

The Mom Moment

Celebrate simplicity this season

It seems Santa hasn't been reading the news: Even with the recession, Americans expect to spend an average of \$845 on holiday presents this year, according to an American Consumer Council study—that's a lot of Bakugans and Barbies! But by focusing less on gifts and more on memorable experiences that bring your family closer, you can imbue the season with more magic (and less stress).

"Your children will start the New Year feeling stronger rather than strung out," says Kim John Payne, a family therapist and coauthor of *Simplicity Parenting*. Here, Payne's suggestions for a simply wonderful season.

Begin a tradition of homemade gifts. Instead of buying Grandpa yet another bottle of cologne, help your kids bake him a batch of his favorite brownies or draw a book of illustrations for a beloved story he's told them. "This will not only be a much more meaningful gift," Payne says, "but it will also spur your child's creativity and create a connection between the two of you while you're working on it together."

Create special experiences. While the hot toy of 2009 will be old news by spring, golden moments together—such as a sledding outing with Dad, or a girls-only karaoke party—strengthen family ties and build memories, Payne says. And because "all the ads aim to set kids off into a feeding frenzy," Payne notes, try limiting TV time to special viewings, like gathering the family to watch *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Keep the holiday spirit going. Continue to create special moments even after the tinsel and menorahs are packed away, Payne says. "Aim to have five minutes of holiday in every day, when you let your breath out and connect—even if it's just sitting at the kitchen counter together having milk and cookies and talking about your day." Calmer, happier kids in 2010? Sounds like your holiday wishes may come true!



Being a mom made me...

"Feel like I hit the jackpot. My heart is filled with gratitude. I'm so into my family. They feel like the real substance, so anything else—my career, etc.—is just extra fun!"

Molly Shannon, mom to Stella, 6, and Nolan, 4

MOMMY STRATEGIES

How do you create holiday magic without spending a dime?

● "Our favorite part of the holiday season is getting together with my sister's family and having old-fashioned fun playing board games. We team up, girls versus boys or younger kids versus older, and play Outburst, Cranium, or cards. We listen to music and enjoy one another's company."

Deana Haduck, 40
Duncanville, PA

● "Hanukkah is the festival of lights, so we decorate paper cups with tissue paper, sparkly glue, and construction-paper cutouts. Then we fill them with sand and a candle, which we put all around the room for a festive atmosphere."

Julie Stern, 44
Potomac, MD

● "My three kids help me bake cookies—traditional ones like chocolate chip, and new ones like Andes crème de menthe. Baking is the way I show love for my family and pass down the tradition to my kids."

Carolyn Mendoza, 31
Arlington, TX

● "Every year my family drives around the neighborhood listening to Christmas music and looking at the lights. My 5-year-old makes up names for her favorite houses, such as Snoopy House and Snowman House. It's built lasting memories for our family—even if we get lost, it creates a good laugh!"

Lisa Kobeluch, 32
Crystal Lake, IL