

Family holiday activities

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

It's too easy to get caught in the commercial hustle and bustle of the holidays. The season shouldn't just be about gifts, food and pageantry. It's a time for families to enjoy each other's company and draw closer together.

There are many fun holiday activities parents and children can enjoy together that can strengthen family bonds—that won't cost you a dime and will help people remember what the holidays should be all about.

“The days leading up to the holiday are an exciting time, particularly for kids. Take advantage of this time to share in such fun and educational activities as reading holiday stories, creating your own holiday cards and even baking or cooking together,” says Sharon Darling, president and founder of the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).

Here are some great holiday ideas from the NCFL to bring the family closer:

—Read holiday stories: In the weeks before the holiday, gather the family's favorite holiday books and read one story or chapter together nightly. Have children participate in following along, turning pages and by asking them questions about the story. Reading the characters in funny voices and acting out the stories can help even the biggest Grinch warm to reading.

—Sing out loud: Holiday songs are great for young kids, as they're filled with fun rhymes and repetition. This helps kids learn new words and familiarize themselves with language. Consider making up words to such holiday favorites as “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Be sure to stick to the traditional lyrics when caroling in public!

—Make your own cards: Have kids help make a list of recipients. Then help them write holiday messages and decorate holiday cards before mailing them. If kids are too little to write the message, have them help create one and then sign their names or add drawings. Grandparents will appreciate these more than store-bought cards.

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—Cook up some fun: Have kids assist in the kitchen with holiday cooking or baking. This draws everyone to the same room and will help complete all those side dishes or holiday cookies. Have kids read recipes, measure ingredients and keep things organized. This helps them develop reading, counting and organizational skills while enjoying the tasty fruits of their labors.

—Hold holiday movie nights: Have kids, grandparents and parents pick out favorite seasonal films. After watching each movie, get kids thinking by having them invent their own sequels. Simply ask them what they think happens next in the story. They even can write their own stories the family can read together.

—Make holiday lists: Have every family member make his or her holiday list. Don't list presents you want. Instead, list things that make one happy or about which one is thankful. Then, have kids decorate the lists with fun borders and hang them on the refrigerator until New Year's Day. Every time someone goes for a snack they will brighten the day.

For more fun family activities that help kids build reading, writing and math skills, visit www.familit.org.