Stewardship Corner

Every year, parents struggle to decide what to buy their kids for Christmas. It can be challenging to find or afford the perfect gift. It can also be easy to lose sight of your budget when you're shopping.

The average American family spends $1,000 on Christmas presents. As a result, it's not uncommon to overspend on gifts.

Do you want to reign in spending while giving your children a memorable holiday season? The 4 gift rule can help.

WHAT IS THE 4 GIFT RULE?

The 4 gift rule has been circling the internet for years. The idea is that you only buy your children four gifts for Christmas. This helps simplify shopping, keeps you on budget, and prevents your kids from being overwhelmed by gifts.

Implementing the four gift rule is easy. You simply purchase one gift from each of the following categories: something they want, need, wear, and read.

This may sound similar to the 3 gift rule, which is when each child receives three gifts to symbolize what the three wise men gave to baby Jesus.

The 4 gift rule a terrific way to teach your children they can't have everything while still allowing them to receive gifts they enjoy. It also lets them learn the life lesson that material possessions don't bring happiness.

The best part is that it allows you to stay on budget.

SOMETHING THEY WANT

This is a present your child chooses and likely is the big gift they will receive. As your children get older, you can ask them for a list of things they want for Christmas.

Younger children will likely want a special toy. Older children may ask for a new bike or a cell phone.

Ask your children for ideas to maximize their excitement.

SOMETHING THEY NEED

Depending on the age of your child, this item can be selected by them or you. If you pay attention to your child, it's likely obvious what they need.

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- A new coat or jacket for your toddler
- Open an investing account
- The musical instrument they've been learning in school

The ideas are endless. The item you choose doesn't have to be expensive.

SOMETHING TO WEAR

Something to wear may overlap a little with a need, so make sure you buy one item for each category. This purchase can be as simple as dress-up clothes for your toddler daughter. It could also be a new pair of sneakers for your teenager. If your child likes to pick their own clothing, you can give them a gift card to their favorite store.

SOMETHING TO READ

Books are great gifts. If your child loves to read, this option lets you give them two gifts they want for the price of one.

If you have a young child, you could choose a set of Dr. Seuss books. If you have an older child, books from their favorite author or something like the Harry Potter c**ollection** might be appropriate.

BENEFITS OF USING THE FOUR GIFT RULE

There are several benefits to using the 4 gift rule for Christmas presents. The obvious benefits are that it helps you control spending and avoids setting up your children to expect they will receive tons of gifts every holiday season.

Other benefits include:

It's green: If you have a child, you know how many gifts come with a lot of packaging. This is especially true with toys. Buying fewer gifts means less plastic and junk end up in landfills.

It's less clutter: It is fun to have a house full of Christmas presents. However, more presents create more clutter. Indirectly, the four gift rule lets you maintain a smaller house.

It doesn't overwhelm your children: I'm particularly motivated by this benefit. My husband and I have twins who are toddlers. A lot of presents would overwhelm them.

Instead of buying many gifts, we prefer focusing on a few items. This allows them to get more out of fewer presents instead of showering them with tons of gifts that won't get as much use.

SUMMARY

Children are more expensive as they get older. However, there's not much else you would get your children outside of the categories in the 4 gift rule. This makes it easy to manage holiday spending.

The four gift rule covers all the bases and limits you from going overboard. The best part is that the philosophy allows for some nice splurges while protecting your budget.

It's fun to spoil children, but that comes at a cost. With focused spending, you can give them a memorable holiday season. You can also teach them a few important life lessons.