

Tell Teens Enough is Enough this Holiday

No ribbons, no tags, no packages, boxes, or bags? Yes!

by Kim Seidel

During the holiday season, the line between abundance and overindulgence can easily blur as marketing and parents' wishes for their children to be happy come together, urging parents to buy more, give more, says Jean Illsley Clarke, a nationally-certified family life educator in Minneapolis. "Children can learn to be unappreciative when they have too many and too much," says Clarke, co-author of "How Much is Enough?" (Marlowe & Company, 2004).

o'ver·in·dul'gence n.

What is overindulgence?

"Overindulging children is giving them too much of what looks good, too soon, too long. It is giving them things or experiences that are not appropriate for their age or their interests and talents. It is the process of giving things to children to meet the adult's needs, not the child's.

"Overindulgence is giving a disproportionate amount of family resources to one or more children in a way that appears to meet the children's needs but does not, so children experience scarcity in the midst of plenty. Overindulgence is doing or having so much of something that it does active harm, or at least prevents a person from developing and deprives that person of achieving his or her full potential.

"Overindulgence is a form of child neglect. It hinders children from performing their needed development tasks, and from learning necessary life lessons."

Excerpt from "How Much is Enough? Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible, and Respectful Children—From Toddlers to Teens" by Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson, and David Bredehoft, Marlowe and Company, 2004, based on findings from the Overindulgence Research Studies).

Visit cpclax.com to see what teens really want from their parents this holiday season!

To downsize your holidays with teenagers, parents can encourage them to participate in the project, rather than mandating it. "Get teens on board by telling them this is the year to be reasonable about gift giving, and ask them for ideas for outings instead of presents," Clarke says.

Teens are moving into their adult years, so it's a great time to get them involved in the decision-making process for the season, Clarke says. "You could make a pledge with the family that no gifts will be put on a credit card, so there is no Christmas debt," she says. "Tell your teens you're only going to use cash. Parents and teens can make a budget together."

With the economic crisis challenging many families this holiday, it's an ideal year to get teens involved with budgeting and help them to realize they aren't the center of the universe, Clarke says. The holiday season also brings an excellent time to clear out old toys, books, and clothes that are no longer used and give them to others in need.

"If we want children to view the event as more than gift getting, we can signal that by the questions we ask," Clarke says. "The values and experiences you want to emphasize this season might include generosity, appreciation, joy, togetherness, family, caring for those less fortunate, and spiritual growth. You can ask questions that will help children focus on your values."



Try asking the following types of questions, rather than focusing on that all too common question: What did you get for the holidays?

- What gift did you make for someone?
- How did you save money to buy gifts for others?
- Did you visit someone special?
- Do you have a favorite holiday food?
- Did you do something fun on your holiday vacation?

“Stopping overindulgence in our children begins with saying ‘enough is enough’ to ourselves,” says Jill Rigby, author of “Raising Unselfish Children in a Self-Absorbed World” (Howard Books, 2008). “Make this gift-giving season a true season of giving. Give more to others outside the family than you do to each other.”

Serve those in need as a way to open the hearts of teenagers to others. “Sit down with your teenagers and explain that this year you’re going to maintain your holiday budget, but rather than spend it all

on each other, you’re going to spend half as much on each other and use the other half for those in need,” says Rigby, founder of Manners of the Heart (mannersoftheheart.org). “Provide Christmas gifts, for example, to a family with teenagers.”

Rigby echoes Clarke’s sentiments about encouraging teenagers to be creative this year with budgeting and spending time together instead of giving presents. “We are mistaken in our thinking as parents of teenagers that things are more important to them than time with us,” Rigby says. “In a recent survey, more than half of teens said they didn’t have enough time with their parents and family. Unplug your house. Sit face-to-face, rather than back-to-back, and reconnect with each other.”

Activities to enjoy together in place of gifts can include caroling and sledding, Clarke says. Select a few church activities to engage in as well. Have your teen come up with 10 activities and decide on the options as a family, she says.

Teens can read Christmas stories to their younger siblings. If they play an instrument, they can perform a song as a gift to their grandparents, Clarke says. “You can use the holiday season as a time to come together as a family,” she says. “Find creative ways of ‘gifting’ each other to avoid giving too much and overindulging.”

Start a few new family traditions. Rigby suggests delivering surprise gifts to neighbors, making homemade bread, and inviting the friends of your teens over for a night at your house.

“If you’ve overindulged in the past, don’t worry,” Rigby says. “If you give more of yourself this year in place of more stuff, your teenagers will be delighted. If they’re not, don’t lose heart. It may take a little time for them to understand you’re taking your family in a new direction.”

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Kim Seidel is a writer based in Onalaska. To read more about overindulgence, go to overindulgence.info.

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