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No Gifts Please 2 Comments

How to tell your family you don't want gifts this holiday season

By [Natasha Burton \(/tags/natasha-burton\)](#) December 06, 2014

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Start a New Tradition

I have an extremely big-hearted family when it comes to gift giving, and [for that I'm grateful](#) (<http://www.dailyworth.com/posts/3147-20-quotes-from-powerful-women-on-gratitude>). However, I've decided that I no longer want presents for the holidays. Am I crazy?

Maybe. But I'm 30, I just got married, and I recently took five trash bags of clutter to my local Goodwill. As much as I love getting presents from my extended family (especially in the form of checks), I feel guilty accepting them. I'm a full-fledged adult now; I rarely see my aunts and uncles; and, honestly, I [don't have the funds](#) (<http://www.dailyworth.com/posts/3116-how-to-get-through-the-holidays-in-debt>) to reciprocate their generosity.

For those of you in the same boat, here's how to gracefully bow out of annual holiday gifting.



Just Tell Them

Often, the best way to get your point across is to be up-front. Beverly Hills, Calif.-based etiquette expert Lisa Gache (<http://beverlyhillsmanners.com/>) advises having a conversation in person (or over Skype) well before the holiday itself. "Your delivery should be respectful and warm in tone," she says. "Highlight your gratitude and appreciation, and finally convey your concern. You should be gracious and grateful and communicate that the relationship is most important, not the gifts."



Give a Reason

You may feel more comfortable giving a reason why you'd prefer not to accept gifts, explaining, perhaps, that you simply don't have the budget. (This is a great option if you think your relatives are probably stretched rather thin as well.)

"The best way to communicate that you will be cutting back this year is by simply stating it out loud. No apologies needed," says etiquette pro Diane Gottsman (<http://dianegottsman.com/>). "We tend to think people will be offended when we suggest cutting back on presents, when in actuality most people are relieved. People with limited budgets, people on fixed incomes, and people whose families have expanded will no longer feel the pressure to reciprocate."

Make Time Instead

Here's an easy trade: Your presence instead of presents. "So many of my clients say they wish they had more time to enjoy loved ones," says life coach Patty Bevlock of Advanced Life & Wellness Coaching, LLC (<http://www.advancedlifecoach.net/>), explaining that your family may even prefer spending an afternoon with you to opening a traditional gift.



The gift of time could include baking cookies with your young cousins, going to lunch with your aunt, holiday shopping with your grandma, or simply setting a phone date so you can really catch up if you don't live close.



Consider Alternatives to Tradition

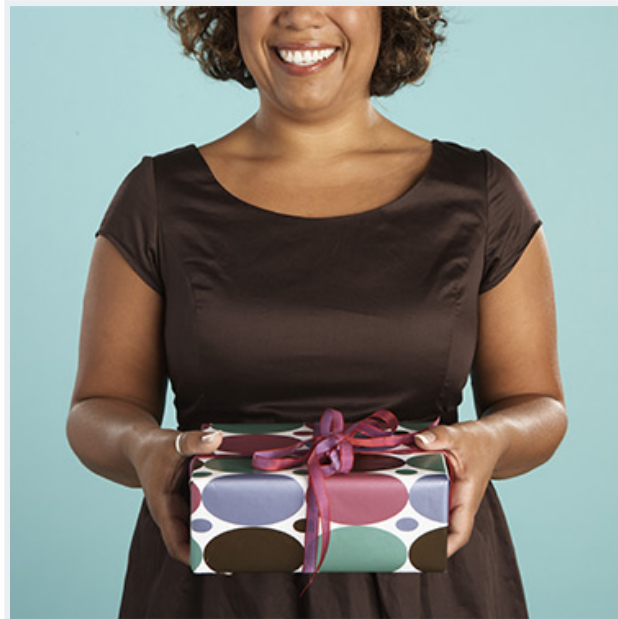
If your family is big on gifts and you can't imagine bucking tradition without causing a situation, suggest a themed exchange, says Adeodata Czink of [Business of Manners](http://www.businessofmanners.com)

(<http://www.businessofmanners.com>). While traditional White Elephants can be fun, you may consider trading homemade jam with your mom, or asking aunts and uncles to bring their favorite dessert instead of gifts. Or set a family rule (like gifts for kids only) or a spending cap (or both). That way there are still some presents to be opened, but it's less of a pinch on your wallet.

Get Charitable

"My clients are overwhelmed with gifts, gift cards, things they never use and don't want," says [Liz Taylor of Taylor Organizing Inc](http://www.taylororganizing.com/) (<http://www.taylororganizing.com/>). "Plus, they then feel guilty about donating the gloves Aunt Sally gave them." She suggests asking family to make a donation to a charity you care about in lieu of giving a gift and tell them you'll do the same.

"Even better, ask them to spend time volunteering with you at a local food bank or charitable organization, if you live nearby," she suggests. "It may be the season of giving but that doesn't necessarily mean *to you*."



Let It Go if You Must

Before you try any of the aforementioned tips, consider *why* certain family members continue to give you annual gifts. "Gracefully refusing a holiday gift from a loved one is treacherous territory, as these gifts are typically given with love and only the best of intentions in mind," Gache

says. "To reject the gift may come across as a refusal of love, leaving the gift giver humiliated and hurt."

Relationship expert [April Masini](http://www.askapril.com) (<http://www.askapril.com>) agrees: Your relatives may be in a time warp, but treating you like you're still a kid makes them feel purposeful and gives their holiday structure. "Is the five-dollar bill in a holiday card really that much of an imposition on you?" she says. "Sometimes allowing others to give is the biggest gift you can give them."

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2 Comments

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milledoni · an hour ago

Gift giving is a pleasure for many people. Reciprocate their generosity it's not needed. Maybe it's a good idea to start enjoying receiving gifts...a very hard thing to do!



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Haralee · 6 hours ago

It is a dicey situation because some people love giving gifts and you don't want to deny them this pleasure. An idea that has worked for me is recipes. Sharing a favorite recipe and if some one wants to include the dish prepared too, so be it! I think by 21-23 all gifts are for kids or even just for the under 10 crowd for extended family.

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