

shopping

CUTE STOCKING FILLERS

Spend a little or splurge a lot with your personal shopper SAM WYLIE-HARRIS



spend

A sweet Christmas keepsake, these festive knitted gift boxes contain Moo Free chocolate buttons, which are dairy and wheat free – making them a suitable gift for children with a food intolerance. Handmade by Grannies gift boxes and Moo Free chocolate drops, £4.99. For stockists visit www.alotofchocolate.co.uk.

NESTLED inside this shiny red box are four of the finest milk chocolate pralines – a token gift for epicureans. Mini Christmas Stocking, £6.25, by Prestat. For stockists call 020 7494 3372 or visit www.prestat.co.uk.



HANDS of time... tweenies will love counting down with this unisex blue plastic watch. Plastic bracelet watch, £9.99, from Amazon. For stockists visit www.amazon.co.uk.



splurge

KNICKERS! Silk, satin or chiffon, bagging some frilly undies is made easy with La Senza's pick & mix collection. Grab five for £12 on selected knickers. For stockists visit www.lasenza.co.uk.



TWITTER lovers and social media fans can now tweet with a tea towel – the perfect last minute pressie to make a loved one smile. From the people behind the Anya Hindmarch I'm Not A Plastic Bag shopper, each Tweet Towel can be designed to carry a personal message, using up to 140 characters. Tweet Towel, £10, from We Are What We Do (delivery between three to five days). For stockists visit www.wearewhatwedo.org.



BIRDS of a feather... little ones will love sipping their favourite hot drink from one of Susie Watson's festive designs. Small Christmas bird mug, £13, from Susie Watson. For stockists visit www.susiewatsondesigns.co.uk.



How to have a merry Christmas

IT'S less than two weeks before Christmas, and already people are getting stressed about what they've got to do and what can go wrong.

Joyce Campbell, neuro linguistic programme trainer, success coach and author of *How To Get Off Your Backside And Live Your Life*, has put together some common scenarios, and ideas for dealing with them without resorting to knocking back the cooking sherry in the kitchen before midday!

● **Last year your family seriously overstayed their welcome. They were meant to stay just two days, but they were having such a great time they decided to stay till after New Year. You went back to work completely frazzled. How do you avoid it happening again?**

The main reason that guests outstay their welcome is that you haven't had good communication up front, with arrival and departure times agreed in advance. So think ahead, and be clear about the extent of the invitation. Prime all other family members NOT to plead with them to stay either. If you find yourself stuck again, you have two options really: suffer it, and try to enjoy yourself – it's probably a compliment. Alternatively, you can ask when they plan on leaving, and if necessary, say something like 'it's been great having you, and we are very busy from Wednesday, so let's do something

special on Tuesday evening before you go'. If you decide to have them stay on, don't spoil it for yourself and everyone else by being snappy – chill out and enjoy it.

● **You open a present from your friend at a pre-Christmas night out, and discover that they have bought you an expensive present – but you've bought them a cheap box of chocolates. How do you handle it?**

This is a tricky one, and it really is an occasion to believe that it's the thought rather than the value of the gift that counts. You friend presumably bought you something she thought you would like and enjoy using – so the issue is not that your gift is of a lower value, but rather that a box of chocolates is more suitable for an 'emergency' gift rather than for a friend who you know you will be exchanging gifts with.

Some forward planning can help here – keep an eye out in advance for quirky stuff that you know your friend will appreciate, but that won't have a clear monetary value attached to it – second hand shops, charity shops and craft fairs are all great places for that sort of gift.

Don't get into a spending war! If you get caught out on the day, sometimes you can say something like 'I ordered your gift on line, but it must have got caught in the Xmas post, so here is just a little something meanwhile, and I'll



TRAINER: Joyce Campbell

bring your real present the next time I see you.'

The other option is just to admit you had no time for shopping this year, and you are very sorry that you got such an unimaginative present, and stress how much you love what she has given you.

● **Your teen wants to go out drinking on Christmas Eve, but you don't want them to be wrecked for Christmas Day. How do you get them to control themselves?**

The bottom line is that you can't really. So long as they are legally old enough to drink, there isn't a great deal

you can do, except be very clear that they are not having the car, and you don't want them getting into anyone else's either. A firm statement about your expectations of their behaviour on Christmas day is probably the best you can do. Make sure they eat before they go out, and remind them how their day will be ruined if they have an almighty hangover.

● **You've accepted an invite to an acquaintance's party. Your other half refuses to go. Come to think of it, you're not keen on going either – you won't really know anyone there. How to get out of it?**

One of the things I always tell my clients is to prioritise the things that give them pleasure. Let go of some of the 'shoulds' and 'musts' in life. My advice here is to have some clear and assertive communication – don't just not turn up, (especially if the party involves a sit-down meal) but call and say something like 'I'm so sorry, something has come up and we aren't going to be able to make it tonight. I hope you have a wonderful evening though.' Chances are that they will have so much else happening that won't mind at all.

● **Last year your sister and her husband arrived having clearly just had a huge row. Christmas dinner was conducted in icy silence punctuated by barbed remarks. You ended up with indigestion, and the entire**

afternoon was ruined. What are you going to do if it happens again?

There is no easy way around this, I'm afraid. Sometimes you can divide and conquer, and separate them by asking one or the other to help you/take the kids for a walk/set the table etc. That can give some cooling-off time if it's just been a spat.

However, if that doesn't work, you are going to have to say something, or risk the entire day being spoiled. This is not a time to get into detail though, and you don't want to be dragged into taking sides.

Take each aside, and be clear and direct. I teach my clients a model for this, called BIB. This means you describe the behaviour (B) as it currently stands, you explain the impact (I) it is having, and you state the behaviour (B) you want to see instead. Something like this would cover it: 'I've noticed that you and xx keep snapping at each other (B).

I don't want to get into the rights and wrongs of it just now, but it's really causing an atmosphere and making everyone uncomfortable (I). Could you leave it aside for the day, and be pleasant to each other, please, (B) and if necessary, we can talk about it next week?' It's tough to do this, but it really is the only answer. Don't apologise – you have a right to expect your guests to be courteous.