

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

# Handling the Holiday Gimmies



BY: **KIM DEMARCHI**

*"Mom, will you buy me the new Play Station that just came out for Christmas?" asks Peter.*

*"No honey, we can't afford it this year," replies mom.*

*"But Mom, ALL of my friends have one!" begs Peter.*

*"You're exaggerating! Not ALL of your friends have one. And I already told you, we can't afford it."*

*"Mom, PPPLEEEEEASE!"*

*"That's it! I've had it! You should be grateful for the things you have and give you. Mention it again and you won't get ANY presents!" threatens Mom.*

Peter stomps off and flops down on the coach discouraged.

Sound vaguely familiar? Holiday time, a time for joy and sharing, can become a war of wills

with hard feelings. We all desire closeness and meaning in our relationships, especially during this time of year. However, in the above example, Mom unwittingly squelched her son's excitement and made him feel bad for asking for what he wanted. Though we may not be able or willing to buy the latest and greatest Play Station for our child, it is essential that we handle our children's requests with consideration. We need to find ways to say "no" to our children without undermining their self esteem. After all, isn't part of the holidays about wishing.....wishing for peace, love, and joy, wishing for health and happiness in the new year, and yes.....even wishing for that Play Station on the gift wish list!

Even if we don't get our child the Play Station he so desperately wanted, all too often our children sit in a pile of toys and gifts surrounded by a heap of tattered paper searching for their next gift. This can grate on even the most loving parent. Here are some tips that may be helpful this holiday season:

1. If you feel you must set clear limits, use a friendly tone and empathize. For example, "It sounds like you REEEEEALY want a Play Station. I'm unwillingly to spend that much money for a Play Station. I'll support you if you would like to save for it." Avoid telling your child frequently that you can't afford it. Over time, it creates a scarcity mentality without teaching the value of money.
2. Teach children the value of earning money by saying, "If you really want a Play Station,



I'd be happy to discuss some ways you can earn enough money to buy it." This teaches children perseverance while motivating them to find innovative ways to achieve goals for themselves. Additionally, you've conveyed the message that you care about what's important to him.

3. Empathize with your child. "I can see why you'd want the newest Play Station. It can do so many cool things and has all those new games!" Sometimes children are satisfied with you siding with them instead of fighting with them.
4. Let them put the Play Station on their list. That's why it's called "A Wish List". Part of the fun of the holidays is wishing and wanting. Make sure they know that they are merely providing you with a list of ideas. Make sure they know they aren't getting everything on their list. Children can have a wish list ongoing throughout the year. Have them be the one that writes the items on their list. They will see, too, that things they wanted 6 months ago, they don't really want any more and can be crossed off the list. If they aren't of writing age yet, they can cut and paste pictures from junk mail and toy catalogs. (Great for developing fine motor skills!) I can't tell you how many issues were diffused with my twins when they were toddlers and young children. Inevitably, they would find things they wanted at Costco, the grocery store, the mall, just about anywhere! I would validate their longing, smile, and tell them it can be added to their wish list when we got home. No whining, crying, begging, or negotiating!
5. If your child having a wish list has developed into a lesson in greed and entitlement, take the list a step further and make a Global Family Wish List. This is especially effective as they children get even older. Preferably, during a family meeting, have everyone in the family brainstorm at least one idea on how they would make the world a better place. Then, as a family, agree on one of the ideas and actually implement it in the coming year. For example, if the family agreed on ending world hunger, perhaps your entire family

would volunteer to work at a Soup Kitchen serving meals to homeless people. A Global Wish List truly reflects the holiday spirit.

6. Continuing with the list theme, encourage your children to make a Giving List. Who do we want to give to this year? Who do we appreciate? What do we value? How do we want to show our gratitude? Your child may include family, friends, teachers, neighbors, coaches, community service workers. List them and then help them decide what they want to do for each one. Of course, they will automatically think of buying them gifts. Help them see that there are additional ways to show we care:
  - Homemade gifts such as bookmarks, photo frames, jewelry, baked goods, and flowers from the garden
  - Gift of time such as gift card for Jamba Juice and library visit, coupon for day hike to Silver Falls, trip downtown to Saturday Market
  - Gift of service such as a book of coupons, i.e.: Good for one hug, Good for playing a game of your choice, Good for helping me garden
  - Written gifts such as cards, poems, letters, and drawings

Everyone has a picture of what the holidays should look like or how they should go. When the reality doesn't match the expectation you have in your head, it doesn't feel good. Sit down and really think about what will work for your family, what you want the holidays to be about for your children., Be honest and create your holiday for your family. It's time to put the Happy back in Happy Holidays!

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