

By Brooke Romney
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Once you're too old to sit on Santa's lap, Christmas often loses most of its magic. That is, until you have children.

For parents, the magic returns, twofold, as your children's faces light up as they open gift after gift. Parents love that feeling so much, oftentimes the presents never seem to stop.

And some parents start wondering "How many gifts are too many gifts?"

"It's very hard not to give my children a big Christmas," says Carol Ann Boyd, a mother of six who lives in Higley.

Instead of spending money on the hottest item, which is usually broken or forgotten by the end of the day, the Boyds give a small number of gifts and spend most of the Christmas budget on a family vacation during the holidays.

"That's when we really make our memories, when we are all together, away from home, enjoying each other," Boyd said.

Keri Maughan, a mother and family life coach in Mesa, would approve.

"We should focus on traditions of Christmas, not gifts of Christmas," she said. "Let your children help you create fun and meaningful traditions."

At her house, Maughan likes to keep gifts to a minimum.

"The more they get, the more they expect," she said. "Real happiness comes only from true gratitude."

If your children are always anticipating the next item or wishing there was more to open, it is hard for them to really be happy and grateful for the gifts they were given. They'll always be wanting more, she said.

Kristine Kotter, a Mesa mother of five, says she can't help but make Christmas a huge spectacular.

"I try not to get them everything on their pretty long lists, but my kids are great kids -- straight A students and pleasant at home," she said. "This is my time of year to really have fun rewarding them."

Throughout December she anticipates their reaction to the piles of gifts they will find on Christmas morning.

"Sometimes the reaction is a bit of a let down. The more gifts they open, the less grateful they get," she said.

Kotter's family offsets all the getting by providing Christmas for a few other families each year, serving in soup kitchens, and donating clothing to homeless shelters. They feel blessed to have so much and are more than willing to give.

Maughan, the family life coach, helped one affluent family rein in their gift-giving. Each year, Christmases were still spectacular, but the next year each child gave every old toy but one to a local children's shelter.