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40,500 Unique Monthly Visitors

A lean Christmas is a chance to teach kids

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Since last April, Jamice Hendricks, of Kankakee, has tried to get a job -- anywhere -- retail stores, restaurants, hotels, you name it.

She has a good work history and a certificate in personal-care assistance, but it hasn't helped Hendricks find work.

With Christmas around the corner, she is frustrated.

"To know that people say they are hiring, and you're filling out applications, you're on the Internet, you go to job fairs and you still don't have a job, it is very disappointing," she said.

With Kankakee County's unemployment rate at 13.3 percent, according to the Illinois Department of Employment Security, many local residents share Hendricks' situation.

In the past, Hendricks was able to buy Christmas gifts for her sons: Jaylin, 7; Roddrick, 6; Jaeshawn, 3, and Jordon, 2. A strong single mom who doesn't like to depend on help, Hendricks knows she will have to depend on her family members to do what she can't this year to make it a merry Christmas for her children.

After all, what parent wants to tell a child that there will be few or no gifts under the tree this year?

But finances are a reality for every family, and while every parents cannot provide piles of toys and gifts under the tree, they can provide what children need -- love, understanding, time and effort to help the whole family get through a tight Christmas.

Chicago parent-teen expert Dr. Susan Kuczmarski said having limited funds at Christmas is a perfect opportunity for children to refocus on family.

"Children really get the picture," Kuczmarski said. "They don't really need all of that. What they really want is to be together."



Photo:

Jamice Hendricks and her four children, Roddrick Randle Jr., Jaeshawn Ellis, Jaylin Hale and Jordon Randle near the Christmas tree in their home. (12-18-09)

Kuczmariski said families should hold fun nights where they play board games, bake cookies or play in the snow. She said parents should also allow their children to share their ideas about how to spend time together.

Dr. Leslie Seppinni, a California-based clinical psychologist, said it can get rough because sometimes families have emphasized the gifts more than the spirit of giving. "You might see some negative exchange between the parents and kids because the kids can feel very disappointed."

So, Seppinni said it is crucial that parents be honest about the family's financial state. Hendricks, who takes job-preparation classes at Kankakee Workforce Services in downtown Kankakee, has shown her oldest child, Jaylin, the many job applications that she filled out. That way he knows she's tried her best to make their holiday season a memorable one.

Still, many parents can't shake what some experts call a "bad-provider syndrome." And in most cases, Seppinni said, it is all too often the father who suffers the worst case.

"His ego is hurt, his pride, he's feeling shame and guilt that he's not making the money he was when he lost his job," Seppinni said.

"And you have to be careful around the kids because kids pick up on that. The parents set the tone of the spirit of Christmas."

And Hendricks believes she has strong family support, so she is optimistic that her children will find this holiday season enjoyable -- even with fewer gifts to unwrap on Christmas morning.

Hendricks candidly said, "As long as they get something for Christmas, they are Ookay."

