

## Gift-Giving Ideas to Bring Families Together

How to help kids focus on the joy of giving (instead of just the rush of getting).

By Heidi Smith Luedtke, Air Force spouse



If your kids have wish lists as long as their holiday stockings, it may be time to refocus your festivities. Emphasize the spirit of giving – not getting – with these fun family activities.



### Bake Blessings

Make homemade cookies together (**check out our recipes on page 54!**) and donate them to your installation

cookie drive or a chapter of Meals on Wheels. Sharing holiday treats reminds kids how sweet their own situation is.



### Express Gratitude

Help your kids say “thank you” to people who least expect it, like the school crossing guard and the pizza delivery

man. Thankfulness opens our hearts to give and receive more good things.



### Serve Others

Dish out a meal at a local soup kitchen in an act of family service. Arrive early to help

set up or stay late to wipe down tables. Volunteers report higher levels of well-being, less stress, and a greater sense of meaning in life.



### Do Good Deeds

Encourage kids to find small, practical ways to help others, like taking the neighbor’s newspaper to the porch

or mowing lawns for free. Reinforce kind acts with generous praise.



### Buy Together Time

Purchase tickets to an event you’ll enjoy as a family, rather than buying more gadgets or goodies. Watch a play

or concert, then stop for hot cocoa. Fond memories are the best holiday treasures.



### Be Friendly

Invite friends to your place for an informal wrap session. Each guest can bring small gifts to wrap

and a roll of wrapping paper. Share scissors, tape and ribbon. Catch up on each other’s lives while you work.



### Use Your Words

Give affirmations in a feel-good family ceremony. Ask each person to share something they appreciate about

another family member, as they light a candle in his or her honor. Respect and admiration grow when you give them away.



### Snuggle Up

Touching gestures make us feel loved and appreciated.

Make it a point to give (and get) more

hugs, kisses, back scratches and foot massages this holiday season. Touch relieves stress and helps you reconnect.



### Give Giggles

Share the gift of laughter by hosting a family comedy festival. Kids of all ages love to tell jokes,

make up skits, or act out silly movie scenes. Make a big bowl of popcorn and settle in to enjoy the show.



### Play “Secret Santa”

Selecting gifts makes the act of giving more concrete for kids. Give each child whatever money

you can to purchase a toy for a needy child. Donate it anonymously through Operation Santa Claus or Toys for Tots.



### Shop For Others

Air Force spouse Andi Wrenn’s family adopts a needy family every year. “The most memorable year

was when we decided to buy for a family with six kids,” she says. “My kids were so excited to pick out matching outfits for the three girls and three boys.”



### Create Homemade Gifts

Ask each family member to make a holiday gift for another family member. Kids can make collage placemats, write and

illustrate a storybook, burn a CD, or knit a scarf. The fun starts when you dream up what to make (**find great ideas on page 50**). ★