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Comments



The holidays are a magical time for kids and full of opportunities for spending time with family and friends. However, it can also sometimes feel like the main point is holiday gift giving and receiving, and kids pick up on this. Sometimes families get overwhelmed with all the “I want!” during this season.

Some parents try to handle this by using it as an opportunity to get their kids to behave. The very popular “Elf on a Shelf” capitalizes on this by reminding kids that all their deeds (good and bad) get reported to Santa and have a direct impact on their gifts received. I think there is benefit in

having holiday traditions, like a friendly elf who lives in your house during the season to remind kids that their behavior has consequences. However, I also think that it is a very risky proposition to tie your children's holiday presents to behavior.

What happens if they have a terrible day? Do they really risk losing everything? What if that day is Christmas Eve when there is no time to "make it up?" Are the holidays really about just being good so you can get presents?

I think families can decrease some of the "gimmies" and focus on what their children will get by focusing on the giving rather than the receiving. For example, here are a few ideas for doing this:

- Instead of getting them to create lists of what they want, have them create lists of what would be good to give to their family/friends. Help them learn how you think about what someone else wants and needs

and help them focus on how good it feels to make someone else happy.

- Do an “adopt a family” program or engage in community service to focus on giving to one’s community.
- Do some family activities focused on being grateful. For example, take some time at the dinner table to go around and talk about what everyone is thankful for. That gives a reminder of what we do have, rather than focusing on what we think we need.
- Instead of focusing on the “naughty versus nice” criteria, focus just on the nice! Have a nice jar where you challenge your kids to do nice things for people throughout the day. They can write down their good deeds (or tell you to write it down) and you can put everyone’s in a jar. You can then go through them and read them out loud at the end

of the week and focus on how nice everyone has been.

The holidays present a great opportunity to teach children about caring for others and being grateful, rather than just what presents they get. It is a nice time to set family traditions around this message as well!

ABOUT THE EXPERT



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