



PARENT SENSE BY VICKI CURRAN, EDS, LPC, NCC

Christmas presence, not presents

I love this time of year. Holiday music plays, lights and decorations make everything festive, and the chill in the air creates the perfect excuse to slow down and sip a mug of hot chocolate in front of the fire. But along with the decorations and music comes the constant advertising for “things” to add to our Christmas lists. Unfortunately, that focus on the material aspect of the holidays makes it easy to get caught up in the superficial, stressful component of the holidays.

Black Friday sales and constant commercialism convince us that we “need” all

the stuff we don’t have. Research shows that material possessions do not equal happiness. However, “experiences” and the memories created by those experiences can be much more intrinsically fulfilling. Experiences are also uniting. We are more likely to bond with someone who enjoys the same activities as we do, or who have traveled to the same places that we have then we are to bond with someone who owns the same “things” we do. Even the nicest car or the newest phone become standard after enough time, but memories tend to become fonder as time passes.

It sort of makes sense... our experiences become a part of us while “stuff” is still, well, just “stuff”.

So maybe this year, the focus could be on “Christmas presence” instead of Christmas “presents”. Putting down our phones, shutting off the television and actually being present with our friends and family may be the best gift we could ever give our loved ones. Rather than buying and wrapping a physical gift, maybe we can consider how to share time or an experience together. The gift of doing something together can last longer than the thrill of a gift that gets opened and

is soon forgotten for three reasons:

First of all, the anticipation leading up to an event or experience is exciting in itself.

Second, the time spent during the activity promotes bonding and helps children to gain a stronger sense of attachment.

Third, the memories gained from the experience offer enjoyment for years to come. If you think about it, time spent together truly is the gift that keeps on giving.

So while preparing for the coming holidays, consider what experiences you might be able to give loved ones this year. For families, think

about doing something like getting Season Passes to a local attraction like Great Adventure, visiting a family friendly escape room together, buying a tent for some family camping trips, signing up for family outings like skiing or white water rafting, or purchasing season tickets to a local minor league team for some great family outings that last all summer long.

For kids, consider purchasing “adventures” that offer opportunities for them to experience and develop a new hobby or skill, like a horseback riding lesson or an indoor rock climbing gym day pass.

Make homemade “coupons” that entitle them to different rewards with you, like lunch or dinner at their favorite restaurant for a one-on-one date with a parent, choosing the game for a family game night or 30 minutes

of interruption-free snuggle time.

Remember, creativity is key and the gift is your “presence,” not your presents. Even if you’ve already purchased gifts for this year, consider adding some experiences as well or slowly transitioning to more experience-based gifts over time. The family time and memories are worth so much more than any gift you can buy.

Even better, giving experiences rather than gifts may help reduce your stress levels while also contributing to family bonding. Finally, you don’t have to find room to store these gifts because your loved ones will hold these experiences in their hearts and their memories for years to come.

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.