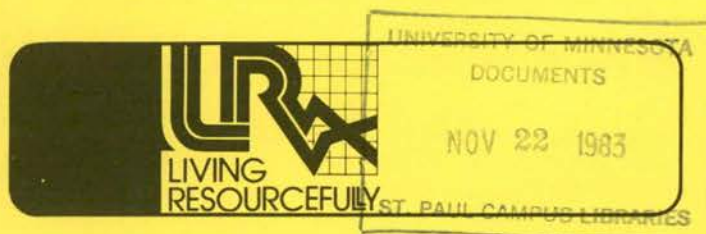


young families

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Creative Gifts

As the gift-giving season approaches, we need to look at the reasons why we give gifts. Gifts should have a shared meaning between giver and receiver. That's why it's important to make gifts personal. A gift should say you think the other person is special.

Giving a gift that you have made is a creative and meaningful way of sharing a part of yourself with others. It may take some extra time, but it can be rewarding and very enjoyable, especially if the family spends time planning and perhaps making some of the gifts together. It adds to the spirit of cooperation and family fun.

But you don't have to make a gift for it to be creative. The creativity can be in the way a gift is presented. For instance, you can make or buy a card that will give the gift personal meaning, wrap it in an unusual manner, or perhaps make a treasure hunt with the gift as the final prize.

Don't let creative giving become one more cause of holiday tension and stress. We have enough demands without adding guilt about giving gifts. Creative gift giving should be looked at as a potential for productive family and personal time.

Ideas for Creative Gifts

- a book of coupons for homemade cookies.
- a photo collection of your children mounted and framed or put in a small album for grandparents.
- a freshly typed clean set of favorite recipes for mom or grandmother.
- a book of coupons for special chores or for driving someone who can't or doesn't drive.
- a tape recording of each family member's greetings to send to distant friends and relatives.
- a gift of time to your children, such as a whole Saturday with just one child (their choice of activities).
- a gift certificate for cooking dinner once a week or month for the person who usually has to do it.

Here are some ways to encourage creative giving in children:

- Look at your own feelings about gifts. That's what your children copy.
- Let children make some of their presents.
- Help children to buy some of their presents, giving limited choices.
- Accept children's products sincerely and don't try to fix them up.
- Try to see that the less-than-perfect presents that the child makes go to adults who understand.
- Let children give to some people who can do nothing in return.

Looking Ahead

What are some characteristics of happily married older couples? Researchers have found that, in general, these couples highly value their marriage relationship and experience increasing closeness as the years go by. Compared with unhappy older couples, their relationship is marked by equality. They tend to divide up household tasks with less and less thought given to what is "man's work" and what is "woman's work."

Save Grocery \$\$\$

If you shop at the same store each week, make up your grocery list to match the layout of the store. If aisle one has soups and salad dressings, and you need some of these items, then jot down aisle one at the top of your list and the items in that aisle that you need. Do this for each aisle. With this method, you may be able to skip some aisles entirely.

Be aware that stores use psychology to encourage purchases. For example, food is placed strategically on the grocery shelf. New products or something you might buy on impulse will often be placed at eye level, whereas those items that are staples are usually on a top or bottom shelf. Check the cereal shelves. The ones with special prizes that children want are usually at eye (or basket-riding) level. Look for old standbys on a top or bottom shelf.

Other psychological methods include special promotions or packaging. Special displays, such as strawberries, shortcake, and topping all placed together, are designed to give you menu ideas. Bright, attractive packaging or tasteful, uncluttered packages encourage impulse buying. And what about the aroma of sausage or pizza samples being sizzled right near the display case?

Before you use a cents-off coupon, be sure to compare brands and prices. If the cents-off product is already priced 10 cents higher than its same-size competitor, it's not a bargain.

The large economy size may not be a bargain either. Unless you have meal plans for all of it and ways to store it, you may end up tossing some of it. No food is a bargain if it ends up in the garbage can.

Use unit pricing to decide on the best buys. Many stores give the price per pound or ounce. Or a pocket calculator can help you figure the unit price by dividing the number of ounces or pounds into the price.

Store-hopping for bargains may be costly in time, gasoline, or bus fare. A car pool with neighbors traveling to the same store can save gasoline dollars.

A New Year Idea

Here's an idea for starting a family New Year tradition. On New Year's Day, all members of the family bring out their past year's collection of important items (papers, photos, mementos, etc.). Each person chooses the most meaningful items and these are put into a family scrapbook or collection box. You may want to set a limit on the number of items.

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Current information available from University of Minnesota Extension: <http://www.extension.umn.edu>

Fire Escape Plans

If a fire occurs in your home, you and your family will have a much better chance of surviving if you prepare an escape plan ahead of time.

Think of different ways fire could occur and how you would escape. (Incidentally, this is a good habit to use even away from home, in hotels, theaters, and other buildings.) Develop a fire escape plan for your family and teach it to everyone. Practice it over and over so that if an emergency should ever occur, everyone will know what to do. Be sure babysitters know what to do in case of fire.

Some Tips for Fire Safety

- Use fire safety equipment: properly installed, functional smoke alarms; flashlights (in the bedrooms, too); folding ladders for upper floors; fire extinguishers for small fires.
- Have two escape routes for each bedroom, for example, a door and a window.
- Feel the closed door if a fire alarm sounds or if fire is suspected in another part of the house. If the door is hot, don't open it. Use the window escape route.
- Stay close to the floor.
- Take short breaths, and cover your nose and mouth with a damp cloth, if possible.
- Meet at the preplanned point. Call the fire department from a neighbor's house.

Making the Most of Dinner

Families are often so busy that dinner may be one of the few times that the entire family is gathered together. A little creativity can make this limited amount of time an enriching experience.

Why not try a potluck family dinner? Each member of the family is responsible for one part of the meal. Smaller children work with a parent or older sibling. Afterwards, everyone helps with the cleanup.

Reminiscing during dinner can be fun. Spend your dinner reminiscing about the fun you've had as a family at home. Then choose the best experience you've thought of and, if possible, repeat it after dinner.

Family "note night" can be an opportunity to catch up on letter writing and bring pleasure to others. Clear the table after dinner and let each family member choose three people to send notes to. You may choose relatives, friends you haven't seen for awhile, missionaries, teachers, associates, or others. You can each write to a different person or slip individual notes to the same person in one envelope.

A family dinner for "secret company" can be a special time. Plan a special dinner using the best tableware and tell the children that some "important" people are coming for dinner. When it is time for the guests to arrive, send the children out the door and lock it so they have to ring the bell to get back in. Then, open the door and welcome them in as the "important company." Spend dinner telling the children how special they are to you.

What to Carry in Your Wallet

Your wallet is actually a mini-filing system. You should carry identification, driver's license, employee ID card, persons to contact in an emergency, social security card, and health, accident, and auto insurance information. If you happen to have money, that's handy, too. Carry credit cards only when you think you will be using them.



Setting Limits for Children

As a parent, you need to decide what is important and what is trivial before you set limits for your children. The limits or rules you set should reflect your deeply held conviction or values. Once limits are set, commit yourself to consistently maintaining them. Before you set a limit, ask yourself these questions: "Is this rule really important? Am I willing to deal with the conflicts that will naturally occur and assert my authority if my child disregards the limit?" For example, is it really necessary to insist that a child eat all his or her peas, wear certain clothes, or join a particular club? Wouldn't it be more important to take issue when a child destroys a friend's toy, swears at a parent, or steals money out of your purse? Parents who set too many rules can overwhelm their children with too many demands. You are more likely to be effective if you focus on those you believe are most important.

Keeping Healthy in Winter

In winter, as in summer, children need to play outside for a little while each day to get fresh air and exercise. It's also a good way for children to learn the proper clothes to wear outside to keep warm. This includes the right sequence of putting on outside clothing and being able to practice zipping, buttoning, buckling, and tying.

If you send your child to a day care center, be sure to provide essential outdoor clothing — boots, coats, pants, mittens, scarves, and caps. Most of the body's heat loss is through the head, so a cap is very important.

Cold weather does not cause colds; colds are given to us by other people. Build up your child's immunity to colds by maintaining good health practices — exercise, rest, fresh air, and good nutrition.

If someone in your family has a cold, dispose of used tissues quickly to prevent germs from being transferred to others. Proper dishwashing will also help keep germs from spreading. If you do not have a dishwasher, the best method is to use hot, sudsy water and let the dishes air dry.

This Issue

This newsletter is published for Minnesota young families by the Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, and distributed through your local county extension service office. Please call your county extension agent, HE/FL with your suggestions for its content.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eileen Anderson".

Eileen G. Anderson, County Extension Agent,
Home Economics/Family Living

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