

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS



Doing Good for Others

They say it's better to give than to receive. But try explaining that concept to your child during the holiday, and they're likely to look at you as if they just found coal in their stocking.

Nonetheless, teaching children about charitable acts will give them a valuable appreciation of showing kindness and compassion toward others. You can begin by establishing charitable family traditions during the holidays.

START GIVING

Introduce your children to the concept of giving — while also making room for the new toys and clothes they'll receive during the holidays — by working with them to organize their room.

Although children can quickly outgrow their favorite clothes and toys, they often still hold an emotional attachment to these items. Forcing them to give away their stuff may create a negative reaction.

Instead, start the process by simply telling the child that you're going to help them make room for all of the new things Santa is bringing. As you work together, talk to them about how much great stuff they have, while also telling them that there are many children whose families can't give them such nice stuff.

Then, as you identify items that the child hasn't used in a while, ask them how they'd feel about giving the item to someone who is less fortunate. As they agree, place those items in a box. You may be pleasantly surprised how quickly the child begins placing items in the box without being prompted.

LOVING SUPPORT

Teaching children that giving means more than just offering gifts and items to others is

also important.

Start a family tradition of visiting local nursing homes, spreading holiday cheer by caroling, helping to serve meals or just visiting with residents. Be sure to check with the facility's administrators first.

Have children help as you create goody bags filled with travel-sized items such as soaps, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste, which can be given to nursing homes or homeless shelters.

Also, sit down with your children and identify family members, friends and neighbors who may have circumstances that will make the holidays difficult this year. Teens can assist elderly relatives who may need help getting to the store and shopping.

Young children can help as you buy extra grocery items to anonymously drop off to a neighbor who has recently lost their job. Or, if you have a family friend who isn't able to visit their own family, ask your children to create a holiday card, inviting them to your Christmas dinner.

Charitable traditions are a great way to establish a sense of community, benevolence and altruism within your children. These simple gestures, and many others, can help your children to learn the intangible value of giving during the holidays, which will carry throughout the year as well.



Fun With the Children

Ask any child to name their favorite time of year, and they'll most-likely say Christmas. Undoubtedly, most of them will point first to the bounty of gifts they hope to receive.

Nonetheless, children also enjoy the warmth and social interaction of holiday traditions shared with family and friends.

DECORATING THE TREE

Decorating the Christmas tree with your kids can be a fun way to kick off the holiday. Allow smaller children to hang ornaments on the bottom half of the tree while the older kids decorate the top.

Commemorate each Christmas of your child's life by purchasing an ornament each year that relates to their personality or features their name. As they become old enough, let them hang each one of their ornaments while sharing memories from that particular year.

Children can also look forward to traditions related to decorating the tree, such as drinking hot chocolate from their own special mug that is only brought out once a year.

CRAFTS

Encourage your children to make handmade ornaments and decorations for the tree and around the house, such as popcorn garland or decorative chains made from construction paper.



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Establish a tradition of giving with your child by providing them with a certain amount of money to spend on small gifts for each family member. Or ask your kids to create a book of artwork, which you can make multiple copies of, to give out as gifts.

Another idea is to have your children help as you make holiday cookies and treats to

hand out to their classmates and friends.

MOVIES

There's something about Christmas movies that make them timeless. Many of the same movies we watched as children are still popular with kids today, and everyone seems to have their own per-

sonal favorite.

Some people may even refuse to fully acknowledge Christmas until they've seen their beloved holiday flick. Capture the magic of Christmas themed movies by designating a movie night for the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Assign each of your kids a movie night when they get to

choose which Christmas movie the family will watch. Also, be sure that Mom and Dad get a turn, too, so you can introduce the kids to your own favorites.

After the movie, talk about why the night's movie is that person's favorite. It'll open opportunities for sharing stories and learning more about each other.

MILK AND COOKIES

Don't forget the milk and cookies. It's fun to watch as your child makes a plate of warm cookies and a cold glass of milk for Santa to enjoy as he places gifts under the tree. It's even more fun to watch their face light up the next morning when they see that Santa left them a personal note to show his appreciation.

Leave a partially eaten cookie on the plate, or even just a few crumbs, with a note from Santa telling the child "thank you" for the tasty treat. For younger children, use smaller words that they can read.

As your children continue to grow, try writing with your non-dominant hand or have someone else write the note for you, so that they don't recognize your handwriting.

Sweet, Savory Tastes



While the holiday season is sure to evoke a broad spectrum of warm feelings and fond memories, the most prominent is likely to be the abundance of delicious food.

Around the world, gathering together over a large meal is an integral part of the holiday tradition.

cake's misaligned connotation.

TURKEY

Traditional images of early holiday meals often depict Pilgrims and Indians joined together, ready to feast on a large roasted turkey.

In actuality, it's most likely that early settlers would've dined on foods that were already familiar to the Native American palette, such as venison, oysters and corn.

Turkeys weren't incorporated into holiday dining menus until some time later, presumably because the bird was large enough to feed many folks, and better yet, affordable.

FRUITCAKE

What are your feelings about fruitcake? Despite being the butt of many jokes, a well-made fruitcake is a tasty treat that is rich in Christmas tradition.

In ancient times, cakes filled with expensive nuts and dried fruits were a sign of prosperity. Often served at special events, these dense cakes quickly became a holiday tradition.

Their consistency and longer shelf life made them ideal for shipping to friends and family, resulting in the

THE PROCESS

But what about holiday traditions in the kitchen? The process of preparing food can often be just as rewarding as the meal itself. Many of the cooking traditions we hold dear today were born simply from a mother's request for help in the kitchen or a child's desire to help and learn.

If your child plans to leave cookies and milk for Santa this year, why settle for store-bought cookies? By using simple recipes for sugar cookies or other favorites, you can introduce children to the process of cooking, while also establishing a tradition they'll hand down to their kids, too.

The idea that homemade candies require special skills is a misconception. Creating sweet treats for your family is easier than you think, and your kids will be look forward to carrying on the the tradition, too.

If cooking just isn't your thing, there is another holiday cooking tradition that you're sure to embrace — the tradition of not cooking for the holidays, and instead, just being grateful for the culinary talents of others. You don't necessarily have to be the cook to enjoy and appreciate your family's holiday cooking traditions.

Decking the Halls

Decorating your home for the holidays is a tradition steeped in history and culture, with decorations and styles being handed down from one generation to the next.

But these days, the abundance of readily available resources — from books and magazines, television and online media — has inspired decorators to embrace holiday decorating traditions from around the world, as well as seeking ideas to establish new traditions.

USE CARDS

Holiday greeting cards can bring a smile to your face, but they can also pile up quickly, becoming a cluttered mess. If you can't bear to throw these cards away, and a pile of oddly sized cards is unacceptable, you incorporate the cards into a festive household decoration.

Hang a strip of decorative ribbon from an interior door or wall, and staple greeting cards onto the ribbon as they arrive in your mailbox. As more cards arrive, start a new ribbon. You can also assemble greeting cards into a montage, using tape to secure the cards in place.

TRIMMING THE TREE

These days there's no limit to the decorating options available for your Christmas



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tree. Artificial trees, advanced lighting options and entire stores dedicated to Christmas

decorating have changed conventional expectations of the family tree.

Nonetheless, the process of adorning the Christmas tree is inherently laced with tradition. For some, these traditions might involve the ceremonial placement of an inherited tree-topper. For others it might be the establishment of new decorating traditions.

While the end result may be quite different from days of old, family members will undoubtedly reminisce over heirloom ornaments or recall the memory of loved ones who inspired them to hand down certain traditions to the next generation.

OUTDOOR DECORATIONS

Remember the days when decorating the exterior of your home involved hanging a couple strands of Christmas lights and maybe a wooden snowman?

While there's nothing wrong with these simple displays, in many neighborhoods, hanging Christmas lights isn't just a holiday task. It's a tradition.

Creative homeowners invest countless hours and a lot of money in their light display. These extravagant spectacles become interactive shows, with lights flashing,

dancing and changing colors in perfect sync with Christmas carols blaring boldly from hidden speakers.

It's not uncommon to enter affluent neighborhoods and see signs asking viewers to tune into a specific radio station, which will play holiday music and give information about each home's display. These dazzling demonstrations have become viral sensations online, with people around the world logging on to view the holiday pageantry.

NATIVITIES

Nativity scenes are another long-standing decorative tradition that has also evolved in complexity over the years.

These scenes, depicting the birth of Jesus, once consisted of small figurines — featuring Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus — displayed on a mantle, shelf or coffee table.

Today, collectors seek out intricately hand painted ceramic sets, in whole or in part, including the three wise men and various animals. Nativity scenes became larger as they were incorporated into outdoor displays, and finally took on a life of their own as people began dressing the part to create live nativity scenes and reenactments.

Spending Time Together

There's no question that the holidays are a time of gathering with loved ones to share each other's company, celebrate over a big meal, and catch up with relatives we haven't seen in awhile.

Nonetheless, the anxiety of a family gathering can put a damper on the holidays as well. Here are a few ways to make your family holiday events a tradition to look forward to year after year.

SPORTS

You don't have to be an athlete to enjoy sports with family. Tossing a football or baseball around in the back yard is a surefire way to bring folks together without the pressure of maintaining constant dialogue.

A flag football game is a great activity that can be enjoyed by men, women and children. Organize teams so that they're made up of family members who may not know each other as well to create a fun environment for building those relationships.

FOCUS ON CHILDREN

Take the stress out of gift-giving by having family members only

bring gifts for the kids. A week or so before your family gathering, have a designated person gather the names and ages of the children who will be present, and then assign a child's name to each parent.

Set a price range to avoid some kids getting lesser gifts than others. For the adults, have a white-elephant or gag-gift exchange, again within a certain price range.

Make sure each gag gift is wrapped and have people draw numbers to determine who gets to pick their gift first. For an additional twist, give

everyone the chance to swap gifts once before unwrapping them. After each gift has been handed out, let everyone unwrap their gift and let the laughter and stories begin.

ORAL HISTORY

Before the age of online genealogy services and social media, family histories were handed down through storytelling. While it may be difficult to organize this activity, hearing funny stories or learning about your family's heritage can be an irreplaceable memory.

When talking to a family member, make note of their interests and encourage them to talk to another family member present who may have an interesting story to tell them. Or make seating arrangements at the dinner table that place folks with similar interest together.

MUSIC

Most families usually have at least a few people who are musically inclined. Encourage them to bring an instrument, or gather around the piano to sing Christmas songs and other music.

You may discover that other family members can sing or play, and those who can't will still enjoy gathering together to listen in. But be forewarned, you might also find out that crazy Uncle Ray can't resist grooving to the music, even if he is a horrible dancer!



Classic Holiday Sounds

We've all been there. You're in the car, flipping between radio stations, when you stumble upon the first holiday song of the year.

If you're not quite ready for the holidays, your first thought may be, "Bah, humbug!" But for many, that first Christmas song brings a smile to their face and marks the beginning of the holiday season.

Regardless of where you live, your cultural background or personality, music is most likely a big part of the holiday experience. Music has a way of attaching itself to your memories, and often evokes tidings of kindness and yuletide joy.

TUNE IN

Over the years, radio stations have tried various tactics for retaining their listener base during the holidays. Some stations sprinkle a variety of Christmas favorites into their standard music format, while others opt to only play holiday songs performed by artists of their specific genre.

And of course, there are stations that switch to non-stop holiday music for the weeks leading up to Christmas, and sometimes afterward. Because of the many options, deciding on your drive time listening preference is often a subconscious holiday tradition.

ORGANIZE IT

For many families, decorating the Christmas tree is a tradition that wouldn't be complete without Christmas carols playing in the background. And thanks to modern technology, gone are the days of finding the perfect Christmas album with all of your favorite tunes.

Organizing your holiday music into themed playlists allows you to cater the listening experience to your mood audience or event.

You'll also avoid the annoyance of continually putting in a new album to keep the music going or shuffling from album to album just to hear a particular song.

LIGHT SOUNDTRACK

Loading everyone into the car and driving around town viewing Christmas lights while listening to holiday music is another tradition that brings families together.

Again, the abundance of customized listening options can enhance this tradition by allowing family members to take turns choosing the next song to be

played.

Add to the fun by encouraging everyone to play musical games to see who can name the song first, performing holiday karaoke, or recreating old classics with whacky lyrics.

CAROLING

Of course, it wouldn't really be Christmas without one of the oldest holiday musical traditions:

caroling.

Throughout the centuries, caroling groups have spread holiday cheer in churches, neighborhoods and malls. These groups may consist of family and friends, church members or volunteers collecting money for charity.

Regardless of their affiliation, the image of rosy-cheeked faces huddled together to sing holiday classics has permeated its way into the traditional Christmas experience. But you don't have to possess the voice of an angel to participate in this

musical tradition.

While the conventional caroling group may sing a capella, or without musical accompaniment, many variations have developed over the years.

March to the beat of your own drum by parading through the streets with school band members, or grab your guitar and join another group of carolers. However you decide to do it, you're sure to be greeted by warm smiles as people gather at their windows and doorsteps to appreciate your efforts.



Making Your List

Depending on your personality, holiday shopping can be an enjoyable adventure or a dreaded chore. Either way, many families and individuals have shopping traditions regarding when and where they shop.

But buying for certain people can be stressful when you don't know what they want, the sizes they wear or the colors they like. You can simplify the task by establishing another shopping tradition with family and friends: the holiday wish list.

CATALOGS

While some shoppers still enjoy the idea of surprising their loved ones with the perfect gift, it is increasingly more common and acceptable to simply ask folks what they want.

Leading up to the holidays, request catalogs from various retailers and display them prominently in your living area, along with a pad of sticky notes and a pen. Ask family members and friends to browse through the catalogues and put a note on pages that feature items they want, along with any relevant notes, such as size and color options.

Or, give certain people a catalog of specific interest to them, and ask that they mark any items they're interested in. It's a good idea to mark each catalogue with a deadline so that they'll be com-

plete when you're ready to shop.

PROFILES

Find out more about your recipients' preferences by creating a generalized profile sheet for family and friends to fill out. List questions such as their clothing sizes, favorite colors, hobbies and specific items they're interested in.

Hand out the questionnaires and ask that they be returned to you by a specific date — or make a note of the deadline at the top of the form. If you'd rather keep the element of surprise, put each person's name at the top of the page, and assemble the blank profiles in a notebook that

you keep handily accessible.

When you hear someone mention something they want, make a note on their profile.

WISH BOX

Another fun way to collect a list of desired gifts is to display a wish box.

Decorate a large shoebox with holiday themes, tape the lid securely and cut a small slit

in the top. Let family and friends know that you'd like them to write down items they've seen on television, in stores or online, and place it in the box.

Again, having a deadline for entries will be important.

When you're ready to shop, open the box and organize the entries by person or particular store. Don't forget to have a notepad and pen available next to the box.

Having detailed wish lists can make your holiday shopping experiences more enjoyable and successful. Additionally, because the individuals may list more items than you plan to buy, you'll be able to help out other family members and friends who are also wondering what to buy for each person.

