

Teach your children the gift of giving this season  
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The malls are getting crowded, familiar carols are being heard on the radio and in stores, and great sales abound. That can only mean one thing – the holidays are here again. While the holiday time is supposed to be a relaxing, enjoyable time with friends and family it can also be a very stressful time.

Trying to do too much, expecting too much, and increasing family togetherness can lead to a lot of tension, especially for children. Appealing presents and decorations around the home and neighborhood, new music and stories, and the tension and stress of the adults around them can all lead to an increase in stress for children.

Children need help understanding what they should expect out of the holiday season. If the emphasis surrounding the holiday is placed on gifts, food and decorations; expect a child to associate the holidays with those things. However, if the emphasis is on family, friends and thinking of others then children will form their beliefs based on those values.

Children enjoy and benefit from making others happy and what better time than the Christmas season to provide opportunities for giving? Here are five ways to teach your children about volunteering and giving the gift of themselves during the holidays.

Start with your closets. There are plenty of needy people that need warm clothes this time of year. Pull out all the old coats and sweaters that are not worn anymore and donate them to a local homeless shelter. Let your children help you with this.

Participate in food drives. Go through your pantries and take your children with you to the grocery store to let them help pick out items for donations. Have them deliver the food to charitable organizations.

Donate used toys. Explain to your children that they need to make room for all their new presents and encourage them to pick out a few toys they would like to give to a needy child.

Sponsor a child or family and let your children participate in gift buying and delivering for this as well.

Finally, let your child drop some change into the Salvation Army bucket set up outside most malls and department stores. Explain why helping others is so important, especially around the holidays.

Charitable giving is a win-win situation for everyone. It increases a child's self-esteem while benefiting the community at the same time. These valuable gains will last long after the holiday hustle and bustle has faded.

*For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.*