

Happy holidays don't have to lead to a New Year full of debt. You can spend less without stifling the celebration.

Make a list and check it twice. List names, jot down some gift ideas, and set a spending limit. Use your talents and imagination for creative gift ideas that can be less expensive. Do you like to take photographs? Frame a special photo. Are you handy with needle work? Knit a pair of mittens. Give a coupon for babysitting or tennis lessons. Share your time and talent.

Think about how much money you can afford to spend. Assign a spending limit for each person on your list. Holiday spending includes more than gifts. Remember to plan for other holiday expenses such as travel, decorations, and food. Plan to pay with cash when possible. If you must use a credit card, set up a strategy to pay it off soon.

Be realistic about expectations. Many people feel pressure during the holidays to give beyond their means. Try to limit your budget to what you can realistically afford right now. Buy only one present per person and buy only for those people you really care about. Talk to family members about setting a dollar limit on gifts or drawing names. Some parents find it difficult to say no to their child's holiday wish list. It's okay to set limits. Ask your kids to prioritize their lists. Limit the number of expensive gifts you buy for each child. Look for sales or coupons. Give jointly with grandparents on big ticket items. Look for small gifts and stocking stuffers at discount and dollar stores.

Holiday traditions are more meaningful and memorable than gifts. Guide children to focus on the spirit of the holidays instead of gifts. Most family traditions cost little or no money. Watch *It's a Wonderful Life*, or your favorite holiday movie, and pop your own popcorn. Bake cookies or make wreaths and deliver them to neighbors and friends. Roll pine cones in peanut butter and birdseed then decorate a tree for the birds. Read holiday stories out loud.

For more tips on smart spending, visit www.uaex.edu/money or contact your local, county office. The Cooperative Extension Service is your source for reliable information. We nourish individuals, families, and communities by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices. We are a catalyst of prosperity for Arkansans.

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