

CCFC GUIDE To COMMERCIAL-FREE HOLIDAYS

TIPS FOR RESISTING HOLIDAY HYPE



Brought to you by some of your favorite
activists, advocates, and authors.

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Carving Out Time and Space for Commercial-Free Family Traditions

A good way to counter holiday commercialism is to build in holiday activities that are concrete expressions of their spiritual, cultural, and social meaning. Take some time for reading aloud stories from your cultural tradition, preparing traditional foods, and actively engaging children in giving, not just receiving. By shifting the family focus and energy away from holiday commercialism we can create traditions that children expect and look forward to each year.

From the time my daughter was two, we began making an annual trip to a grocery store to buy ingredients for a complete holiday dinner that we deliver to a local food pantry. It was always fun to choose the food, and the concrete experience of buying a meal for a family that can't afford it led to conversations about hunger, poverty, and thankfulness, that deepened and became more complex as she grew and developed.

Putting Others' Needs Above Our Wants

One way to fight excessive commercialism and feel the true spirit of the holidays is to focus family gift-giving away from fulfilling personal desires and toward meeting the needs of others. Find a family with fewer resources than yours and give them gifts that they need. For more than ten years, our family has tried to be like an extended family to two families who are unrelated to us and who live not far from us in inner city New Haven. One family is headed by a grandmother who is raising her grandchildren and the other is headed by a single mom. Our daughter has been a mentor to the oldest granddaughter in the first family. And our son has been--and still is--a mentor to the only son of the single mother. Throughout the year, but especially during the holidays, we have tried to make it our business to find out what our "families" need and do our best to respond. This gives us and our children less of what we may want, but it gives our extended families much more of what they really need. And that's the way we like it.



Enola Aird, JD, is an activist mother, director of The Motherhood Project, and author of *Watch Out for Children: A Mothers' Statement to Advertisers*.*



Allen Kanner, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and a founding member of CCFC. He's a father, a columnist for *Tikkun Magazine*, and co-editor of *Psychology and Consumer Culture*, and of *Ecopsychology*.*

Buy Green, Buy Fair, Buy Local, Buy Used, and Buy Less

People have celebrated the holiday season from time immemorial, the magical moment of the solstice never ceasing to amaze us as the sun begins its long return home. But as we all know, the corporate commercialization of the holidays has transformed this precious time into one of material lust and stressful shopping. To begin reclaiming the mid-winter we can “Buy green, buy fair (trade), buy local, buy used, and most importantly, buy less.”

We can also give our children an unexpected gift: a week free of television, say, from December 20-27. It's a gift that may take some getting used to, but the rewards are great. Suddenly there is bountiful time to be together as a family. There is space for quiet, with all its multi-colored nuances. There is a seed planted that can grow into more TV-free time during the rest of the year. The holidays are reclaimed.

TV-Free Holidays

Everyone seems to wish they had more time as the holidays approach. Between special events, cooking, shopping, wrapping, and traveling or preparing to host family and friends, the demands of the holidays can be overwhelming.

One way to tame the chaos and find more time is to turn off your TV. First, you'll find half hour increments of time you didn't know you had: thirty minutes after dinner to write a few holiday cards; fifteen minutes to read your favorite childhood story to your kids. Or even ten minutes to make some hot chocolate, relax, and read before bedtime or talk with your spouse.

Once you're free from the loud commercials, the non-stop “breaking news,” and other clutter coming at you over the airwaves, you may also find increased peace of mind. It may take a few days to get used to the relative silence. If it seems too quiet at first, try listening to music.

How will the rest of your family react? They may protest at first, but use some of your new found time to play a board game, play cards, work a puzzle with them, or bundle up and go for a walk. Even adolescents want to spend more time with their parents.

This holiday season, you deserve more than TV has to offer -- enjoy your family and friends without commercial interruption!



Karen Lewis is a mother, an activist, and Project Associate for the Tobacco Prevention Project, National School Boards Association.*



Nancy Carlsson-Paige, EdD, is Professor of Education at Lesley University. A mother and a grandmother, she is the author of *Taking Back Childhood: Helping Your Kids Thrive in a Fast-Paced, Media-Saturated, Violence-Filled World*.*

Gifts That Show You Care

I like to give gifts to my grandchildren that don't come from stores and that show them I care about them and their interests. Here are some of the gifts I've given my grandkids over the years.

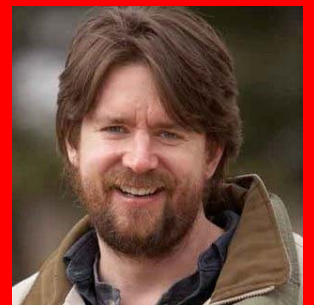
I made a book for my grandson Jackson when he was two years old. In it I put photos of Jack doing things he loved like rolling a big ball, jumping off stairs, and going down the slide at the park. Underneath each photo, I wrote a short caption that described how Jack loved to do the activity pictured in the photo.

For my grandson Miles, who loved playdough at age three, I made a special batch of home-made playdough and gave him a little box of tools- plastic knives, a garlic press, and wooden shapes that he could use for making prints in the dough.

Last holiday season, my granddaughter Isabella, who was 18 months old, was in a phase of fascination with people's purses, and the things she found inside, especially wallets. So I gave Isabella a big purse and in it I put a comb, notepad, a coin purse with large coins, an old cell phone and a wallet with discontinued credit cards that she loved to sort and stack.

Christmas Coupons at the Kassers

On Christmas Eve, my wife and I sit down and make little colored pencil drawings on slips of paper as coupon gifts for our two sons. Some coupons let them skip their fruit or vegetable at dinner but still get dessert, some let them stay up 15 minutes past their regular bedtime, some let them not have to pick up their mess after they've been playing, and some make it so my wife or I stop what we are doing and read them a book or play a game of their choice. For their birthdays, I also give each boy a "Fun Day with Dad" coupon, where they get to plan a whole day of activities. Now our boys sometimes give us coupons for presents too – my wife and I have received coupons for back massages, taking out the compost, and even "no bickering for the whole day."



Tim Kasser, PhD, is Associate Professor of Psychology at Knox College. He's a father and author of *The High Price of Materialism*.*



Diane Levin, PhD, is Professor of Education at Wheelock College and co-founder of CCFC. She's a mother, co-author of *So Sexy So Soon* and co-founder of TRUCE.*

Giving Gifts That Encourage Creative Play

For the past 14 years, I have worked with Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE), an organization of early childhood educators in the Boston area, to prepare the "[TRUCE Toy Action Guide.](#)" The Guide provides information to help families make good decisions about quality toys to buy as gifts during the December holiday toy-buying season. There are so many toys out there that don't have the best interests in children at heart and can actually undermine play, learning and development. These include many toys that are linked to media, electronics, violence and sexualization.

Usually, giving gifts to children means spending a lot of money on manufactured toys. In these difficult economic times, this year's TRUCE Guide suggests you create SHOEBOX GIFTS, an appealing way to promote quality play that you can easily and inexpensively create yourself. Shoebox gifts are collections of small, familiar items that are organized around an appealing play theme such as bathtub play, rescue play, and play-dough play (for which you make your own play dough). Shoebox gifts show that expensive toys in fancy packages aren't the only way to promote quality play.

Give the Gift of Time

Presence always trumps presents. More than any transient toy your kids crave time and attention, so let them bask in your presence. If you're a live-away parent, be with your child through personal communication and traditions, rather than trying to "make up" for your situation with a flood of presents.

Instead of the latest electronic gadget, give your child time (and be sure to keep the commitments you make). Here are a few examples:

- ◆ Take a simple trip together.
- ◆ Make a commitment to spend one hour of one-on-one with her, once a week, all year (for dozens of great ideas, check out *The Dads & Daughters Togetherness Guide: 54 Fun Activities to Help Build a Great Relationship*).
- ◆ Make homemade decorations together and regale her with stories from your childhood holidays.
- ◆ Pick one day between now and the holidays to just watch her non-judgmentally all day. Just be aware of how unique and special she is. At the end of the day, write down everything you love about her and give her the list as a holiday gift.



Joe Kelly—The Dad Man—is a father, speaker, writer, blogger, activist and consultant. He is the author of *Dads and Daughters: How to Inspire, Understand, and Support Your Daughter When She's Growing Up So Fast*.*



Nathan Dungan is the founder of Share Save Spend and author of *Personal Finance: A Lifetime of Responsibility*, a textbook for high school students.

The Choices We Make with Our Money Can Change the World

It was a brisk fall afternoon back in 1994 and I was a young financial advisor in Philadelphia, PA who was about to experience a life-changing conversation with my good friend Bill.

Here's the gist of it. Bill shared with me over lunch that day that his in-laws, Trudy and Sam, had been struggling with how to manage the gift-giving extravaganza that had overtaken their all-family Christmas celebration. They were especially concerned with how it was impacting their grandchildren.

Trudy and Sam's solution; counter the "it's all about me" focus with a simple act of gratitude. In addition to one gift, each grandchild also received a "share-check." Here's how it worked. The "share check" was a \$25 check from Trudy and Sam with everything filled-in except the "pay to the order of." It was intentionally left blank. The goal: each grandchild had to give the money away to a charitable cause they were passionate about. And the best part, it worked! The grandkids now use their "share checks" along with their own money to make a difference in the world. It's a simple but elegant way to shift the gotta-have-it-now emphasis of the holidays.

I've told that story to thousands of people around the country and the reaction is always the same, 'what a great idea!' I agree. Give it a try.

LINKS

We Want to Hear From You! [Send Us Your Strategies for Commercial-Free Holidays](#)

Take Action!: [Tell Toy Companies: Target Parents, Not Kids, With Holiday Ads](#)

[TRUCE 2008-2009 Toy Action Guide](#)



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