



GETTINGRID OF THE GIMMEES CAN BE A TRUE GIFT FOR KIDS



by Mimi Hudson

It is the First of December and most parents have been hearing about Christmas since the day after Halloween! Children have been bombarded by advertising and stores have been decorated for months. Is it any wonder they get the gimmees?

"I want what I want and I want it now!" Children get the gimmees because they are used to having more than they need and having things done for them with no expectation of contributing.

We used to say that, "gimme, gimme never gets." How many of you get or got everything you ever wanted? Even if you could give your children everything they ask for, is it a realistic expectation? Does anyone appreciate that which comes too easily?

Children who have been overindulged, pampered or used to getting what they want when they want it from their parents, run into difficulties later in life. They have trouble taking responsibility for their own actions, delaying gratification and recognizing enough is enough in many aspects of their life. This sense of entitlement could also lead to addiction.

How is it that today's children demand and receive more of everything, particularly

toys, than ever before?

On average, children watch four hours of television each day and are exposed to 40,000 commercials a year! That is a lot of "stuff" they are seeing and hearing about. As well, parents inadvertently contribute to their children's overindulgence in a number of ways.

According to research, at Christmas and birthdays, parents give approximately eight more toys than their children expect. Out of a sense of guilt because they travel a lot, work long hours and/or are divorced, they may feel they have to buy presents to make up for their absence. It is not uncommon for parents to use toys or money to bribe children for good behaviour or to improve marks at school.

We give "things" to our children with the best of intentions, but what should we really do?

First of all, set limits. Don't give in to demands. Make it clear to children that we don't enjoy giving when it is expected. Learn to say "no" firmly but kindly. Limit the amount of television children watch. Companies spend an estimated \$14.4 billion every year advertising products to

children.

Discuss the toys children see advertised and talk about how they might play with them. When a child asks for a toy, ask them what they like about it? What would they do with it? How is it different than toys they already have? Have them make a wish list putting items in order of preference. Discuss their choices and the fact that they might not get everything on their list. A pony was always on my Christmas list!

When going shopping, let your children know in advance what you will and will not be buying that day. If they make a request, acknowledge their desire but let them know you will not be buying it, stating, "I hear how excited you are about that toy, but we are here to buy groceries today."

Make trips to the toy or electronics store just to look. Talk about what you see, read the boxes. Let them know that not every trip to the store results in a purchase. Grant them their wish in fantasy. "Don't you wish you could have everything in this store?"

Teach your children money management. Give them a small allowance. Let them save their own money for things they want between the special occasions when they usually receive gifts. Let your children know that their desires are important and encourage them to ask for what they want – remembering it is not our job to fulfill their every wish. We want to teach them that sometimes they can ask for something as a gift and sometimes they have to make it happen themselves.

During the Christmas season, we can encourage the joy of giving and what children might give to other family members. They can make their own gifts – a frame for a school picture, cookies, candy or a re-gift. They could make a small donation to the Christmas Bureau or the food bank. It doesn't have to be a lot, just an acknowledgement that we share what we have within our community.

We are very fortunate living on the North Shore where there are many free things for families to do. It is easy to model for our children that we don't always have to spend money to have fun. The greatest gift we can give our children is our time and our interest in them.

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