

The Solo Mothers' Misinformed Guide to Coping with Christmas

by Liz Wylie

Recently, I engaged in debate with my fifteen year old daughter (a very foolhardy thing to do!). We were discussing expensive brand-name clothing and accessories and I asked her to think about why she has such a yearning to possess these things. "Didn't you want them, when you were my age?" she asked. I could truthfully answer that I did not because when I was fifteen, such things did not exist.

When I was her age, my modest pocket-money and the small amounts I earned at after-school jobs were enough to buy clothes that were quite trendy and well made and did not have the manufacturers' logos emblazoned all over them! As much as I understand and appreciate my daughter's aspirations to keep up with her peers and look contemporary, I resent that a generation of teenagers (and their parents) are being converted into mindless consumers of cheaply manufactured goods sold at vastly inflated prices. The Christmas season will bring on a mass assault upon the minds and wallets by producers of said goods.

Sole parents feel particularly ambushed at this time of year. With only a single income (often a Domestic Purposes Benefit) and weeks of school holidays stretching ahead...tis not the season to feel jolly! When children are being bombarded with images of sumptuous Christmas feasts, floods of brochures are teeming through the letter box showing images of tempting toys that are also featuring large on the TV screen, what's a hapless single mum to do? Having been one for a long time, I believe I should have some answers, but I don't.! I would, however like to offer a list of suggestions....

- Take many deep breaths
- Remember that Dec 25th is just one day of the year!
- Keep things simple-you don't have to produce a lavish feast!
- Small children do not expect large gifts
- Large children MUST not expect large gifts
- Get together with other single parent families and share time and resources
- You are entitled to enjoy Christmas too!
- Take kids to park, beach, pool a lot if you can – keep them exercised and away from the malls, the TV and the letter box
- Ask for support from family and friends – they might be dying for you to ask
- Make things with kids-cards, decorations, biscuits etc
- Congratulate yourself on the wonderful parent you've been-all year!

It is easy to feel inadequate as a single parent at Christmas. All the imagery and hype can lead us to believe that real families are all about happy mums and dads having a wonderful time with their beautiful, angelic children. The reality is that many couples have their worst domestic disputes during the festive season and roughly a third of New Zealand families are headed by a single parent. You and your children are an authentic, devoted, beautiful family and Christmas is a time to celebrate that.

I will not be buying over-priced over-stated clothing for my child this year. She says she is so 'over' Christmas. Driving lessons are what she desires. I have been through the years of believing I was the world's worst mother if I did not buy 'Sky Fairies' or 'Dance Moves Barbie'....now long broken, discarded and forgotten. What I will never forget is the three year old who asked for a box of band aids of her 'very own' and the pleasure she derived from plastering every last one upon her person.

Give each other modest gifts, enjoy each other and have a great summer.

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