



# How to Control HOLIDAY SPENDING

If advertisements and commercials are beginning to feature scenes of happy families, clad in brightly colored sweaters, gathered by a fire, surrounded by an assortment of presents, then the countdown to the holidays has begun. Although it may be a joyous time that reunites old friends and distant family members, one dilemma you may face is how can you avoid the pressure to overspend, yet still have the pleasure of buying presents for your family and friends?

The key strategy is to plan ahead. Begin by writing down the names of those you plan to buy for—at least one gift idea for each person on your list—including a general idea of where you might find his or her gift. If you don't know what type of gift you would like to give, browse through mail order catalogs, TV advertisements, and newspaper flyers for some ideas. This could help you avoid the trap of making your decision while in the store—when impulse buying may cost you more than you wish to spend.

Setting a limit on the number—and cost—of the gifts you plan to buy can help you stay within your budget and allow you to purchase appropriate gifts for the special people in your life. Once you have your list, and estimate the cost of your proposed purchases, you can adjust it so the total expenditures fit into your holiday budget.

## Shopping Strategy- To prevent overextending yourself, keep the following principles in mind:



Shopping early and using the layaway plans offered by many stores might help you complete your shopping before the “holiday rush” begins. However, you may want to remember that some of the better sales come closer to the holidays.



When in doubt, purchase a gift certificate from a person's favorite store. With this type of gift you avoid overspending because you are purchasing a pre-determined amount. Chances are, your loved one will have some fun picking out the item they desire.



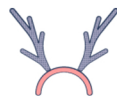
Whenever possible, pay by cash or check, rather than by credit cards. High interest rates and the enticement to “pay later” may lead to a larger debt than you can afford.



Look to purchase “stocking stuffers” at a discount store all in one trip. This will help you avoid impulse buys.



Consider exchanging names among a group of friends or family with a set dollar limit to purchase a gift for one person. Remember, it's quality, not quantity that matters when giving.



Prevent the “return blues” by saving all your receipts for gifts in one envelope. Label each slip with the items you purchased, where you purchased them, and for whom.



Think about pooling your resources with other family members to buy gifts for individuals, particularly if it involves a rather expensive



Handmade gifts and cards are sometimes the best gifts received. Use your creativity and talent to give the gift of yourself, it's often a personal touch that is greatly appreciated!

**Taking an organized approach to holiday shopping can make the experience enjoyable for many reasons.**

First, you will be getting the most value for your dollar. Second, you will now have the time to really relax and enjoy the holidays, knowing your preparations are complete.