



## 44 Ideas To Start Connecting and Stop Spoiling Your Children This Holiday Season by David Bredehoft

Are you worried about spoiling and overindulging your children this holiday season? Here are 44 ideas, many submitted by our readers, which will help you curb holiday overindulgence. Use the ones that work for you and your family; save the rest and try them at some later date.

1. Each year on the 25 days leading to Christmas we open a gift as a family. That gift is one of the kids' books. I wrap 25 of their favorite books (that we already own) and we open one each day as a family. The kids rotate on who gets to open the gift each day. It's a great way to make sure we are spending time together as a family during the craziness of the holidays and the kids also see that a gift does not have to be something just purchased but also can be the treasures we have within the house. **Submitted by Natalie Laski**
2. Have your children make gifts for each other. My children did this last year getting ideas from books in the library and using materials found at home. They still talk about the gifts they made and received from each other with a sense of pride. **Submitted by Debra K. O'Fallon**
3. When it is time to decorate the tree, have each family member choose three ornaments. As each family member tells three blessings they have received during the year as they hang the ornaments on the tree - continue until the tree is decorated by telling three favorite memories from the year, three biggest accomplishments, and three things you like about each family member. **Submitted by Leanne Weyrauch**
4. Instead of making lists of things we each want to get, we all sit down at Thanksgiving and make lists of things we each want to do together as a family during the holiday season. Each person "gets" at least three or four things on his/her list; e.g., old movie night, or Monopoly marathon, or cross-country skiing at night. This also helps instill those family traditions (my daughter's list always includes watching [It's a Wonderful Life](#) and having fondue) and helps to emphasize that what we value most is our time together.
5. I talk about "enough" and take opportunities to point out to my children when I've had "enough". Like, "This food is so delicious and I've had enough. I'm glad there'll be leftovers for later." or "I might want everything in my collection, but right now, it's enough to enjoy this one new addition." I let "Is that enough?" be a common question in my household. **Submitted by Leanne Sponset**
6. I noticed how my kids got so focused on themselves - on GETTING - over the holidays, so we started using half of the days of Hanukkah to focus on giving. Every other night we do a "mitzvah" - bringing food to the local Ronald McDonald house, jump ropes to the neighborhood public school after school program, homemade book marks to the elderly, etc. **Submitted by Jenni Watts Evans**
7. Although my family and I are not Jewish, I like the tradition of making the time that candles burn be family time. We have a menorah and light the candles, and play a game, talk, or cook together while the candles burn down (takes about an hour). **Submitted by Carol Lothrop.**
8. We make a special effort to model doing acts of kindness - shoveling a neighbor's walk, inviting a single person to a holiday dinner, offering the mail carrier a cup of hot chocolate, tipping people who don't normally receive tips - like the cashier at the parking lot.
9. We have a 'too much stuff' day prior to the holidays. This is the day they look through their toys and 'stuff' and figure out what they can give away.
10. We make sure that we have some traditions that the children will remember and look forward to. Since we are Swedish, we celebrate St. Lucia Day, and it is very low-key but fun. **Submitted by Cindy Gardner**
11. No one should go into debt in an effort to celebrate the holidays. Set a realistic budget. Let your children participate in the process. Give each child a budget to follow for gifts they will purchase for others.
12. One idea our family will be trying out this year is called "Advent Angels." Each person in the family draws another person's name. He or she becomes that person's Advent Angel during the Advent Season. The advent angel is to do kind things for his or her person without letting that person know who is doing it. For example John might make Julia's bed for her before she is able to do it. Or, Jay might empty the dishwasher for John even though it isn't on his job chart at that time. On Christmas Eve we will reveal who is each person's Advent Angel and the Angel will give that person a



home made gift. We hope that this will emphasize the idea of giving is as fun as receiving and giving from yourself is better than giving gifts of monetary value. The children will also get to work individually with mom or dad on making the homemade gift for their person. **Submitted by Lynn Baldus**

13. A few years ago our extended family decided that instead of drawing names for gift giving we, would each contribute to a charity of our choice and talk about it at our family Christmas gathering. This has worked well for us! **Submitted by Lenore Bayuk**

14. In our family we follow the example led by the 3 Wise Men. They each brought baby Jesus a gift, thus he received 3 gifts. We give each of our children 3 gifts for Christmas (plus some little stocking stuffers.) Family and friends will be giving them gifts, too, so there is no need for us to go overboard. If there is something specific I want for them to get I might suggest it to my sister or Mom who would be getting them something anyway. My boys are little now, but we figure if we start this tradition now they won't know any different later on! **Submitted by Andrea Jones**

15. We take different routes home in the dark to see the lights on different streets and houses. **Submitted by Cindy Gardner**

16. Take the opportunity to have the children go through their toys and books. We all have things that are just like new but we are tired of. And then prepare a "care package" for a needy family and involve the children in leaving it on the family's doorstep.

17. Work at a local soup kitchen/shelter serving a meal during the holiday season, or volunteer at a local hospital or nursing home. **Submitted by Barb Clare**

18. Request that grandparents and others put money into an education fund instead of buying too many toys. Education funds, ideally, can be used to cover sports, music, theatre, other lessons, and summer camps that broaden the horizons of children and youth, but drain family budgets.

19. I use money from grandparents to buy Zoo/Museum annual memberships instead of more toys. **Submitted by Debra K. O'Fallon**

20. Even young children can be involved in making cards, small gifts and remembrances for the adults in their lives. Perhaps the best way of avoiding the holiday "gimmees" is to help the child become a giver, not just a taker.

21. We decided to say "no" to a lot of the invitations and activities of the season. We decided what the most important things about the holiday season were and then selected one adult-only activity for the month of December, and prioritized the rest of the family activities. **Submitted by Bonnie Buckley**

22. Make a new year's resolution to overindulge your children less this year and to reread "[How Much is Too Much?](#)" to understand what to do instead. **Submitted by David Bredehoff**

23. I'd recommend the book [Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season](#) by Jo Robinson, Jean C. Staeheli. An especially good time to read it is right after the holidays when everything is fresh in your mind and there is time to evaluate on how things went for your family and reflect on what you might want to do next year. **Submitted by Bonnie Buckley**

24. When my youngest son was 3 1/2 he wanted everything he saw or heard about during the holiday advertising bonanza. He would come running to show me the latest item in a catalog or to tell me about an item from a TV ad. At first I tried to reason with him about the pluses and minuses of each item and to remind him of the limit our family had on presents. I quickly realized that this strategy was not working. Instead, I got a little notebook and started writing down each of his suggestions. He still came running to me several times a day with a new gift item but was satisfied to have me add this to his list. He didn't really want all these things; he just wanted me to listen to his ideas. When the holiday rolled around, we had nearly filled the little notebook with gift possibilities. Yet he was happy with those few special things that he actually received. **Submitted by Kathie L. Dormanen**

25. Make the time you spend putting up holiday decorations a time to spend with the family in doing so choose to make it a fun family activity rather than a holiday duty or chore. **Submitted by Leanne Weyrauch**

26. We make our own wrapping paper with inexpensive roll paper, sponge shapes and paint. **Submitted by Cindy Gardner**

27. **First**, take half or more of the money that would normally be spent on presents in the family and spend it on presents for those in need. Going shopping could be a family event. **Second**, draw names for Christmas in the family and put a limit on the amount of money spent. **Third**, give back to the community: soup kitchens, habitat for humanity,





United Way, etc. **Submitted by Melissa Melby**

**28.** One of my son's favorite holidays is when we watched movies all day and just ate pizza and sat by the fire. Works for me - don't need to spend the day in the kitchen making a meal nobody really wants. **Submitted by Eileen Piersa & Steve Dahl**

**29.** We also decided that visiting all the far away relatives was very stressful on our family and children at Christmas. It was such an exciting time for the kids and then all the travel just about put everyone over the edge. So, we decided that the relatives were welcome to visit us at the holidays and that we would travel to visit them in the summer when we had more time and excitement was less intense (also the weather was better!). **Submitted by Bonnie Buckley**

**30.** Model caring for others.

**31.** A few years ago we had a "lean" Christmas. So I told everyone that they had to find 3 things in the house that we had either never used or hadn't used in a long time - a book, game, puzzle, etc. Everyone dragged their feet - but once they got into it - we had LOTS of wrapped gifts under the tree and "re-gifted" them to ourselves. Our kids saw how much they already had and didn't need more. This is still something that we do each year. The kids are older and don't get all the gifts they used to get from relatives - so it makes them appreciate all they have and their "abundant" life.

**Submitted by Eileen Piersa & Steve Dahl**

**32.** That same year we each wrote out 10 things we appreciate about each other and read them to each other on Christmas eve. It teaches the kids how to express their appreciation for others. **Submitted by Eileen Piersa & Steve Dahl**

**33.** Now that my kids are older - we talk about what is most important to them for traditions and then we do those. It changes as they get older. We are more into "making memories" than "stuff". It's really nice. People ask me if I'm done shopping and I never really start. The kids write up a list - they get one "big" thing and then stocking stuffers. I don't buy for nieces and nephews any more since they are all older. I'd rather give them a gift when I see them and enjoy it.

**Submitted by Eileen Piersa & Steve Dahl**

**34.** I curb overindulgence during the holidays by going each year to India where I can celebrate Christmas in a spiritual environment far away from the materialistic processes that occur here. There I experience being happy and exceedingly grateful for the small piece of cake that my spiritual teacher personally gives us to commemorate the day.

**35.** I am giving each of my three children a scrapbook that I'm trying to catch up on -- for my second-grade son, it'll be his 1st grade scrapbook. For my middle child, who is in kindergarten, it'll be her baby book (which has been half finished for years now!) For my 15-month-old daughter, it'll be an album of her first year. I find it's helpful for me as a mom to have a deadline (Christmas Eve!). I imagine it will be fun to look through these books on Christmas Day, and the books will be treasures in years to come, too (I plan to give the kids books for each year of their life up until they graduate from high school). I hope to give them each scrapbooks on birthdays and Christmases from now on.

**Submitted by Molly Guthrey Millett**

**36.** Our daughter is the only child of two only children. So she has a lot of "stuff". So we try to get her experiences instead throughout the year. We print up gift certificates to "a day of ice skating with two friends" or a "professional manicure". This way, we don't have to come up with all the money up front, making it so we don't overspend, and we have fun things to do with her the entire year! **Submitted by Candace Scott**

**37.** As a family we always visit our local art museum and go through the "period rooms" which are decorated for Christmas. It gives us an opportunity to talk about how families from different times in history, some with more, some with less celebrate the holidays.

**38.** Every year we designate a special "baking day". The whole family bakes cookies and other holiday treats. I make it a point to bake my mother's sugar cookie recipe written in her own hand and talk to my children about when I use to do the same with grandma. It is a wonderful generation touchstone. We bake enough that we give 5-6 dozen to the local soup kitchen.

**39.** We spend time not money by making coupons for our children. Each coupon is worth an hour of our undivided attention. My children can trade them in any time during the year to do an activity of their choice, with the parent of their choice.

**40.** Value giving rather than receiving. Have your children research local charities and pick one they are most interested in. Have them decide on a dollar amount they are going to give the charity from their savings. Encourage it



by making a pact with them that you will match their donation dollar for dollar.

**41.** Spend time with the people you love. Do things together as a family that you love to do. Decorate the house, play games, listen to holiday music, or watch a favorite holiday movie together like "[White Christmas](#)", "[Love Actually](#)", or "[The Holiday](#)".

**42.** Savor your conversations with friends and family. Look for opportunities to sit and talk with neighbors and family, especially people you don't see much of throughout the year. Slow down.

**43.** Share your time or money. Acts of kindness not only help others, they change your soul. "Adopt" an older person who's alone during the holidays or invite family to contribute to a charity like the "[Heifer International](#)". Together you could buy a flock of chickens, or even a goat for a family in Africa.

**44.** Put limits on how much TV your children watch during the holidays! Advertising works. You are in control of how much TV your kids watch, and how many advertisements they see. Use the parental controls on your smart TVs.

There is more help about avoiding overindulgence in [How Much is Too Much? Raising Likable, Responsible, Respectful Children – From Toddlers To Teens – In An Age of Overindulgence](#) (2014, DaCapo Press Lifelong Books).

