

## **Feeling like you'd like to do something different next holiday season?**

This holiday, did you find yourself unable to fully enjoy the spirit of what the holiday should bring? In fact, you may be feeling let down and empty. Did you feel pressured to attend functions you did not want to attend? Or perhaps you got an overwhelming feeling that you have bought into the consumerism and wondered how the heck you got there? Your credit has nearly maxed out, that next pay cheque feels very far away and you are completely stressed about.

For those of you who truly enjoyed your holidays and found joy and meaning, read no further. If, however, you are now finding yourself a few pounds heavier, poorer and wondering if there's more to the holidays than this, here are some thoughts for next year.

### Re-think some of the regular traditions with balance in mind

What are your expectations for the holidays and how can you meet those within reason and without resentment and stress. Think about what is important to you and really give some consideration to how you/your family would like to spend the holidays next year. Weigh out the costs and benefits of current practices. What kind of holiday legacy would you prefer to build? Then plan out how you can convey the importance of this with your family and friends. An example: "This year, we feel that we really want/need to \_\_\_\_\_. It's very important to us; we've given it a lot of thought. We hope you understand." Then do it. This includes kids. If kids are reminded of what the season means and the importance of re-evaluating how it is celebrated, you might just get them on your side and enjoying it. Remember that change often results in some degree of discomfort as things shift. Here are some other tips.

1. Start planning in the fall, whether it's baking or preparing/buying gifts. Make a list of "musts" and "would like" and determine what is reasonable to achieve. Include planned time to do nothing and simply enjoy.
2. Participate in functions that are important to you. Decide what aspects of the holidays you can do without and politely decline.
3. Consider pre- and post-holiday functions/gatherings as alternatives.
4. Share or delegate chores and/or turn them into social functions (baking, tree-trimming, etc.) or consider alternatives like catering and on-line purchases.

### Gifts

Gift-giving has become the single most important aspect of many people's holiday celebration. If this is something you would like to rethink, consider the message we are reinforcing and the lessons we are teaching our children about entitlement and the value of things. Re-assess the reasons why you find yourself giving in to this part of the season and why we are at times spending beyond our means.

1. Consider gift-exchanges, limit spending and/or number of gifts
2. Donate money to a charity, hospital or other worthy cause

3. Donate unwrapped toys to the local fire station for donation to children's charities
4. For more serious folks, consider joining the growing movement at [www.buynothingchristmas.org](http://www.buynothingchristmas.org) : although a bit radical for some, it offers great ideas for creating memories and meaningful gifts.

### Give the Gift of Time

It seems that people generally do not have the time anymore to just sit and enjoy. We are forever running around trying to find what we thing is that perfect gift. Let's face it. Is that what it really is or will any toy on that shelf do? Think about the last time someone's appreciation of your actions was about something you did for them and not what was purchased. The gift of time is suddenly valuable and worthy. In addition to giving our friends and family the gift of our time, consider other options.

1. Information Markham Volunteer Centre at [www.informationmarkham.ca](http://www.informationmarkham.ca) – see their links
2. Sponsor a family/Surrogate Santa Program at Children's Aid Foundation at [www.cafdn.org](http://www.cafdn.org)
3. Pack food at the Markham Food Bank
4. Help serve a holiday dinner at a homeless shelter

### Reaching outside of our traditions

With so many different traditions and faiths in our community, why not explore other cultural celebrations taking place during this time of year. Learning how neighbours from backgrounds other than our own navigate the holiday season may be a great way to revitalize our perspectives of our own customs and beliefs while enriching our appreciation of the larger community to which we all belong.

Angela Colangelo, M.A., CCC  
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