Teach giving. Two times a year sit down in your child’s room or the playroom and together sort through all the clothes, toys, books, and crafts that they no longer use. Whether you give these away to a friend, a charity, or a thrift store, I want your child to be the one to make the physical transfer. It is such an important lesson to learn the power of giving. A friend recently made her five-year-old’s birthday party into a pajama party, asking children to come in their PJs and to bring a new set of pajamas instead of a gift. The pajamas were donated to the Pajama Program (www.pajamaprogram.org), a charity that gives new pajamas and books to children in need, in the United States and around the world. I thought this was a great idea that created a real opportunity to teach small children about our obligation to help those less fortunate.

The money class

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Have a clear toy/gift policy. This is one area where I see so many parents completely drop the ball. Instead of reserving gifts for special occasions such as birthdays, they have become your go-to solution to help you get through your way-too-hectic day without an upsetting meltdown (yours or theirs). So you promise a gift for good behavior, or you hold out the carrot of a step at the toy store if your child behaves well while you are running other errands. Toys—big and small—have become passers at home. When your child starts to get a little cranky and your first list of talking it through doesn’t work, you pull out a “little something” from your hidden stash in the closet to shift their energy and attention.

I am asking you to think about the message you are sending your child. If they act up, you will give them a toy. Then you wonder why when you are at the toy store your child has a meltdown because you have just said he can have one (less expensive) toy, not