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Giving Back Over the Holidays: Ways to Help Others While Also Helping Yourself

For many, the holidays are such a rush of shopping, cooking, planning and attending parties, coordinating family gatherings and trying to stay afloat financially and mentally. In the midst of all the chaos, I would like to encourage you to take a step back and make time to give back to others this season.

Research shows that sharing your time or money with people in less fortunate situations promotes personal growth and self-esteem. Charitable giving also has a positive effect on the brain, creating a sense of happiness and increased worth.

Here are a few ways to give back to your community this holiday season.

- 1) Volunteer. Giving back doesn't always mean spending money. Give the gift of your time by assisting with the Salvation Army's kettle campaign or other local fundraising drive. Offer to help serve a dinner at your local homeless shelter.
- 2) Adopt a family or even an individual. If you're in a position to give back financially, consider adopting a family this year. You can transform someone's holiday season through your generosity. Maybe you want to take this approach, but your budget doesn't allow for you to adopt an entire family. Contact your local nursing home about giving to someone with limited family. The gift of new pajamas or slippers might make a huge impact on someone feeling alone.
- 3) Donate to a larger cause. There are many organizations collecting donations during this time of the year. Depending on your interests, you could collect food for a local food pantry, donate animal supplies to the local humane society or buy new, unwrapped toys for a local toy drive.

- 4) Think small. For those (like me) who are always running a hundred miles an hour and don't do a good job of planning time to volunteer or shop for others, remember there are opportunities all around you to make a difference. Take a minute to send a handwritten note to a soldier or pay for the car behind you in the fast food drive thru.

While there are many opportunities for giving during the holidays, also remember that doing a random act of kindness is something we can do all year long. It's both humbling and rewarding to do something for someone else, no matter what season it is.

Happy Holidays!

For more information, please contact Julie Smith, K-State Research and Extension Wildcat District Family Resource Management and Entrepreneurship Agent, juliesmith@ksu.edu or by calling 620-238-0704.

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