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## **Ways to Keep Kids Busy over Winter Holidays**

By Judy Arnall

### **Schedule Downtime**

For people whose personality is one that craves structure, uncharted, relaxed empty space on the calendar can be very stressful whether they are kids or parents. They feel out of sorts without something they should do and may wander aimlessly, or become cranky (kids especially). It helps to have one activity scheduled on the calendar each day to satisfy the need for order for those people whether it is visiting friends, or bowling or cleaning out the basement.

Structured time is okay, as long as it is relaxed and not rushed! Time with family and new experiences are always fun.

What kids hate is anything that is hugely time-demanding or anything that resembles school type structure – something they need a well-deserved break from.

Playing video games is downtime to many teens and even adults. If parents want family time, they could join them in game playing. Get some games as presents that have 4 players and buy/borrow some extra controllers. (In my DVD, *Plugged-In Parenting*, available on Amazon, I've listed the academic and social benefits of computer and video games, so playing benefits the whole family.)

### **Connect with Each Other**

- Have one on one time with one child. Go to a movie, restaurant, or coffee date with one and just enjoy that time together.
- Get to a job that is on your to-do list and invite a child to help. Promise a goody after! Kids open up when doing activities with a parent.
- Volunteer for an organization. Grab a group and go caroling at a hospice, serve dinner at a drop-in centre, or make beds at a homeless shelter.

### **Create Traditions:**

- A weekly Board game night could be a Christmas holiday tradition that can include several board game nights over the holidays with

different family friends. Our "family" (I say family so that no one child gets ownership of the games and veto rights) gets two new board games for Christmas and invite another family over to play. (Preferably with same age kids). Everyone brings snacks to contribute. My five kids have loved this tradition.

- Skate, ski, snowboard or toboggan day where the whole family goes and participates.
- Watching the same family movie every Christmas holiday. Ours is "Sound of Music".
- Baking. Not during the frenzy before holidays but during or even after is better. Get some new cookbooks from the library and have a pie or cookie baking session with jobs doled out to the whole family. Wrap the presents up and deliver them to people over the holidays – the lady at the post office, the garbage collectors, the hairstylist, your favorite cashier at the grocery store. People, who don't expect a gift from you, but know you, and would be delighted. Kids can really feel the joy of the season when they do something that is fun, yummy, not rushed and done together with parents.
- Home movie, or photo night. Review the year on the big screen TV by hooking up videos and photos taken throughout the year for the whole family to enjoy.
- Give holiday movies as presents and watch them.
- Christmas craft kits and gingerbread house kits are on sale after the 25<sup>th</sup> and its a tradition to buy them then and make them when time is more relaxed. Not everything has to be done BEFORE Christmas. Save old Halloween candy to add to the houses.
- Learn a new card game. This Christmas, we are going to learn how to play poker as a family. Some of our favourite times were playing blackjack with wrapped caramels, chocolates, and candies as betting items!
- Go to second hand shops (which really not busy this time of year) and pick up new games and kits.

The most important point is that kids remember the "doing" part of Christmas the most rather than the "getting". They don't remember what they got for gifts the last year or previous years. But they do remember the family times spent doing activities that are fun, relaxed and stress-free.

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