

Young Families

January/March 2007

A family-focused newsletter with young children in mind

Gifts From the Heart

The Best Presence

Among the precious things I own are a clay plate with a happy face, several framed poems and paintings, and a beatup, old painted flowerpot in the shape of a cat used to hold messages of a child's happy memories.

My children are young adults now. These old gifts are important not just because they made them, but because they are invested with a measure of their love.

In a materialistic world, it's easy to forget the power of these kinds of gifts. Unfortunately, we may buy too many things

and overlook the gift of our own time.

Of course, children love our material gifts. The spelling of the word "present" meaning gift, is identical to the word "present," which means being near, being here. The best presents are those that have a little bit of us in them. What children really yearn for is something from the heart, the true caring and sacrifice of time offered by their parents.

So maybe we should consider how to invest ourselves in the gifts we offer. Build the tinker toy structure with a child or have that

tea party with another. Take time to help a third build that model airplane. When children see those tinker toys, dolls, and plastic models, they will look beyond the wood, the cloth, the plastic to find us and our love invested in each and every one.

The next time you go to buy that Captain Crazo Space Cadet figure or the fancy Miss Smarty Pants doll that wets its diapers, pause for a moment and ask yourself, "How do I give myself when I give this gift?" "How can I be present in the present?" That's the greatest gift of all.

Charles A. Smith

Children Giving Presents

When it's time for a young child to give a birthday or holiday gift to mom, dad, or a grandparent, a parent might purchase a gift, wrap it up, then put the child's name on it. This experience is empty of the real meaning of giving for children.

Instead, a child might give daddy a framed drawing for his office or a plate she sculpted from clay for grandma. Invite children to participate in the wrapping, even though the result is not likely to be perfect.

What children give in this case is themselves, their imagination and enthusiasm. Long after the tie or soup spoon is discarded, these little treasures will continue to provide lasting memories.

Charles A. Smith

Thoughtful Gift Giving Can Be an Art

Gift-giving customs vary among families because of many things. They might be related to a family's background and heritage as well as current circumstances. Whenever you are thinking about giving gifts to your family and others around you, think about your reason for giving gifts.

Is it out of respect and appreciation?
Is it to promote and maintain relationships?
Is it to celebrate?
Is it out of obligation?

Think again if it is only about feeling obligated — perhaps a friendly note would be enough. Think about the persons to whom you want to give gifts.

Giving a Christmas ornament to a family who does not celebrate the season shows a lack of consideration for them. Also, avoid giving gifts that give hints (e.g. dieting book for a person struggling with weight gain) or giving expensive gifts to impress others. Gracious gift giving is about recognizing others and your connection to them.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen



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Give Your Family the Gift of Healthful Eating

You're probably wondering, what does healthful eating have to do with gift-giving? Your child will acquire most of his eating attitudes and behaviors by the time he or she is 6 years old, according to Ellyn Satter, dietitian and parent and family therapist who specializes in family feeding dynamics. As a parent, you make all the difference in your child's eating capability. Children know how to eat from birth, and they know how much to eat.

Satter believes parents should trust their newborn. She suggest that a newborn should be allowed to eat how much she wants and to feed as fast or as slowly as she

wants. This encourages a child to feel good about eating, and a foundation of trust is laid for feeding development. This allows the child to venture forth through the adventurous stages of learning to eat – exploring finger foods, mastering a spoon, investigating new foods and eating comfortably in a variety of settings. By the time a child is six years old, most of his eating attitudes and behaviors are in place, and evidence of healthful eating can be seen – the child likes to eat and feels good about eating.

Parents who have a healthy attitude about food and eating can raise a child who is a healthy eater. It is the child's eating attitudes

and behaviors that are important – more important than any one day's "good" or "bad" food choices. Satter says, parents should relax and remember that children learn, "bite by bite, food by food, and meal by meal." Then it becomes easier to see the importance of family meals – the laboratory where healthy eaters are created!

So, give the gift that truly lasts a lifetime – and can keep giving for generations! Invest in healthy eating for the whole family – wrapped up in the pleasure of family meals together.

Reference: *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* by Ellyn Satter. Kelcy Press, Madison, WI. 1999.

Sandy Procter

Food Mixes Make Great Holiday Gifts

The holiday season is upon us and another birthday is just around the corner. Children, like adults, like to give gifts to their love ones. This time of the year can be a great opportunity for children to show off their creativity and express their love through the gifts they give. Dry ingredient mix for breads, muffins, pancakes, cookies, brownies, cakes, soups, or beverages can be put into a decorated bag or jar and given as gifts. This gift idea is inexpensive and also reinforces math skills for older children and fine motor skills for younger children.

Depending on the recipes that are used, this could also be a good opportunity to encourage products made from whole grains such as whole wheat flour, oatmeal, whole wheat pasta, or brown rice. Just because it is the holiday season, does not mean healthy eating habits should go out the window. Below is an example of a whole grain product recipe that could be used as a dry mix gift. This recipe was taken from the Kids a Cookin' Web site <http://kidsacookin.org>.

Dry mix for the bag or jar:

2 ¼ cups quick oats or long-cooking oats
½ cup flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ cup brown sugar
1 cup raisins

Mix the baking soda with the flour. Layer the dry ingredients in the bag or jar in any order. Tie the bag or cover the jar with a lid. Decorate the bag or jar as you desire with ribbons, pictures, bows, etc. Then attach a card with the following recipe and instructions:

Chewy Oatmeal Bars

Oatmeal bar mix from bag or jar
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
5 tablespoons margarine, softened
¼ cup honey

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly coat an 8- by 8-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine all ingredients. Stir until well blended.
3. Press mixture into pan and bake 18 to 22 minutes or until golden brown.
4. Cool 10 minutes, then cut into bars. Let bars cool in pan before serving.

Tandalayo Kidd

It is not how much we do,
but how much love we put
in the doing. It is not how
much we give, but how
much love we put in the
giving.

—Mother Teresa

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