

Child Guide

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November/December 2016

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Holidays *and More!*

Trains & Model Railroading

Thankful Giving

Countdown to Christmas

DIY Christmas Gifts

Calendar of
Holiday Events
and other
family-friendly
things to do



25 Simple Ways to Count Down to Christmas

BY LISA A. BEACH

As the holiday season approaches, a whirlwind of activity ensues that leaves families almost breathless by the end of December. Instead of rushing through the month, be intentional about what you say yes to. Rather than over-committing to too many activities that take you away from your family, focus instead on infusing the holiday spirit into your family.

But how? Create an advent calendar, with 25 days of simple, meaningful holiday activities that focus on giving, family, friendship, and fun. Starting on December 1st, focus on one intentional, memory-making activity each day.

1. Play the Giving Game. Brainstorm ways you can give to others without buying something (i.e., give a smile, a hug, a helping hand, etc.). Post the list on the fridge as a reminder. Each night, ask kids to share how they gave to others that day. Track everyone's daily "gifts," and at the end of the week, whomever gave the most gets to choose a holiday flick to watch on family movie night.

2. Adopt an international Christmas tradition. The Swedes celebrate St. Lucia Day on December 13, which focuses on St. Lucy being the light during the long, dark Scandinavian winters. Light up your own holidays by eating breakfast together by candlelight. Or adopt the French tradition of making buche de Noel, a traditional cake resembling a Yule log with bark-colored frosting and a buttercream filling. Decorate it with "snow" by sprinkling confectioner's sugar on top.

3. Blow holiday bubbles outside by adding red food coloring to one jar of bubbles and green food coloring to another. For a crafty twist, blow the bubbles onto sheets of white paper and watch a Christmas color-burst emerge.

4. Play holiday decoration bingo by driving around your community checking out yard displays while searching for Christmas items like snowflakes, inflatable Santas, and Rudolph.

5. Do a "ding-dong-ditch" by secretly placing a poinsettia plant on a neighbor's porch, ringing the doorbell and running away without getting caught.

6. Make holiday S'mores by adding crushed candy canes to a classic S'more recipe for a festive spin on a classic summertime treat.

7. Allow your kids to decorate their bedroom doors for Christmas with garland, ornaments, ribbons, etc.

8. Invite Grandma to a craft or baking day at your house to ensure your holiday fun extends to other family members.

9. Designate a "chores for charity" week. If you normally pay your kids for chores, ask them to donate their weekly earnings (which you'll match) to a charity

of their choice. If you don't pay for chores, create a menu of special paid jobs to choose from (i.e., raking leaves, washing windows, etc.). Pool everyone's wages and let the kids drop the family donation into a Salvation Army kettle.

10. Play Christmas tourist in a neighboring town. Pop in a local gift shop to check out holiday treasures. Walk along storefronts and look at window displays. Grab a sweet treat at a neighborhood bakery.

11. Pick a Secret Santa among family members and do something kind for each other every day for a week. Reveal your Secret Santa identities in a cookies-and-milk ceremony at the end.

12. Go on a nature hike and bring along gifts to leave for forest critters, such as handfuls of bird seed or pieces of peanut-butter-smear bread.

13. Cull through old toys, books, and clothes to give to needy families. Take your kids with you to donate the items together.

14. Ask each family member to choose a favorite cookie recipe, and then schedule a few baking sessions. Everyone helps research recipes, make a list of ingredients, shop for supplies, bake, clean up and eat the tasty results!

15. During your baking sessions, make extra treats to share. Take a cookie tray to your local fire department and thank them for their service. Or divvy up cookies into treat bags and deliver them to a few neighbors.

16. Attend a community holiday event (such as a concert, play, or parade) and bring a lonely relative, friend or neighbor with you.

17. Let your kids sleep near the Christmas tree one night, nodding off to the soft glow of tree lights, with holiday music lulling them into a yuletide dreamland.

18. Create a new tradition, such as buying a Christmas tree ornament that represents a special family moment from this past year or allowing kids to open one gift on Christmas Eve.

19. Instead of a lemonade stand, host a hot chocolate stand, asking for donations to your favorite charity.

20. Take back an old-fashioned tradition and go Christmas caroling. Invite neighbors to join in the fun, with hot chocolate and cookies back at your house to cap off the songfest.

21. Live somewhere warm where it never snows? Let the kids have a flour fight outside and watch them giggle as they cover each other in clouds of white.

22. Rewrite the lyrics to a favorite holiday tune by putting your own' family's spin on it. ("On the twelfth day of Christmas, my mother gave to me, 12 light sabers dueling, 11 markers drawing, 10 dogs a-barking....")

23. Create a Christmas scavenger hunt at home,



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using holiday items and decorations around the house. Conclude with a family game night after the kids put back their collected treasures.

24. Mix up a batch of reindeer dust (red and green glitter mixed with dried oats) and sprinkle it on your front lawn so Rudolph and his flying, antlered-gang can find your house on Christmas Eve.

25. Prepare a special treat for Christmas breakfast, whether it's something simple (such as fresh-squeezed orange juice and cinnamon toast) or something more indulgent (like mulled apple cider and a sausage-and-egg casserole).

With just a bit of intentional planning, you can slow down the pace of your holiday season and create a memory-filled month your kids won't forget.

Lisa Beach is a freelance writer, humorist and recovering homeschooling mom who lived to write about it. Check out her writer's website at www.LisaBeachWrites.com and visit her humor blog at www.TweeniorMoments.com.

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