

INSIGHTS

Unspoiling Your Kids This Christmas



Even in homes where getting by is a bit of a struggle, Christmas is generally a time of indulgence for most families. We might be fighting inflation, increased rent and mortgage payments, and rising fuel and food costs, but it's Christmas! We want to make it memorable, and spending seems to be the default to make that happen.

Yet, at the same time that we spoil ourselves and our loved ones, we often bemoan the ingratitude of our children. We feel that they're spoiled. We wish they'd look beyond themselves and stop making Christmas all about "me, me, me." And apart from that, it's expensive!

With this in mind, here are 10 tips for "unspoiling" your children this Christmas.

First, focus on others!

1. Focus on Service

This year, one family I know is baking cookies and visiting the local police station, ambulance station, and fire station to drop off some Christmas cheer. They take the time to thank the people who work to keep us safe. Others I know visit the local RSPCA with supplies or donations, drop food, books, and toys at a women's shelter, or donate food (or money for a well) to one of the many overseas charities that help those who are impoverished and in need.

2. Focus on Your Neighbourhood

Who are the people in your neighbourhood? Perhaps an elderly widow could do with a hand in her yard. 'Tis the season for fast-growing grass and gardens. Perhaps someone has just gone through a tough separation and could do with a Christmas basket to ease the pain (financial and emotional) that Christmas might bring.

One of our favourite things to do is to host a neighbourhood Christmas party. We invite all of our neighbours for a barbecue and to sing carols. Every year, we are asked for the date in advance, so people can be available!

3. Try a Secret Santa Drop

Our children's favourite Christmas activity is playing "knock and run." We select a handful of people we want to give something to each year. It might be a teacher, a friend, a coach, or a church leader. We wrap their parcels (often home-made treats), write thank you cards, and drive to their home. After parking out of sight, we sneak to their door, place their gift on the doorstep, and bang on the door before sprinting for a hiding place. Then we watch with delight as someone gets an unexpected, anonymous Christmas surprise. (It can be hard to do this well with six children, and we've often been caught—but it's always fun.)

Next—focus on the children.

4. Give Something Exciting

The reality is that our children DO want to get something exciting at Christmas. So, pick something great for them (within your budget) and help them enjoy it. A decision to not get anything can leave them feeling resentful, particularly when they see everyone else "getting."

5. Reduce the Number of Gifts They Receive

Some children receive gifts from everyone. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents, and even siblings are all expected to buy for everyone. This not only costs a fortune, but it can overwhelm children and leave them expecting more and more. Invite your extended family to contribute to one meaningful gift, rather than lots of bits and pieces.

6. When Opening Gifts, Take Time to Savour Them

Savouring is the magnifying, or amplifying, of a positive experience. When the children open a gift, give them time to savour it. Encourage them to play with it. Let them breathe in the excitement of the moment, rather than ripping into the next package and flinging their gifts aside.

7. Experiences Are Better Than Things

One of the most remarkable findings from positive psychology research is that spending money on experiences brings more happiness than spending money on “stuff.” Perhaps a family trip will be more memorable than more toys?

In a similar vein, gifts that encourage relationships are better than gifts that promote isolation. A new game console might be fun, but it may lead to withdrawal (and fights). It might be better to purchase some games that bring the family together.

8. Rather Than Gifts, Give Letters

One year for Christmas, I contacted my siblings and asked them to give me 10 memories of special times with Dad. With six children, we had a total of 60 memories, each written on separate pieces of coloured paper and rolled up into mini-scrolls and placed into a jar. Dad opened the jar and looked at us, perplexed. He reached in and pulled out the first note. He read it and chuckled. Then it dawned on him that there were 60 notes from his children. He dipped his hand in again and read. Then he began to weep. The rest of that Christmas morning, he read, cried, laughed, and reminisced. It was a meaningful, wonderful gift that cost nothing but meant the world.

9. Encourage the Children to Write “Thank You” Notes

Christmas break is a great time to take stock of gifts and say thank you. Invite your children to write thank you notes to those who gave to them, saying specifically why they’re grateful. Sincere thanks takes time—but it is a wonderful way to help the children show appreciation.

Finally, give the most valuable gift you can: time.

10. Give the Gift of Time

There may be no gift more appreciated by our children than your time. It costs so little yet is so hard to give generously. But when we give of our time generously, all the material desires our children have will fade away.

This Christmas, “unspoil” your child by reducing the emphasis on materialism, crowding out the crass commercialism of “getting” with sincere, compassionate giving. It can make your Christmas truly memorable.

How are you planning to make this Christmas one to remember?



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