

15 Ways to Connect With Your Kids During the Holidays

I'm always impressed at the ingenuity of dads (often with help from moms) when it comes to finding ways to stay connected with their kids, and I want to share some ideas I've heard from dads over the past few weeks.

I don't know how the holidays go in your family, but in ours, there are lots of activities and traditions, and they're all great. But sometimes I have to remind myself about the real purpose behind all the activity: to celebrate as a family and build stronger bonds with each other.

And for dads, we can't just go through the motions during this holiday season; we have to find ways to strengthen that bond with our kids. And in today's world, there are complex family situations and a growing number of distractions that would get in the way of dads and kids making that connection.

So, this week, I simply want to pass along some practical ideas that you can use. They might not all work for you, but if you pick up a tip or two, and they add some fun or a little more genuine connection to your time with your children, I'll consider this a success.

Here are some of the ideas we received from dads right here in our offices and from a request I put out on Facebook:

- 1. Bake cookies or prepare an entire meal together.** (And dad has to be more involved than just taste-testing.)
- 2. Go to the local rescue mission as a family to serve meals** or offer whatever help might be needed.
- 3. Watch holiday movie classics with popcorn, hot chocolate** or whatever the kids enjoy.

4. One dad with older kids used to just give his kids cash as a gift, but it seemed a bit empty. Then he came up with a better idea. Now he gives them the cash, but they do a father-child outing, using the money to shop for things they want. (He also adds a bonus challenge: extra cash to the child who comes closest to spending all of it without going over.) A variation of this would also work with younger kids.

5. Three words: board game night. One dad said there are games that are competitive and others that are cooperative. Find one the family enjoys—and remember that the biggest prize is quality time with your kids.

6. A non-custodial dad bought his kids a computer and iPhone so they can connect by FaceTime or Skype, text back and forth, read Christmas books at bedtime and so on.

7. Try a craft with your kids—even if that isn't your thing. Make Christmas tree ornaments, for example. One dad has many more ideas here.

8. Get your child out of school a little early one day and see a movie or do something else together that's fun. (A great idea, but make sure you check with the school and it doesn't interrupt plans in your child's classroom.)

9. Can't be with your kids for the holidays? One family I know makes new pajamas part of their Christmas Eve (as we do in our home). Since their young-adult daughter couldn't be home for the celebration, they sent her pajamas and some other gifts in the mail, so they'll all "be together" via Skype and still share the moments and memories. Non-custodial dads could surely come up with some great variations of this one.

10. Travel together—a great way to break everyone out of the normal holiday routine.

11. Brainstorm together and then play "secret Santa" by getting gifts or doing nice things for someone you know.

12. Be in a Christmas musical or pageant with your kids.

13. Go through the toys they already have and donate the ones in good condition.

14. Bundle up (if necessary) and get outside. Play in the snow, go for a walk, bike ride or participate in some other outdoor activity you enjoy.

15. Have each person share favorite memories or traditions related to Christmas or best memories from the past year.

I have to add a few more that are more general principles than specific tips. These are too good not to pass along:

- Just make the time to be there for and with them.
- Don't treat family traditions like "check the box" obligations. Sometimes less is more. Quality over quantity.
- If you're divorced or in a blended family, stay positive. When it's time for the kids to go to their mom's, encourage them to go and enjoy the time.

Dad—this list isn't done. Please add your own ideas or comments below. {eo}

Carey Casey *Championship Fathering Commitment I want tips on how to be a great dad who lives out loving, coaching and modeling for my children.*

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