

Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful

Children in an Age of Overindulgence

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50 Ideas to Help You Stop Overindulging Your Children This Holiday Season

By David Bredehoft

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The majority of parents think that we buy way too many gifts for our children each Christmas. This is true for Hanukkah and Kwanzaa too! [70% of Americans](#) feel Christmas is too focused on spending. A recent study found that holiday shopping can be [as stressful as running a marathon](#).

If you are a concerned parent or grandparent I am going to share 50 ideas to help you curb overindulgence this holiday season. Many of these ideas have been submitted by our readers. Use the ones that work for you and your family; save the rest for some later date.

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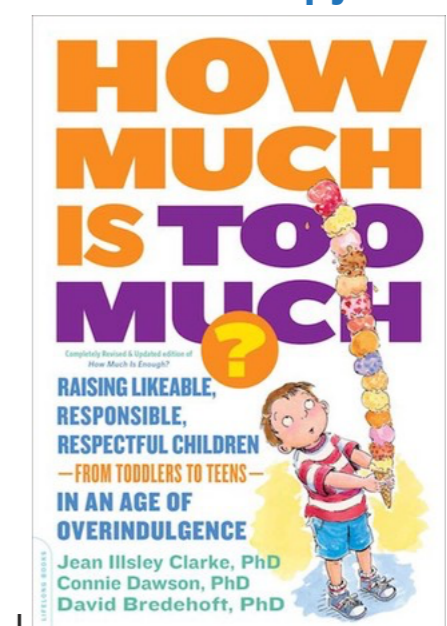
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1. CHOOSE A FAMILY GIFT

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. MAKE GIFTS FOR EACH OTHER

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. SHARE THREE THINGS YOU LIKE ABOUT EACH OTHER

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. MAKE A LIST OF THINGS YOU WANT TO DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY

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. MAKE A TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF “ENOUGH”

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 Sponsel**



6. EACH NIGHT OF HANUKAH WE GIVE TO A DIFFERENT CHARITY

I noticed how my kids got so focused on themselves - on GETTING - over the holidays, so we started using half of the days of Hanukah 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. LIGHT MENORAH CANDLES AND USE IT AS FAMILY TIME

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. MODEL ACTS OF KINDNESS

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. HAVE A TOO MUCH STUFF DAY

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. CELEBRATE A FAMILY TRADITION DAY

We make sure that we have some traditions that the children will remember and look forward to. Since we are Swedish, we celebrate [St. Lucy's Day](#), and it is very low-key

but fun. **Submitted by Cindy Gardner**



Celebration of Saint Lucy's Day in a [Lutheran](#) church (2006). By Claudia Gründer (Claudia Gründer) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

11. DON'T GO INTO DEBT

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. An extra bonus.....teaching your children money management skills!



12. BECOME AN ADVENT ANGEL

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. CHOOSE A CHARITY OF YOUR CHOICE

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. FOLLOW THE 3 WISE MEN

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. ENJOY THE HOLIDAY LIGHTS

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

16. TOY CARE PACKAGE

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. BECOME A HOLIDAY VOLUNTEER

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. GRANDPARENT EDUCATION FUND

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. MONEY FOR MEMBERSHIPS

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

20. HELP CHILDREN TO BECOME A GIVER

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. SAY "NO" TO SOME OF THE HOLIDAY INVITATIONS

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

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 Bredehoft**

23. READ UNPLUG THE CHRISTMAS MACHINE

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 how things went for your family and reflect on what you might want to do next year. **Submitted by Bonnie Buckley**

24. CREATE A GIFT SUGGESTION NOTEBOOK

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 PUTTING UP HOLIDAY DECORATIONS SPECIAL

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. MAKE YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS WRAPPING PAPER

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

27. PLAN WAYS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY TO CARE FOR OTHERS

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. WATCH FAVORITE MOVIES ALL DAY

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. LOWER STRESS BY STAYING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

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. CREATE A CULTURE OF KINDNESS IN YOUR HOME

Teach by example. Children learn what they see. Show kindness. Look for opportunities to demonstrate kindness. Talk about kindness. A quote by Steven Walton says it all, ["By role modeling kindness and encouraging them to open their hearts to others and act kind at all times they will develop an unconscious habit that will become second nature to them."](#)

31. RE-GIFT TO OURSELVES

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. SHARE 10 THINGS YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT EACH OTHER

That same lean 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. MAKE MEMORIES RATHER THAN GETTING STUFF

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 anymore 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. ENGAGE IN FOREIGN TRAVEL

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. MAKE A MEMORY SCRAPBOOK FOR YOUR CHILDREN

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 s 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. PRINT UP GIFT CERTIFICATES

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. VISIT YOUR LOCAL ART MUSEUM

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. HAVE A SPECIAL BAKING DAY

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. COUPONS WORTH AN HOUR OF UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

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. HAVE CHILDREN RESEARCH LOCAL CHARITIES

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. WATCH YOUR FAVORITE CHRISTMAS MOVIES AND MORE

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](#)”, “[The Holiday](#)” or “[A Christmas Story](#)”. If you don’t own them check them out free from your local library or tape them on your DVR for playback at your convenience.



42. SLOW DOWN

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. **REMEMBER - SLOW DOWN.**

43. PAY IT FORWARD

Share your time or money. Acts of kindness not only help others, they change your soul. Volunteer and help feed the homeless at a place like the [Dorothy Day Center](#). "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.



"Giving an animal is like giving someone a small business" Heifer International

44. REMEMBER "ADVERTISING WORKS" LIMIT TV

[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. [Make rules about TV watching and enforce and follow](#)

them. I encourage you to read and follow the Mayo Clinic's suggestions in "[Screen Time and Children - How to Guide Your Child.](#)"

45. READ CLASSIC CHRISTMAS BOOKS TO YOUR CHILDREN

If you do not already own them, go to the library and check out a dozen or more children's classic Christmas books such as [The Polar Express](#) by Chris Van Allsburg, [How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#) by Dr. Seuss, [Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer](#) by Rick Bunsen, and [The Berenstain Bears and the Joy of Giving](#) by Jan Berenstain. For a list of additional titles check out [Top So Kind Holiday Books for Children](#). Read a new one to your children each night before they go to bed. You and your children will enjoy the stories anew!

46. TAKE THE PLEDGE TO SIMPLIFY THE HOLIDAYS

Go to the simplifyholidays.org and take their pledge: "[This holiday season, I pledge to focus on more of what matters and less of what doesn't: More love and less waste...More fun and less stuff... More joy and less stress.](#)" Check off 3 or more options specifically designed to help you follow this pledge.

47. GO ON A FAMILY POST CHRISTMAS SHOPPING TRIP

Christmas was a very busy time in the Bredehoft household when I was growing up largely because my dad was a Lutheran pastor and he had to conduct services Wednesday before Christmas, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. Add to this holiday parties and my birthday on December 29.....there was little time to shop for gifts for all of us. So mom and dad came up with a wonderful idea - a **Family Post Christmas Shopping Trip**! They gave each of us children a set amount of cash. Then on the first shopping day after Christmas we hit the mall as a family. Deep discounts abounded! We got great bargains! Most of all we learned to stay within a budget! Afterward we headed home and had a wonderful time doing show and tell as a family! **Submitted by David Bredehoft**

48. DOWNLOAD THE "SIMPLIFY THE HOLIDAYS CALENDAR"

A wonderful resource for families is the [Simplify the Holidays Calendar](#) from The Center for a New American Dream. Each week has a theme like "Living Within Your Means" and More Love, Less Waste". Within each week's theme you will find specific suggestions like "[curbing the gimmies](#)" and "[staying on a budget](#)". It is free, just download it.

Simplify the Holidays					
The Big Picture	NOV 16	17	18	19	20
	23	24	25	26	27
	30	DEC 1	2	3	4
	7	8	9	10	11
	14	15	16	17	18
	21	22	23	24	25

Click on image to download this interactive calendar from New American Dream

49. STOP UNWANTED JUNK MAIL

Everyone is inundated with catalogs and junk mail especially during the holiday season. They are trying to sell you things! One helpful idea is to stop the junk mail before it even arrives. [Simplify Your Life and Stop the Junk Mail for Good.](#)

50. REFOCUS ON THE REAL REASON FOR THE SEASON

Refocus on your true family’s values. No matter what your family’s traditions and values are, I think we all can agree on the following sentiment expressed by Hamilton Wright Mabie:
[“Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.”](#)

A blessed and merry holiday season to you from all of us on the overindulgence team. Give the gift of family stories this year.

Do all things with Love, Grace, and Gratitude

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

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