everything to be perfect.
4. Few people have ideal families. Sometimes, getting everyone together can bring up old hurts or disappointments. Try to look past that and focus on the positives.
5. Keep to your budget. Don't rack up credit card debt.
6. Learn to say "NO." Be realistic about what you can or can't do. Ask for help, delegate and don't over-extend.
7. Spend time with people whose company you enjoy and limit time with those who make you unhappy or depressed.
8. Join forces with friends. Have everyone cook several batches of their famous cookies or bars. Then divide them up so everyone has a variety.
9. Remember that holidays magnify feelings and evoke memories. The brain responds to triggers and links sights, sounds, smells, and touch with memories of the past. Some of those memories are wonderful, but some aren't pleasant. If there's been a death, then the "empty chair" will be emotional. Don't deny your feelings.
10. Cheat! Don't think you have to make everything from scratch. Use ready-made piecrusts, pastry shells and frozen dough.
11. Say "YES" when people ask "Can I bring something?"
12. Close doors on rooms you won't be using. Don't clean what won't be seen.
13. Shop very early or very late in the day.
14. Two sets of families? Plan ahead on how to divide the time. Compromise! Some families rotate Thanksgiving and the Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa season.
15. If you are going to be alone for the holidays, schedule a vacation away from home, get involved in a community activity to help others, or invite friends to share pre-holiday celebrations with you in your home.
16. A holiday doesn't have to be an eating frenzy. Much of holiday eating has nothing to do with actual hunger; we eat more simply because it is there. If you add 500 calories a day to your diet over the holidays, the result is a gain of five extra pounds!
17. Don't get too wrapped up in New Year-itis. Many people get carried away with resolutions then feel guilty when they don't do them. Remember: every day is a fresh start.
18. Solitude, self-care and downtime are the soul's holiday and are needed to recharge our batteries and emotional wellbeing. The more we push ourselves, the more time we need to replenish ourselves. You may not recognize it during the busy times, but holiday stress can affect you before, during and after the festivities are over. Get enough rest, relax and enjoy.

EAP Can Help!

Your EAP is a confidential, assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your family members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization.

1-800-769-9819 ~ TTY dial 711 for TRS then dial 800-769-9819

Online Work/Life Services

If your organization offers Online Work/Life Services, visit our 24-hour internet resource for information, advice and support on a wide variety of issues. Contact your human resources department for a company code then check our Work/Life Services at www.affiliatedeap.com

