

Making Cents Of The Holi-daze

Consumer Alert!

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Credit Counseling

"Americans list lack of money (61%), the pressures of gift giving (42%), lack of time (34%) and credit card debt (23%) as top causes of holiday stress." (Source: American Psychological Association)

Do you feel financially ready for this holiday season? Are you looking forward to the holidays or does the thought bring a little anxiety? This publication provides six steps to help minimize your holiday stress factor, gift ideas that keep your spirit bright yet are light on your bank account, and great activity ideas for making memories instead of debt. And don't forget to read the Alliance *Holiday Survival Guide* for seven strategies for avoiding a holiday debt-hangover and for dozens of tips on trimming your costs.

Stress-Free Holiday Steps

Here are six steps to help you get ready for the holidays and minimize your holiday stress factor.

1. Set Limits.

Use the Alliance publication *The Spending Plan* to create a monthly budget, which will include a plan to set aside a little each month for gifts. Use the Holiday Spending Planner from the Alliance *Holiday Survival Guide* to determine the monthly total you have available for spending on gifts.

2. Make A List.

Use the Holiday List Planner (in this publication) to make a list, and ensure that you don't overspend. Check out the inexpensive gift ideas below.

3. Mark Your Calendar.

Add the time-sensitive items to your calendar. Check out the activity ideas below to include some inexpensive fun. Assign tasks appropriate to each person and then put the calendar where the whole family can see it.

4. Prioritize Your Spending.

Pay your bills in advance, or reserve funds for your projected bills.

5. Use The List.

Shop with the list you created using the Holiday List Planner, and stick to your budget. Remember that stores tend to be less crowded in the mornings and earlier in the week. To avoid the crowds completely, consider shopping online.

6. Reward Yourself.

Choose a date by which you want to have all your preparations finished and mark it on your calendar as a day off (for accomplishing your tasks). If you get your shopping done under budget, take the difference and put it into your savings/retirement account, or give yourself some other little treat.

Bargain Hunting Tips

- Make a note on your calendar, on the day(s) right after the holiday, to shop for holiday gifts. For example, you can find holiday chocolate up to 90% off.
- Check out the "Used & New" link for an item at Amazon.com. You can often find books being sold in new condition for less than half price.



Bright & Light Gift Ideas

Home-baked. Cookies, bread, muffins, trail-mix, jams, jellies, preserves, or whatever you like. Add an inexpensive cellophane wrap and a gold/silver bow or ribbon for a festive presentation. Need frugal recipes? Check out dozens at: www.miserlymoms.com/MOMfrecipes1.htm.

Home-grown. Organic is in! Your garden can be a source for fruits, nuts, herbs or vegetables. Present them fresh (depending on your climate) or dried.

Home-made. If you have craft-abilities, consider a gift from your own quality handiwork: knitted mittens or scarf, quilted place mats, hot plate, hand painted ornament, apron, tool belt, hand-decorated ceramic mug/bowl, t-shirts/sweatshirts. Here's an idea for holiday meal placemats. Cut up greeting cards you received, mix it up with photos, place your collage on plastic contact paper and cover it with another piece. Each family member can create their own. Need ideas? Check out 101 great gifts to make at <http://familycrafts.about.com/cs/giftgiving/a/120400a.htm>.

Favorite Recipes. Write your top ten family recipes on index cards or print them if you have a computer.

Coupons. A great gift idea that can cost you nothing but be highly valued is a coupon for a service or a

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privilege you can provide (something outside of what's normally expected). For example: preparing dinner, a nice massage, a car wash by hand, or a free service that you do for a living. Another popular coupon that won't cost much consists of a free movie rental and a bag of microwave popcorn. Want help making the coupons? Check out the free ones you can print at: www.budget101.com/giftcoupon.htm#Free_Printable_Coupons.

Collections. Assemble your own personalized gift basket (or bag, or stocking) from inexpensive items purchased at dollar stores, flea markets, thrift stores, or yard sales.

Computer-assisted. If you already have a computer and a printer, put it to use. Make a calendar using your own pictures or art. Use the free moviemaker software that came with your computer (Windows MovieMaker or Apple iMovie) to create a CD/DVD of shared experiences – family holidays, trip, or other memory. Buy an inexpensive T-shirt and personalize it with an iron-on transfer you can create. For more ideas on gifts you can create using your personal computer, check out: www.thecraftypc.com.

Group. Consider pooling your resources to create a gift for a whole family rather than gifts for each individual. Consider the extra fun that can come from a game or activity the whole family can enjoy or a basket of smaller items that a family can share.

Subscriptions. Consider giving a year's subscription to a magazine of interest to the recipient (also saves wrapping and the cost of shipping or of picking it up). Want help finding magazines on certain topics? Check out www.magazinesusa.com.

Holiday List Planner					
Category	Description	Interest/Occu.	Item	Cost	Date
Gifts					
Family	Spouse				
	Child1				
	Child2				
	Father				
	Mother				
	Father-in-law				
	Mother-in-law				
	Brother1				
Friends	Sister1				
	Relative1				
Work/School	1				
Charity					
Charity1					
Decorations					
Tree					
	Flowers				
	Lights				
Cards					
Greeting					
	Thank You				
Postage					
For cards					
	For gifts				
Wrapping					
For shipping					
	For gifts				
Holiday Food					
For meals					
	Treats				
	Beverages				
Total Cost:					

Make Memories, Not Debt

The most valuable gift you can give is your time. Consider a few of the following ideas for fun that won't have you singing "Blue Christmas:"

★ Check your local paper for free public holiday displays (parks decorated), free activities (public skating), or events (free concert).

★ Take a family drive to look at the holiday lights in a safe neighborhood.

★ Attend a holiday musical or play put on at a local place of worship (also consider volunteering to help make it happen).

★ If you already have a computer and a digital camera or video camera, make a slide-show or movie of your family

holidays past then watch it together with family/friends.

★ Watch your favorite holiday movies together. If you have the ability, record them when they come on television and then watch them at your convenience. This way, you can fast-forward through the 20 minutes of time-wasting, jingle-hype commercials that occur every hour.

★ Volunteer to help out with a local charity (food bank, soup kitchen, clothing store, homeless shelter).

★ Check it out at your public library: holiday books, movies, music, crafts, games, and more.

★ Have a family story time. Check out one of the holiday collections from the Chicken Soup For The Soul series or visit www.Christmas-stories.com.

★ Have a family game night or puzzle night. Don't forget the holiday music and some hot cocoa.

★ Have a decorating party. Involve family and friends in making and sharing homemade decorations.

★ Sing in the season with karaoke, carols at home, or caroling with a group.

★ Have a family adventure. Enjoy the natural wonders and activities found at a city or state park.

Holiday Stress-Busters

- * Get decent sleep
- * Eat and drink moderately
- * Enjoy recreation
- * Laugh with loved ones
- * Expect challenges
- * Leave the past behind
- * Do unto others

To Find Out More



- The Spending Plan (Alliance): www.knowdebt.org/education.php.
- Holiday Survival Guide (Alliance): www.knowdebt.org/education.php.
- 19 inexpensive gift ideas at: www.newdream.org/holiday/giftideastaff.php.
- 39 Frugal Tips for Saving Money at Christmas: www.betterbudgeting.com/articles/holidays/saveatchristmas.htm.
- Frugal gift ideas, articles on frugal living, links to free things at: www.budget101.com or www.thefrugalsupplier.com.