

Last night I decided it was time to just tough it out and finish my Christmas shopping. With my list of family and friends, as yes, my budget in tow, I set out on my mission. The stores were buzzing with activity and many of the people I saw had their children with them. I am glad to report that many of them seemed happy and at ease, but there were several who were struggling to find the merriment in shopping with the family. I saw parents struggling to get their kids to put on coats, to leave items in the shopping cart or to give up possession of the toy clutched in their hand long enough to let the clerk scan the coded tag. There were some tired pouty faces, tears, and even a few screams. I could tell these parents were feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Parents are also tired, financially stretched, grumpy about parking, all while dealing with the everyday challenges of balance work, family, and relationships. In the midst of all this shopping "excitement," I could hear the end of the song playing overhead "...and peace on earth, good will toward men." The irony of that moment makes me smile yet today and reminds me of one of the many quotes I can remember from my own upbringing: "You can be part of the problem, or part of the solution!" With solutions in mind, I share with you an article I recently read written by Nancy B. Peterson, and Dr. Charlotte Shoup Olsen, both of whom are K-State Research and Extension colleagues.

*Few families will match the idyllic images captured in the holiday advertisements, but most can find joy during the holiday season. Everyone is encouraged to extend the thankfulness typically associate with Thanksgiving celebrations throughout the holiday season – and into the new year. Feeling grateful for home, family, friends and life in general spills over into other activities and to others who sense your gratitude. Gratitude itself can have a calming influence.*

*A little planning also can go a long way in relieving family stress – holiday stresses. The following time- and stress-management tips are offered:*

- *Start early to plan family and other gatherings.*
- *Involve others, so everyone will be informed. Surprises can add stress unnecessarily.*
- *Be responsible. If the family is planning a potluck and you promised to bring the main dish, be on time, with enough food to serve everyone expected.*
- *Ask adult children what they would like to bring, rather than making arbitrary assignments. Let's face it – a daughter-in-law may enjoy making fruit salad but not pie crust.*
- *Explain house rules to children.*
- *Leave disciplining others' children to the childrens' parents.*

- *Plan age-appropriate activities, such as soccer or touch football, table or board games.*
- *Keep the peace – try not to bring up touchy topics.*
- *Don't overstay – everyone needs his or her own space and time for self.*
- *No family nearby? Call a local chamber of commerce or community service organization and volunteer to help serve a community dinner or give time to a food or toy drive. (In fact, there is a community Christmas Day Dinner being served by the Junction City Church of the Nazarene on December 25. If you want to volunteer your time, donate money, or food to help with the Christmas Day Dinner, call their office at 762-4402 by December 20 to let them know how you can help.)*

*Focus on others, rather than yourself by inviting others to join in a potluck, watch a movie or sports event to share the day. You could spend some time with residents at the nursing home who, like you, are without their family around them during the holiday season. Calling family and friends also can help those who are alone stay connected. And, if you like – and can – treat yourself to an afternoon off, new book, video or craft project. The dog might like an extra walk, too!*

We can't avoid ALL of the stresses life has to offer, but we can balance our reaction to those stressors with more positive interactions. After a challenging trip to go shopping, find a way to spend more quality time with your children. I love to cook and bake and my children always enjoy the chance to be in the kitchen with me. We often gift food to our friends and neighbors. Homemade baked goods or vegetable trays are some of our favorites to share. Some other ideas for de-stressing with your family could include coloring together or taking a walk together. Talk about the traditions in your family that have been passed down from year to year. Create a handmade book together that illustrates something special about your family or about the things you like to do as a family.

Children mirror the emotions and tone their parents display as well as mimic what they see their parents and other influential adults in their lives do. Being aware of this can help each of us make an extra effort to make the holiday season a time of gratitude, not attitude and model what the song says..."peace on earth, good will toward men." For more ideas on activities you can do with your children that promote quality time, feel free to contact me at the Geary County Extension office 785-238-4161.