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Reclaim your holidays

By Susan Salterberg, UNI Center for Energy & Environmental Education

Take three minutes to think about and write down your answers to these quiz questions:

1) What are your favorite parts of the holiday?
2) What traditions are important to you?
3) What parts of your holiday routine deplete rather than restore?

By answering these questions—and then heeding the insights from your answers—you can begin to reshape your holiday so it is less stressful and more meaningful.

Reclaiming the holidays means doing things you love, it means making decisions according to your values, and it means nurturing and celebrating relationships. Here are a few tips to help you:

1) Communicate expectations with your family/friends. You must be clear about what you want and ask your family and friends what they really want; no one is a mind-reader.
2) Identify a few favorite activities. Focus on making sure you do a few things you love at the holidays.
3) Take care. Self-care may be more critical during the holiday season than any other time of the year. And care of others is also important—whether it’s limiting your gift list so you have the time to give thoughtful gifts, or whether it’s singing carols at the community nursing home. After all, isn’t “caring” what the holiday is about?
4) Consider gifts of experience. Studies show they hold more value and are remembered longer than material ones. A list of ideas is available at www.ceee.uni.edu/reclamyourholidays.aspx.
5) Consider giving share-checks. Write a check with everything filled in except the “pay to the order of.” Intentionally leave it blank, and allow the recipient to give the money to a charitable cause they are passionate about. Great for teaching kids the value of sharing.
6) Help children prioritize their wants and cherish gifts. Ask “Which do you want?” Help children make decisions between two or more items.
7) Pay as you buy. You’ll have plenty of time to consider whether the gift—or purchase for yourself—is truly important. If you do buy, you’ll save plenty on interest. If you make a $1,000 purchase on a credit card charging 18% interest, and make only minimum payments monthly, the item you are buying will cost about $1,400—40% more than the purchase price!
Many more tips, and more information about UNI Center for Energy and Environmental Education’s Reclaim your Holidays project, is available at www.ceee.uni.edu/reclaimyourholidays.aspx.

*The Center for Energy and Environmental Education received two grants—one from the Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program and another from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Solid Waste Alternatives Program—to help Iowans create more meaningful holidays. The hope is that, when the focus is on meaning rather than busyness and buying, the environment will also benefit. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed as part of this project are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of REAP CEP or IDNR.*

Sidebar:

**What Iowans say about reclaiming the holidays**

I love the holidays with extended family – we do not exchange gifts. We play games, tell stories of “back in the day,” and eat each other’s food. The year we did the game “Dance Dance revolution” in Grandma’s living room was my favorite – all ages participated!

Our extended family has celebrated many holidays at Backbone State Park. The cabins are modern and comfortable, we’ve had bonfires, we’ve hiked, and we’ve seen eagles fly eight feet above our heads. There’s no TV; conversations, game-playing and being outside are the focus.

I've never enjoyed shopping, especially when the mall is packed with frenzied shoppers with a buying mission that seems to override the real reasons for gift giving. Shopping from local, privately owned shops feels good. I'm supporting my community, and my purchases tend to be unique. The feeling I get shopping downtown is much more calm and joyous. I love going into the winter air between stores, smelling aromas from coffee shops and restaurants, and hearing holiday music from minstrels.

**Share your own short story** for possible publication on UNI Center for Energy & Environmental Education’s Reclaim Your Holidays website by emailing reclaimyourholidays@uni.edu.