

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY TRADITION A HIGHLIGHT OF THE HOLIDAYS

By Courtney Diener-Stokes
For MediaNews Group

Many people mark Black Friday as the day they start shopping for the holiday season.

But Diane McCormick, 81, of Chester Springs, Chester County, has her focus on staying at home to keep up an 80-year-old tradition in her family: Cookie Day.

It's a day that focuses on some of the most simple and important aspects of the holiday season: family togetherness and making memories.

For McCormick, the day after Thanksgiving centers on making several batches of cookie dough with her daughter, Dawn McCormick of Pittsburgh, using the same rolled sugar cookie recipe that was originally used by McCormick's late grandmother, Emma Blackwood of Philadelphia. Written in Blackwood's handwriting, the recipe card comes out once a year in anticipation of the Christmas holiday.

"During WWII, my mother, grandmother and my aunt pulled their ration coupons to buy the butter for the cookies," McCormick said. "That is how long it has been going on."

Beyond serving as a day dedicated to making a beloved holiday treat, it's time spent with family gathered in the kitchen with each equipped with their own rolling pin. It's a focused activity they can pour their love into that also serves as gifts for all they know and love.

"The energy invested in doing it is family time spent together," McCormick said. "It's not running off shopping."

The two-day event for making cookies takes McCormick back to her early years when she was in elementary school and learned the technique for making the cookies super thin.



COURTESY OF DIANE MCCORMICK

Diane McCormick's grandchildren, from left, Ryan, Kylie and Connor McCormick, on Cookie Day a few years ago.

"We all learned when we were little kids and we grew up with it," she said. "My kids and grandchildren started when they were in preschool."

Blackwood was the originator of the recipe, and McCormick's grandchildren participate in what has come to be considered their own family holiday.

"Then my mother (Vera Keiser of Philadelphia) did it, myself, my children and now my grandchildren are the fifth generation carrying on this tradition," McCormick said. "This is our families' official start of the Christmas hol-

iday." On Cookie Day, McCormick enjoys the time with her three grandchildren, Kylie, Ryan and Connor McCormick, who are the children of Diane's son, James McCormick of Malvern, Chester County.

With the twin boys, who are 18, in college and her granddaughter in high school, Cookie Day takes place when they are home on their holiday break. When they go to McCormick's house, which they have been doing since they were very young, they usually have the movie, "A Christmas Story," play-



COURTESY OF COURTNEY DIENER-STOKES

Diane McCormick of Chester Springs, Chester County, with one of her gift bags filled with cookies made on Cookie Day.

ing in the background. Sandwiches made using leftover turkey are served for lunch when they take a break from cookie making.

"This year the World Cup was playing so we had to watch the soccer game instead," she said.

Kylie, 16, started giving out the

cookies to her friends when she was in middle school.

"This year she made gift bags for 21 friends and eight teachers and librarians," McCormick said. "She put Hershey's Kisses in the bags for friends and tea for the

COOKIE DAY » PAGE 2



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Cookie Day

FROM PAGE 1

teachers and librarians.”

Kylie took shape requests from friends who might have a penchant for a Santa shape over a wreath cutout.

“My favorite thing about Cookie Day is spending time with my family and making delicious treats that I know will bring joy,” Kylie said. “Cookie Day has been part of my life since I was a little kid, and I look forward to it every year and all the fun little traditions surrounding it. When I give my friends the cookies we make, their faces light up, and I know I will continue the tradition for years to come.”

If you visit the McCormick home on Cookie Day, you will see the entire dining room table filled with stacks of colorful cookies that have been baked to perfection. The original purpose of Cookie Day was to have nice cookies to serve at Christmas. Three generations later, McCormick began gifting them to extended family, friends, neighbors and more.

“I take them to my dentist’s office and the ladies in my church,” she said. “They were so excited about the cookies at the dental office it was like finding the Holy Grail.”

Each festive bag, tin or plate she gives to someone comes with a generous amount of cookies, along with a few packets of tea for adults and hot chocolate packets for children.

McCormick shared some tips on how they make their thin and crisp sugar cookies, which are made with traditional ingredients you would find in a sugar cookie such as butter, flour and vanilla.

After making several batches of the dough, with each batch yielding about 6 dozen cookies, it all heads to the refrigerator to chill overnight for cookie baking to take place the following day.

“I always use King Arthur all-purpose flour, and I always use real, unsalted



Diane McCormick’s grandchildren, from left, Kylie, Connor and Ryan McCormick, are the fifth generation carrying on the 80-year-old family tradition of Cookie Day.

butter,” McCormick said. “And we dissolve the baking soda in boiling water.”

McCormick has a method for keeping the dough from getting too soft while rolling it out super thin before cutting it out with the cookie cutters.

“We keep all of the dough in the refrigerator the whole day and just take out pieces as we need it and roll it,” she said. “We roll on a heavy-duty canvas (pastry cloth), and we cover our rolling pin with a fabric cover. I still have the ones like my grandmother used. The key to the cookies being unique is how thin they are.”

She adds a little flour to the canvas before cutting them in shapes such as

bells, Santas, holly, sleighs and more.

“We have cookie cutters for all of the normal Christmas symbols, and if you’re Jewish, I have Hanukkah symbols, too,” she said.

When it comes to decorating the cookies, they never use icing — only colored sugar or cinnamon sugar. The sugar is placed on the cookies once they are on the baking sheet before they go in the oven.

Cookie Day also simplifies gift-giving since the cookies can serve as a gift for many. It is a win-win for all involved.

“Everybody who gets them, they eat them so they don’t have to worry about, ‘What am I going to do with this thing?’” she said. “If we

give you a cookie tin or a gift bag you can reuse it, so it helps recycle.”

Their gifts of cookies are intentionally distributed early in the Christmas season.

“We give them out as soon as possible after Thanksgiving before people have too many cookies and so they aren’t overlooked when things get hectic,” she said. “They are usually the first ones that people get.”

McCormick takes pride in this multigenerational activity her family can look forward to every year.

“My favorite part is that it’s a strong tradition in our family and I’m very pleased that our grandchildren are continuing it,” McCormick said.

MCCORMICK’S CHRISTMAS SUGAR COOKIES

Makes about 6 dozen cutout sugar cookies (the yield varies depending on size and thickness of cookies)

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups unsalted butter (1 pound)
- 3 cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 7 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 level teaspoon baking soda dissolved in 1/2 cup boiling water

DIRECTIONS:

In a large bowl (McCormick uses a KitchenAid stand mixer), cream butter and sugar; add the eggs, one at a time. Next, add vanilla and then slowly add flour (mix on low speed). Lastly, add the water/ baking soda mixture.

Note: It is important not to overmix this dough. As soon as all of the flour is incorporated into the dough, add the baking soda mix. Stop mixing as soon as the liquid is mixed in.

Next, divide the dough into four sections (it will be somewhat soft) and wrap each quarter separately in wax paper. Put each wrapped section into a plastic bag; place in the refrigerator (not the freezer) and chill overnight. Dough can rest in the refrigerator for 2 days and the results will be fine.

After chilling, use 1/4 packet of dough at a time, roll it and cut into desired shapes with cookie cutters (metal cutters work best). Before you begin rolling the dough, lightly flour the surface. McCormick uses rolling pin covers and roll the dough on heavy-duty pastry cloths. Decorate the cookies before baking using colored sugars and sprinkles. Another easy topping you can make is simply by mixing regular sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle on the cookie before baking.

Place on ungreased baking sheets; bake at 350 degrees F until lightly browned. Ovens vary; start with 8 to 9 minutes.

When done, remove cookies carefully and cool on baking racks. When completely cooled, store in airtight containers. Cookies will remain fresh for several weeks.



COURTESY OF DIANE MCCORMICK

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SPOT OF T

Phone takes a dive and doesn't come up for air

By Terry Alburger

A funny thing happened last night. Not funny, ha, ha, but funny in an odd kind of way. My phone took a dive. Literally.

However, it was ill-equipped for underwater life, and though I pulled it out quickly, it succumbed to water inhalation. Alas, poor phone, I knew it well! (My apologies to Hamlet and to Shakespeare)

Today I am phoneless. My phone is in its rice bed with hopes that it will make a full recovery. If that fails, we will no doubt be visiting a phone store for possible resuscitation or burial. Yet I remain hopeful.

But this predicament has given me time to ponder my situation. I realized that I have been going through the five stages of phoneless grief.

The first stage was utter disbelief. I heard a plop and turned to see my beautiful phone, laying at the bottom of ...gasp ... the toilet. How did I let this happen? I've never been this careless! After all, our entire lives are on our phones, right? How would I exist without it?

This stage passed quickly because it was followed by the immediate stage of desperation. I fished it out (and sterilized both it and my hands!) and did my best to dry it off.

Then came the vain attempts to use the phone. It showed glimmers of life but nothing near being usable. Repeated attempts to wake it up failed. The next step was the immediate immersion in a bed of rice. I would try anything! I felt as if I had lost a member of my family.

Sadness was next. I went to bed feeling empty, without my trusty 24/7 companion by my side,



PXHERE

happily charging. It was a lonely feeling. There were no dings of incoming messages. No glow of the display.

What if someone needed me? What if I needed to make a call? What if... it was indeed a loss. I was lulled to sleep by silence while visions of a restored phone danced in my head!

The morning brought a new feeling — acceptance. I went downstairs hopeful that a miracle may have transpired. I fished it out of the rice, and the screen

did indeed light up.

Though relatively unresponsive, I was able to get it to wake up once. I had my icons...my precious icons... all there. But I was unable to get any of them to respond to my touch. Oh, woe is me!

I was able to get it to charge a bit, but then it was back in the rice. We were told it can take as long as 24 hours to completely dry out. So, it's a waiting game. But then it happened. The fifth stage.

Clarity! Yes, that's right,

clarity. As I was driving in this morning, I realized that without my phone, I am also without distraction. There will be no inane requests, no junk texts, no spam calls, just quiet.

We all lived lives without cellphones once. Remember that? I think we were more aware of each other's presence, more interactive with family and friends and had more face-to-face contacts.

As I sit here, I realize that I spend way too much

time on useless amenities offered to me on my cell. Games, social media, Google, sure, all great to have. But without them? I'll still ok. I'm going to survive! I am putting my time to better use today.

Who knows? Maybe I needed some downtime where I'm not at everyone's beck and call. Maybe I needed some quiet time to really be able to ponder the meaning of life.... Or at the very least, what I'm going to have for dinner.

But pondering is good,

no matter what. It gives the old grey matter a chance to flex its muscle for a change.

So, if you need me today, call the land line, drop an email, send a smoke signal or Morse code message ... but don't text or call my cellphone. Today, I've gone old school and am off the proverbial grid.

I'm on my own today and actually, it's not so bad! But I will long remember the day my phone died.



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ASK RUSTY

I'm working, why hasn't my Social Security benefit increased?

By Russell Gloor

DEAR RUSTY» I will be 72 in July. I started taking my Social Security at age 64 after a job loss and other items that came up. So, my plan to wait past 68 evaporated, but I have continued to work since that time at a considerably smaller amount.

I have contacted Social Security about increasing my entitlement since my earnings of late are considerably more than my first few years of earnings. Using the formula of the highest earnings over the last 35 years divided by 420, my monthly increase would be about \$500.

I've contacted Social Security several times about this. Their standard reply is that they evaluate all accounts every October and if any adjustments are to be made, they will be made in

March of the following year. Nothing has changed with regards to this as I've continued to work.

Does the fact that I claimed my benefit at age 64 take me out of the equation?

*Signed,
Working Still at 72*

DEAR WORKING» The Social Security representatives you spoke with told you correctly — they examine your recent earnings every year and will automatically adjust your benefit if it is appropriate to do so. But the dollar values they look at to see if you should get a benefit increase may not be what you think.

When you claimed your SS benefits at age 64, they computed your benefit using the highest-earning 35 years you had at that time, but they indexed those earnings (adjusted them for inflation) for the year

you turned 60 and earlier. That means that to arrive at your age 64 benefit, they increased your historical earnings by an inflation percentage for each year, to pay your benefit in current dollars.

For example, if your 1985 earnings were \$25,000, that would be about \$62,000 in today's dollars, and that is the amount they used to compute your benefit. But that is also the amount you would need to exceed today to have your current earnings increase your monthly benefit amount.

So, unless your most recent earnings exceed the inflated dollar amounts used to compute your benefit at age 64, your monthly benefit won't change. Keep in mind too that Social Security uses only the 35 years over your lifetime in which you earned the most, so

years with lower earnings (for example, when you first started working) probably aren't included in the computation.

In any case, rest assured that claiming at age 64 didn't disqualify you from getting a bigger benefit if you're entitled to one because your current earnings exceed the inflation-adjusted amounts originally used.

Everyone who works and earns, even if they are already collecting Social Security, will have their earnings record reviewed every year to see if their current earnings entitle them to a bigger benefit. If so, it is automatically given.

Russell Gloor is a certified Social Security adviser by the Association of Mature American Citizens: <https://amac.us/social-security-advisor>.



Russell Gloor

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MEMORY CARE

How lower-income seniors with memory issues can safely age in place

By Dr. Karen Nichols

Mild, moderate or severe cognitive issues can affect older adults and place a burden on their loved ones, who have to juggle working a full-time job while serving as caregiver.

Seniors struggling with memory issues lean on others to help them with basic tasks like cooking and remembering to take medication.

The health of seniors with low incomes often suffers because there is scarce financial support for the care they need. Moderate or severe cognitive diseases especially require support from an adequate care team.

Disadvantages

Once seniors reach their 70s and early 80s, cognitive decline becomes most prevalent. Short-term memory is the first to go. Also, around this age range, some seniors may wander off, forget to eat and miss doctor's appointments.

People in this age bracket also have an increased risk for harm, falls and malnutrition. Lifestyle habits, medication and diseases can cause memory issues and exacerbate preexisting conditions.

Alzheimer's and other dementias are cognitive diseases that cause memory loss, requiring a formal diagnosis from a doctor. A number of tests are available to calibrate the severity of dementia and categorize dementia.

However, a barrier to lower-income seniors is



Dr. Karen Nichols

finding and affording healthcare as well as affording assistance with daily tasks.

Resources

A number of financial resources may be available to help cover the cost of care for low-income seniors with Alzheimer's or dementia. Government programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and veteran benefits are available.

Many communities also offer free services such as home-delivered meals, support groups, and transportation through informal care arrangements from faith or volunteer groups.

Access to care

Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly such as Trinity Health PACE work to provide needed care to seniors with Medicaid while making it possible for the senior to live comfortably in the community, in their home or the home of a family member. Anyone has the ability to refer the program.

During the enrollment

process, the participant will be tested for memory issues to determine their level of cognitive decline. Once enrolled, the participant is evaluated individually for what their needs are.

PACE supplies medications delivered directly to the home or a PACE center. Transportation vehicles, drivers and aides bring the participant to a PACE center and to appointments with their providers.

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Programs like this are in place to provide comfort and safety to seniors that would otherwise be limited in their healthcare options.

Additionally, the caregiver burden is taken off family members or friends and placed in the hands of professionals that specialize in treating seniors with memory issues.

To discover more resources available to lower-income seniors with memory issues, visit the Alzheimer's Association website, <https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources>, and the Community Resource Finder, <https://www.communityresourcefinder.org>.

Dr. Karen Nichols is the chief medical officer Trinity Health PACE, with multiple locations, including a new location called Mercy LIFE Kinder Park that will serve seniors in Delaware County.



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According to the 2022 Long-Term Trend Assessment Results in Reading and Mathematics conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reading and math scores declined during the pandemic at an alarming rate.

Average scores for 9 year olds declined 5 points in reading and 7 points in math compared to 2020. This is the largest decline in reading since 1990, and the first ever decline in math.

Research shows further that it is imperative that steps be taken to ensure that students overcome these obstacles during their primary grades, helping them to avoid a lack of confidence in learning, which often lasts a lifetime.

How do we ensure students have a chance at a better life? We intervene.

A dedicated corps of RSVP Elementary Literacy program tutors has been volunteering nonstop since the beginning of the pandemic to help improve these dismal statistics.

"When schools shut down in 2020, we worked hard to determine the best course of action to keep children learning," said Jackie Matusow, RSVP's literacy program coordinator. "We immediately began planning our virtual program that students could participate in from their homes.

"It took a little time to work out the technology kinks, but it became a great summer and fall 2020 resource for stu-



ADOBE STOCK IMAGES

dents, teachers, reading specialists, and parents. We offered it to students both during and after the school day to ensure we would reach as many students as possible. The virtual reading support program is still popular and in place."

With schools opening up to volunteers this year, teachers needed the in-class support that volunteers provide to students.

"We currently have 95 volunteers providing classroom reading support, but more are needed," Matusow said. "The greatest need currently for in-person volunteers is in the Phoenixville, Ridley and Southeast Delaware County, as well as the North Penn school districts."

Volunteers who are new to the program participate in a training session and are then assigned to a K-fifth-grade classroom. Volunteers work either one-on-one or with a small group on reading and pro-

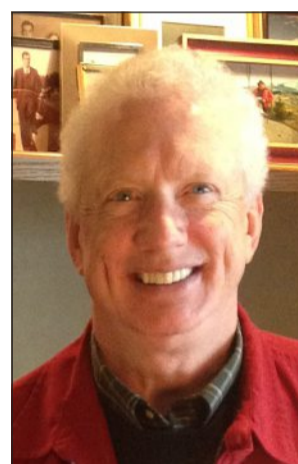
vide guidance on phonics, decoding and fluency.

Tutors are trained to make the reading process easier and more enjoyable, which encourages both self-confidence and reading success. Training sessions are also provided for virtual tutors.

Students feel safe with the volunteer who provides individual attention, enabling students to take risks which they may not be comfortable doing in class in front of their peers, Matusow said.

John Hutton has volunteered as an in-person and virtual reading coach over the years. Before the pandemic, Hutton worked with fourth-graders for about 2 1/2 years at Media Elementary School.

"Every week I had a reading session with a student, and we would read a book selected by the teacher," Hutton said. "We would sound out words, try to predict what would happen next and we would spend some time



John Hutton

was reading with a third-grade student online was about trees and forests," he said. "I found a pinecone and showed it to her on my screen. We talked about how forest fires can be beneficial as the pinecone heats up and drops its seeds to create more trees.

"The student was excited to learn that sometimes forest fires are not all bad. I get a lot of joy from working with students to help give them an appreciation for reading that will last their entire lives."

To learn more about RSVP's Elementary Literacy program, visit www.rsvpmc.org or contact Kathy Stocker, volunteer coordinator, at kathys@rsvpmc.org.

Nonprofit RSVP's programs improve the lives of vulnerable populations by focusing on education and wellness. For information on volunteering, visit rsvpmc.org, email volunteer123@rsvpmc.org or call 610-834-1040, ext. 123.

"One of the books I

Birthday milestone



Mary E. (Wagner) Obarow

Berks County woman celebrates her 100th birthday

Name: Mary E. (Wagner) Obarow

Address: Muhlenberg Township, Berks County

Age: 100

Birthday: Nov. 29, 1922

Where born: West Reading

Name of spouse: Nick Obarow (deceased)

Occupation of spouse: HVAC specialist

Parents: William and Katie (Stitzel) Wagner

Places of residence during lifetime: West Reading, Oley, Muhlenberg Township

Names of children: Nick III (husband of Doreen) of Wyomissing; Craig (husband of Barbara) of Oley; Christine Heffentrager (wife of Sid) of Birdsboro; and Timothy (husband of Michele) of Coshocton, Ohio.

Grandchildren: 6

Great-grandchildren: 15

Great-great-grandchildren: 7

Activities: Taking care of her home and yard; teaching Sunday school and leading Bible study. Homemaker, excellent cook.

Happiest days of your life: when her husband returned from World War II, where he was stationed in England. He snuck into the house and surprised her on his return.

Achievements: She was a founding member of New Life Bible Fellowship Church in Oley.

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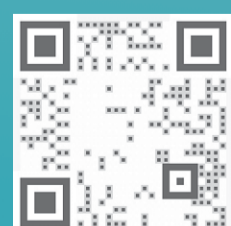


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COOKING

TIPS FOR OVERCOMING AGE-RELATED COOKING CHALLENGES

By Sarah Gantz
Kaiser Health Network

Cooking at home is a mood-booster, exercises muscles and the mind, and can help us maintain a healthy diet, especially as we age.

But with age-related medical conditions come new challenges in the kitchen. People with dementia or memory loss may worry about forgetting the roast they put in the oven.

Perhaps the meals you used to prepare for a family of five no longer make sense for a solo diner.

Arthritis, lost muscle mass, decreased height, and vision problems can all affect how you cook. Here are some tips to get the most out of home cooking.

Consider what you're cooking

Research shows that people who cook for themselves eat out less often and consume less fast food, said Julia Wolfson, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies food systems and food policy.

That can be especially important for older adults, whose metabolism has slowed and who may be at risk for type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol — all medical conditions that are influenced by diet.

But, Wolfson said, “Just purely the act of cooking itself does not equal healthy eating.”

Get the most out of home cooking by planning meals that balance protein and high-fiber vegetables with fat and carbs. Think about portion sizes, and the amount of salt and sugar you use.



TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Susanna Foo begins cooking her Wild Mushroom Dumplings With Porcini Mushroom and Truffle Sauce at her home in Villanova.

For instance, packaged spice blends often contain lots of salt. Making your own spice blend may be one way to cut down on salt and amp up flavor.

Stock the freezer

In a 2020 study, Wolfson and her former colleagues at the University of Michigan found that older adults were more likely than the general adult population to cook for themselves at home.

But people's relationship with food can change as they go through different

life stages, such as children moving out or the death of a spouse.

Preparing and eating a favorite meal associated with fond memories can be comforting. Make the meal you love, then freeze leftovers in individual-serving packages, rather than in one large container. You'll have dinner for the future and reduce the amount of time you have to spend cooking.

Load the slow cooker

Slow cooker meals are perfect for people who may

have balance or strength issues that limit their ability to cook on the stove. Bending and lifting to use the oven can also become challenging with age.

Slow cookers sit on the counter, are designed to be left on all day and are a good way to prepare larger meals that can be frozen, said Heath Jones, an occupational therapist with Wesley Enhanced Living Main Line, a senior living center in Media, Delaware County.

Eliminate access

issues

Put everything you use most frequently in easy-to-reach spots, Jones suggested. Plates and cups don't have to live in high-up cabinets. Leave them on the counter.

Reorganize the refrigerator so that the items you need are within easy reach, without needing to bend down or dig to the back of the fridge. And when it's time to replace your fridge, consider one with the freezer on the bottom or side, rather than on top.

Simplify cleanup

Disposable kitchen items, such as paper plates and aluminum pans, can make the difference between eating a healthy home-cooked meal or turning to processed foods.

Too environmentally conscious to stock up on foil baking pans, paper plates and plastic utensils? Line baking sheets with aluminum foil to avoid baked-on food that's hard to scrub off.

Try single-pan meals to at least reduce the number of dirty dishes.



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PROMOTING SENIOR WELLNESS

Holiday makeover: December 2022 edition

By Jennifer Singley

With the kids jingle-belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer, we have arrived at the most wonderful time of the year, or we hope so. Yet, many find themselves feeling anxious, bitter, lonely or stressed-out before the turkey even hits the table at the end of November. The worry that comes from trying to meet expectations can leave the season feeling far from wonderful. How did this season of joy get so complicated? The following ideas may simplify these chaotic days.



ADOBE STOCK IMAGES

Simplify your gifting

Regardless of age, the biggest source of worry during the holidays is affording —and finding — gifts, according to a 2021 survey by the American Psychiatric Association.

If this rings true for you, consider simplifying your holiday gifting this year. There are so many ways to give that are meaningful, easier on the wallet, and less stressful than embarking on a hunt for the perfect treasure.

- Plan a Secret Santa gift exchange asking that all gifts be homemade.
- Adopt an individual or family from an Angel Tree. Often found at churches or nonprofits, the gifts you provide go directly to a person in need.



- Give the gift of an experience that has more wow factor than a gift card. Tickets to a play or a membership to the zoo create treasured memories that give long after the wrapping paper is torn.

Revisit traditions

The holidays are synonymous with traditions: some handed down for generations, others just getting their footing.

Keeping traditions can be comforting but if one creates more stress, take a break from it. It can always return next season. It's okay to cut back. Follow the needs of your heart.

Clean out

Why wait until spring to declutter? While pulling out the holiday boxes donate the décor you haven't used in years. Experience the freedom that comes with less stuff.

Simplifying creates room to spend more time doing the things you love.

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