



HOLIDAY BUDGETING

Make a budget and **stick to it!**

Set a realistic limit on what you'll spend on everything: gifts, food, entertainment, travel, etc.

Decide how much you'll spend on each person on your gift list.

Avoid impulse buying.

Shop early.

Compare prices.

Use the Internet and catalogs to cut down on "mall stress".

If you can't afford to buy for everyone, set priorities—then let others know you won't be exchanging gifts this year.

If you have a large family, draw names so that everyone doesn't have to buy for everyone else.

Pay with cash.

It's easier to overspend with credit cards.

We don't have the psychological tie to plastic that we do to actual cash.

Consumer Credit Counseling reports that people who use credit cards spend up to 1/3 more than those who use cash.

Don't fall for "skip payment" offers from your mortgage company, or for "deferred billing" from banks or stores (no payments until February!), or for the ability to write "checks" of up to thousands of dollars on your credit card.

However, understand that credit cards can be useful. If you lose your cash, it's gone. If you lose your card, your liability is usually limited to \$50. So if you do decide to use plastic, write down each charge in your checkbook—so you'll know your purchases are costing you real money.

Be creative with your gifts.

Do something home made or home baked.

Make a photo album.

Give someone a coupon for a special service—baby sitting, house cleaning, snow shoveling, lawn raking, gutter cleaning, window washing, etc.

Open a savings account for a grandchild, or make a contribution to an education IRA.

Set reasonable expectations for your children.

If finances are tight, level with them.

Nobody's resources are unlimited.

Tell children your love for them isn't measured by the quantity of "stuff" they get or how much you spend.

Teach them that giving is a greater joy than receiving.

Create family traditions and memories that will endure well beyond the toys and products that will surely be forgotten (if not broken) by next Christmas.

Tour neighborhoods with beautifully lighted houses.

Go caroling.

Invite friends or neighbors in for a potluck.

Rent a holiday classic like, "It's a Wonderful Life".

Volunteer at a homeless shelter.

Go to a performance of "The Nutcracker" or "The Messiah".

Attend a midnight church service on Christmas Eve.

You can emphasize the religious significance of the holiday.