

WINTER 2017

# BHPARENT

Local Life

**LET IT GO: SEVEN THINGS TO STOP WORRYING ABOUT**

**BULLY PATROL: A NEW APP TO SOLVE A BIG PROBLEM**

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS

**FEEL THE SEASON'S CHEER AS YOU COUNTDOWN TO CHRISTMAS WITH THIS MEANINGFUL ADVENT CALENDAR**

**COMPLIMENTARY**

# 25

## Simple ways to countdown to Christmas

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location and props Christmas Village

**W**hen the holiday season unofficially kicks off on Black Friday, 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 this holiday season. Rather than over-committing to too many parties and activities that take you away from your family, focus instead on infusing the holiday spirit into your family.

But how can you accomplish this without cramming more activities into an already frenetic season? Create an advent calendar, with 25 days of simple, meaningful holiday activities that focus on giving, family, friendship, fun, and tradition.

You can buy an inexpensive advent calendar with pockets and fill each day with a fortune-cookie style paper noting the day's activity, or simply write the activity-of-the-day on the family calendar you already use. Starting on December 1, implement one idea each day to slow down your holidays and focus on intentional activities that create lasting memories.

**9** Designate a "chores for charity" week. If you normally pay your kids for their daily chores, ask them to donate their earnings (matched by mom and dad) to a charity of their choosing. If you don't normally pay for chores, conduct a "chores for charity" weekend with a menu of special paid jobs to choose from (i.e., raking leaves, cleaning the family car's interior, washing windows, etc.). Pool everyone's wages and let the kids drop the family donation into a Salvation Army kettle.

**1** Play the Giving Game. Brainstorm a list of ways you can give to others without buying something from a store. (Examples: give a smile, a hug, an encouraging word, a helping hand, etc.) Post the list on the fridge as a daily reminder. Each night (at dinner or before bedtime), ask kids to share how they gave to others throughout the day. Track everyone's daily "gifts," and at the end of the week, the child who gave the most gets to choose a holiday flick to watch for family movie night.

**5** Play Christmas tourist in a neighboring town. Pop in a local gift shop to check out holiday treasures. Walk along the storefronts and look at holiday window displays. Grab a sweet treat at a local bakery you've never been to before.

**10** Attend a community holiday event (such as a concert, play, craft festival, live nativity scene, or parade) and bring a lonely relative, friend, or neighbor with you.

**2** Grab your blankets and a cup of hot cocoa and cozy up to watch a family-favorite holiday film together. Switch it up by letting different family members choose each week.

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

**11** Take your family into the Hills and find the perfect tree to bring home and decorate. Bring snacks and enjoy the time together as you explore the winter wonderland. (Permits are required.)

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

**7** Allow your kids to decorate their bedroom doors for Christmas and offer up supplies of garland, ornaments, ribbons, etc.

**12** Pick a Secret Santa among family members and do something exceptionally kind for each other every day for a week. Reveal your Secret Santa identity in a cookies-and-milk ceremony at the end of seven days.

**8** Invite grandma or a favorite uncle to a craft day or baking day at your house to ensure your holiday fun extends to other family members.

**13** Instead of a lemonade stand, host a hot chocolate stand in your neighborhood, asking for donations to a local charity.

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

**14** Blow holiday bubbles outside by adding red food coloring to one jar of bubbles and green food coloring to another bottle. For a crafty twist, blow the colored bubbles onto snow (or a sheet of white paper) and watch a Christmas color-burst emerge.



**15** Create a new tradition this year and fill the Christmas tree with ornaments that represent something special each year. Head to a local store to pick out their favorites as a family. Another great family tradition option is allowing children to open one gift from under the tree on Christmas Eve!

**16** Play holiday decoration bingo by driving around your neighborhood checking out the lights and yard displays while searching for Christmas items like snowflakes, inflatable Santas, Rudolph, angel tree toppers, etc.

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

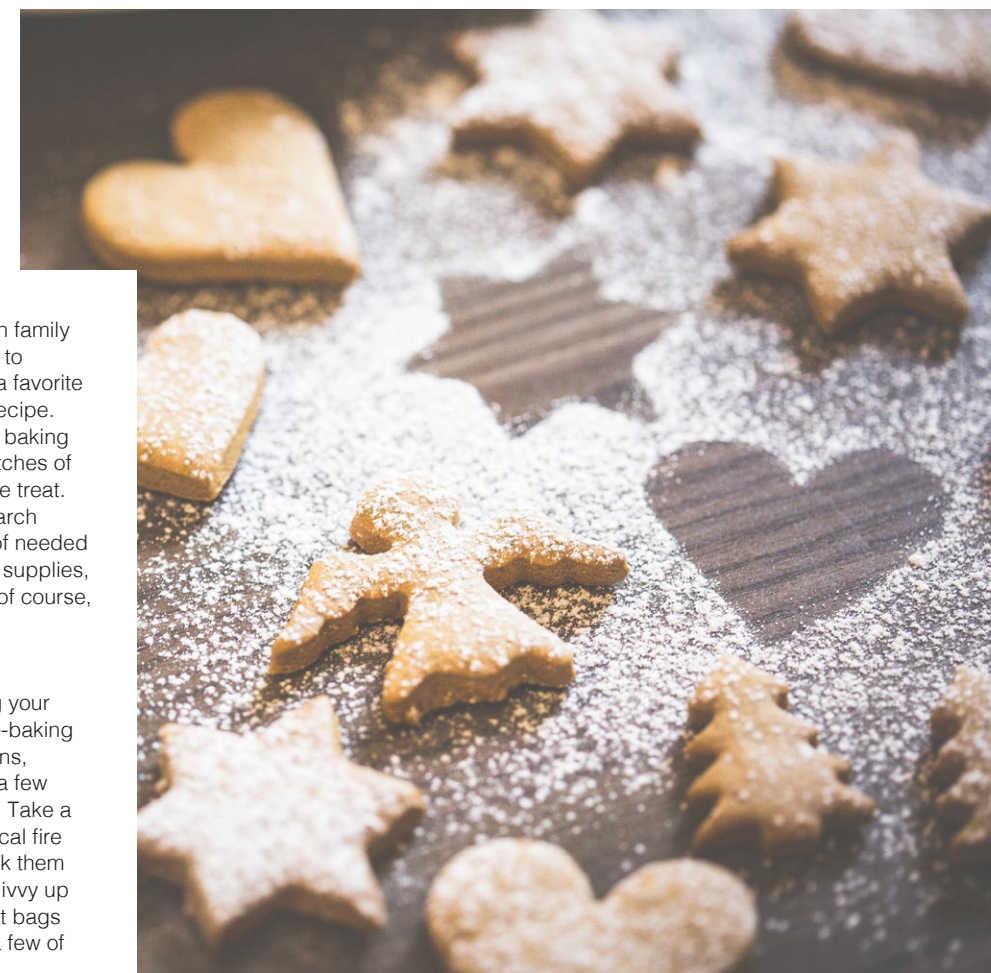
**18** Let your kids sleep near the Christmas tree one night, nodding off to the soft glow of twinkling tree lights, with holiday music lulling them into a yuletide dreamland.

**19** We're always wishing for a white Christmas, but if there isn't any snow, make your own! Let the kids have a flour fight in the backyard and watch them giggle as they cover each other in white clouds.

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

**21** Ask each family member to choose a favorite cookie recipe. Then schedule a few baking sessions to make batches of each person's favorite treat. Everyone helps research recipes, make a list of needed ingredients, shop for supplies, bake, clean up and, of course, eat the tasty results!

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



**23** Before Christmas Day, head to the kitchen and mix up a batch of reindeer dust (red and green glitter mixed with dried oats) and sprinkle it on your front lawn. This festive concoction will help Rudolph and his flying, antlered-gang find your house throughout their travels on Christmas Eve.

**24** Create a Christmas scavenger hunt at home, using holiday items and decorations around the house, on the porch, and in your front yard. Conclude with a family game night after the kids put back their collected treasures.

**25** Prepare a special treat for breakfast on Christmas morning, whether it's something simple (such as fresh-squeezed orange juice and cinnamon toast shaped like a Christmas tree) 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 festive, memory-filled month your kids won't forget.**