

GIVING & RECEIVING

Gift Etiquette

By Christine Chen

Dear Ms. Chen,

With the holidays approaching, I have a question about receiving a gift. Every year my mother-in-law buys my children things like pajamas, socks, underwear, and undershirts for Christmas. As you can imagine, my kids are not too appreciative of these gifts year after year. She is a very practical person and likes to buy things that my children will need. I have tried to encourage my children to be grateful and to show appreciation when they open their grandmother's gifts. Unfortunately, at the ages of eight, ten, and fourteen, their ability to act thrilled over a pair of socks is limited. Should I say something to my mother-in-law or should I just continue to encourage my children to say thank you?

—Diane

Dear Diane,

Yes, we certainly are entering the month of gift giving and receiving. One would think this to be a fairly simple task. However, it is probably one of the most frustrating and stressful tasks of all during the holiday season.

I believe it was much simpler to buy gifts for children and teens years ago. It's even confusing for me to buy for my own children at times. Most items kids want today are so high tech that when I walk into a toy store or game store, I don't even know where to begin. There's so much out there! Now, when I think about a grandmother who may not have a clue what a Wii, iPod, or PSP is, well then, you can imagine, it's difficult. But, there's one thing Grandma does know about and that's how to buy the good old essentials—the things kids used to get excited about. Well, maybe not too excited.

Now, as you mentioned, you have two choices—you can talk to your mother-in-law or you can grin and bear it. Choosing to talk to your mother-in-law depends on a number of things. What kind of relationship do you have with her? Is she on a limited budget? Does she have limited access to transportation or stores? These are things we always need to keep in mind when deciding if a subject, such as yours, should be ad-



dressed. If you and your mother-in-law have a very close and open relationship and she has funds available for gifts, you could say something like, "I know you like to buy the kids pajamas for Christmas, but I thought you should know they are still enjoying the one's you gave them last year. However, I know they sure would love the game Monopoly this year." Now, as I said, I would only say this if I had a very close relationship with my mother-in-law and knew she would want to know.

Your second choice is to not say anything at all which is, by the way, the approach that I would probably take. I believe it's important to teach our children to be grateful for gifts they receive. I am sure you have done this over the years; however, your children might see the gift differently if you explained that their grandmother took time to purchase just the right socks or pajamas, or whatever, for each of them and that giving them something they can use each day probably brings her great joy. If they really think about the process their Grandmother goes through to purchase their gift—taking time

to go to the store, choosing just the right item, spending money, wrapping the gift with care, and the excitement she may feel as they open the package—your children might even look forward to showing their gratitude just to let Grandma know she is loved and appreciated.

Here are just a few additional points we all should remember when receiving a gift, not just during the holidays, but at any time:

- Never ask how much a gift cost.
- Don't hint that you like something even better than what was given.
- Never show disappointment about the gift you receive.
- Even though you may have thanked the giver in person, always send a thank you note.

Yes, it is that time of year again. And, we all love to receive gifts. And, some of those gifts we receive are just what we wanted and some, unfortunately, are not. We should all remember, during this time of giving, that someone gave a gift to show they cared. And, caring is priceless! ☺