

Making the Holidays Memorable and Meaningful



Whether you are celebrating Hanukkah, Christmas, or Kwanzaa, the holidays can be busy and stressful. Children's eyes and ears are filled with messages that say, "Buy me!" We all want the holidays to be fun. But we want holidays to mean more to our children than receiving lots of gifts. Here are some ways to focus on the meaning of every holiday season.

Strengthen family ties.

Plan times to be together as a family. Choose a game night, a pizza and movie night, or a night for reading stories aloud. Avoid filling your calendar with lots of activities that pull parents and children in different directions.

Encourage gifts from the heart.

Help children think about the needs of others. Visit an elderly friend or relative who is alone, make cookies for a neighbor, or bring gifts to a women's shelter. Volunteer at an organization that works with people in your community who have limited resources. (Note: Choose a volunteer activity that is appropriate for young children.)

Create a peaceful home atmosphere.

Reduce the noise and clatter of the season. Plan calm family activities such as family dinners, evening tea times, or story reading. Reduce noise by turning off the television, video games, and the telephone.

Remember family rituals or traditions.

Take part in—or start—some traditions that all family members can enjoy. Make holiday cookies or homemade greeting cards, sing holiday songs or play music, re-read favorite storybooks out loud, start a scrapbook or family diary, or light special candles at dinner or bedtime.

Resist buying more.

Advertisers hope to convince *you* that a perfect family holiday means buying more and to convince *children* that more gifts will make them happier! Limit children's exposure to commercials, and help them learn to question advertisers' claims. When possible, avoid taking preschoolers shopping.

Focus on people, not things.

A good rule of thumb during the holiday season is to spend half the usual amount of money but twice the usual amount of time with your children. Make people, not things, your priority. Focus on activities that bring your family together and that draw children's attention to the needs of others. These efforts will help reduce the madness and enhance the memories and meanings of the holidays.

For related Web resources, see "Making the Holidays Memorable and Meaningful" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



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