



VANDERBILT
Vanderbilt Child
and Family Center

Holidays with Young Children

*Discussing developmentally effective strategies
for families seeking peace and joy
during holidays and other gift giving occasions*

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Support Families to Manage Consumer Culture

Across cultures, gift giving is an act of social importance - it is linked to sharing. Christmas, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, and Yule are just some of the holidays observed in the month of December. As well, the secularization of Santa in the United States has made gift purchasing so ubiquitous that it may feel obligatory and even oppressive.

The stress of “keeping-up” is a huge financial and emotional burden to families.

Empower parents and others to know the difference between children’s consumer desires and their psychological needs. *A child may feel relieved to not get the thing they felt they were supposed to want to receive but were actually scared of – always consider the authentic child.*

Over the past 30 years marketing to children has become deregulated and children are highly targeted by firms merchandising food, toys, clothing, entertainment, and more.

Approximately \$17 billion is spent each year marketing goods to children, a huge increase from the \$100 million spent in 1983. <https://commercialfreechildhood.org/commercialfree/>

Coordinating agreements and rules with grandparents and other family members can be a challenge. Parents may need to initiate crucial conversations in advance to set expectations on safety and quality and limits on quantity.



Sometimes it's nice to have grandparent time on a different day, to space out the gifts.

Let the child get to be the giver!

Children may imitate adults in their gift giving.

Children may spontaneously initiate gift giving driven by emotions (including excitement), and this may derive from relationship.

Children may not feel moved to give a gift to everyone they are in relationship with – they may not yet understand that there may be social rules around the practice of obligatory gift giving (*e.g., they are not intentionally unkind when they make a gift for the grandparent that spends every weekend but not for the grandparent they see once a year.*)

Children may create or purchase a gift that feels special to them although it may be perceived as unusual to the recipient.
The wrapping may be artful and enthusiastic (e.g., LOTS of tape!)

Families may have charitable gift practices that engage their children. *One idea is to help a child to make a list of gifts they want to give instead of gifts they want to get.*



Thoughts on Enough!



Children can be delighted by something new

Consider the impact of change: children can be overwhelmed by too much, too soon

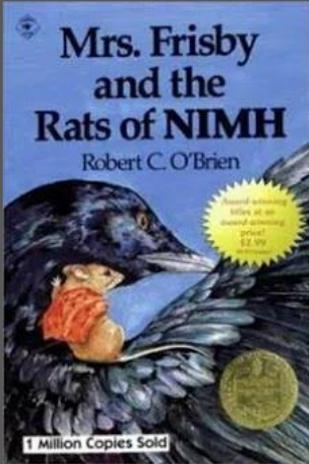
Nothing is more disheartening than carefully selecting and wrapping gifts and having the day end with tears and tantrum

Offer one gift at a time and give the child space to examine and engage with each gift

Take a break between gifts (walk, eat, play, nap)
Toddlers can be very good at collecting bows and putting them in a box for next year.

A total of four gifts is a good rule for all ages:

- A book
- Something useful
- Something wanted
- Something unexpected that is highly desirable to the individual



For a 9 year old: great book, flashlight with batteries, bike (with helmet), a jar of Nutella

Artist

Craftsman

Engineer

Explorer

Scientist



Who is your child?

Careful observer or engages readily?

Toe in the water or cannonballs into the deep-end?

Delighted by bright lights and music or prefers quiet, cozy spaces?

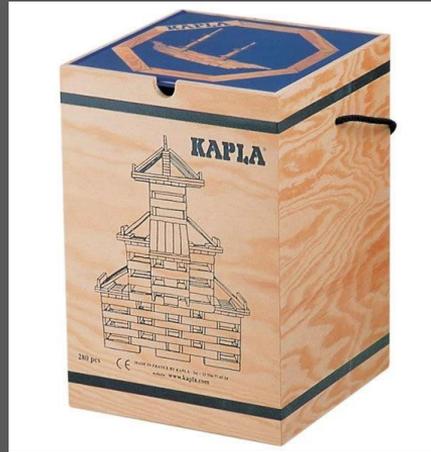
Loves the sticky-icky feels or avoids gooey textures?

Loves to party or prefers to be alone?

Your child's unique disposition should drive both the gift selection and the way they receive it.

Products kid-tested, tried and true:

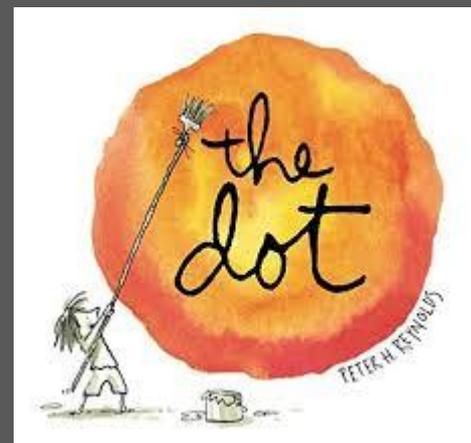
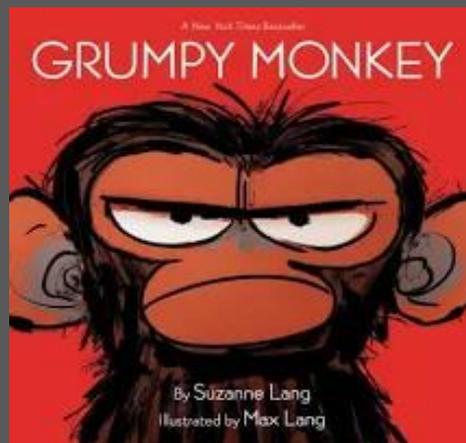
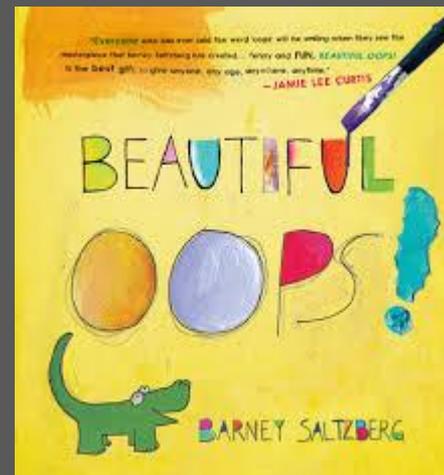
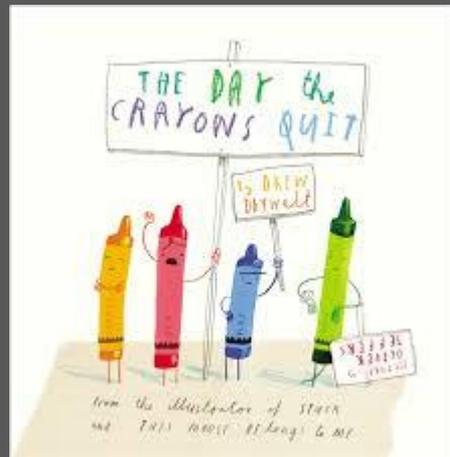
Bella Luna; Community Playthings; Fat Brain Toys; Kapla;
Lego (blocks, not kits); Magic Cabin; Magnatiles



THE BEST
CHILDREN'S
BOOKS
OF 2023
HOLIDAY GIFT EDITION



<https://bankstedu.info/3Qw9PFc>



Consider the Opportunity to Gift Experiences

Especially for children ages four to twelve years, experiences offer profound high impact and supports kids to feel seen and valued:

Tickets to an event (music, sports, theater)

A whole day 1:1 with one parent doing “their thing”:
biking, hiking, ice skating, museum of. . .

Lunch with someone prominent in their field of interest
(getting to meet your hero): artist, dancer, firefighter,
musician, nurse, oceanographer

A mini-trip to someplace no one in the family has been to
(child’s choice): caves, mountains, beach



PRO TIPS

Gifts DO NOT NEED TO BE NEW! *A beloved older cousin's skateboard may mean more to a child than a brand new one.*

Children have unique desires that can often be best met through hand-me-downs and thrifting. *For example: art easels, books, dolls (e.g., vintage Barbies), Legos, microscope, musical instruments, princess dresses and other costumes, sports equipment, stethoscope, stuffed animals (gently laundered).*

Families and friends are usually delighted to help resource a child's dream and give second-life to beloved treasures.

You do NOT need to spend the same amount on each person. Consider equity and value outside of cost.

Be open to resourcing a child's desire. Even if it may seem strange, if it's harmless it can be very joyful!



Teaching Gratitude

Parents and other caring adults will need to teach children how to be grateful, or at least how to act grateful. These behaviors are important to know because they are socially expected when gifts are received or exchanged. Values: Be Kind, Be Respectful

Parents begin by modeling the language and behavior they hope their child will imitate. This is especially true for children ages 8 months to 8 years.

Children are encouraged to use their words to say “Thank you” by four years of age. *Explain* that saying “thank you” is the gift we give back! Parents may role play these conversations with young children in advance of birthdays and gift giving holidays.

Children by seven years of age are encouraged to write thank you notes. Parents can help the child select beautiful stamps at the post office and make this a pleasant activity.

The important message is to teach the child to understand that the true gift is that someone kindly thought about them, not the thing they actually received. Teach them to express “Thank you for thinking of me.” instead of “Thank you for this gift.” Have conversations about how hard someone worked to make or select the gift (if that is true) or how much fun the gift giver had or how good it feels to give or how the gift giver just wanted the child to know that they care about them.