

EXTENSION UPDATE

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Help Children Know the Meaning of Christmas

In a highly commercial society, it's hard to remember the simple things that once made Christmas and other holidays special to people.

Children can't help but become overwhelmed by the hard sell of toys and other gifts they see on TV or hear about from their friends. It's easy to understand why children today may lose sight of some of the traditional Christmas values of love, family, and gratitude.

Although gift-giving is still a large part of today's Christmas tradition, it has assumed an all important role in the minds of many youngsters. Parents should realize the importance of instilling the impression that gifts don't make Christmas special – people do.

To shift the focus away from the gift-receiving aspect of Christmas, parents can encourage children to give small gifts to others. Children will learn more about the meaning of gift-giving and about appreciation from their own experiences rather than from someone else. The meaning of the gift should be, "I give this gift to you because I care." It has nothing to do with the price of the gift.

Kids also have to be encouraged to send thank you notes, which reminds them of the person giving the gift rather than the gift itself. The thank you note can be made a part of the post-holiday family ritual. If the gift-giver is present, the child should be expected to thank him or her as soon as the gift is opened.

Children need to be taught that gift giving doesn't imply any sort of credit. Parents may want to explain that gifts are given for the joy of giving and not to receive a gift in return.

Developing traditions may be another way to establish a link between family and receiving gifts. Traditions help attach meaning to gifts which then become the expressions of feelings, rather than just inanimate objects.

Rituals such as singing around the Christmas tree or opening gifts at specific times can incorporate elements of play that keep children involved.

Parents and educators alike can make caring for others the goals for children this holiday season.

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