

Holiday Ideas from the Staff of the Child Life Department at Cincinnati Children's

Involve children in the process of picking out gifts for family members. This is a way you can start to teach them at a young age that it is not about "gimme."

Choose a way to give to someone who may not have the means to have a good holiday – either with a donation to a trusted organization of food, clothing - or buy and wrap gifts for someone else.

Make something together that you can give to neighbors. Cookies in a jar, popcorn, breads, hot cocoa mixes, etc. Let your child deliver it to the neighbor, or do it together.

Take part in some sort of service act in the morning – prior to opening any gifts. If your church or other organization prepares meals for people at the holidays, maybe your family can help deliver meals to those who can't come get the meals themselves. Perhaps your family can visit for a while with those who are receiving the meals.

Encourage your child to make something for friends and family rather than shopping for them. Or give a gift of time (i.e., 1 hour every Saturday for a month to help them or run errands).

Let children make homemade ornaments and artwork to decorate the tree. Children can also help bake cookies and decorate cards. Time spent together making things can give way to some great conversations.

One family participates each year in an organization called "Operation Christmas Child." Their child chooses small toys and necessities (toothbrush/toothpaste) for a child of the same age. They pack it in a box and it is sent through this organization to a child somewhere in the world. The package is barcoded so they find out where it is delivered and they receive information about the country and its unique qualities and needs.

Children can look on a globe or map and see where their gift has gone. It is something simple and practical that they can participate in, learn from and experience the joy of giving.

At Thanksgiving dinner, invite each person to place an acorn (or pine cone or other nut in a shell, or a stone) into a bowl as he or she names something for which he/she is grateful.

Prior to Christmas or other winter holiday, place a small basket next to a little bundle of straw/hay in a location that is reachable by people of all sizes. Invite family members to add a straw to the basket each time they do a kind act for someone else in the days leading up to the holiday. The goal is to have enough straws in the basket to make a soft bed for the baby (or

other tiny creature, if family is celebrating other than Christmas) by the morning of the special holiday.

Take advantage of the many seasonal books available at the public library. Make it a holiday tradition to cuddle and read together in the days leading up to the holiday. This connects children to culture and traditions; encourages reading and listening; and provides valuable quiet time.

If your family decorates a tree during this season, make a tradition of choosing a special ornament that represents the most important event the family experienced during the year. This might commemorate the birth of a baby, someone's graduation or a family vacation. Over time, these ornaments serve as a sort of family time capsule. The family can review family history each year as the special ornaments are placed on the tree.

Some traditions say that the animals "speak" on Christmas Eve. In celebration of this idea, some families find it meaningful to put out food for wild creatures such as birdseed and apple slices on Christmas Eve. Small children may have great ideas about what food to place outside. They also may enjoy making simple bird feeders in preparation for the occasion. (Bagel spread with peanut butter, then coated with birdseed makes a great treat for birds/squirrels.

Some families find it meaningful to place used trees outside after Christmas, decorating them with food for animals to enjoy in the days that follow the holiday season. A good book to accompany this project is *The After Christmas Tree* by Linda Wagner Tyler.