



## Seasonal Activities

### **The giving season: activities with your children/family**

- Open a YouthGive Account for your child and invite them to decide where to give locally and /or globally.
- Use recycled materials to decorate for Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa at a preschool, senior home, church, synagogue, mosque.
- Think of someone in your neighborhood or your church / synagogue / mosque who might be in need and anonymously help them (a note of encouragement, funds, shoveling their snow, etc.)
- Book Basket: Fill a basket with favorite holiday books then read one (or a chapter of one) as a family each night.
- Make a "Wish List for the World" right alongside your personal wish lists. Ask each family member to contribute at least one idea that would make the world a better place. After you've made your list, choose one (or more) that you can actually help to implement. For example, if your kids want to save the rain forests, you might make a contribution to the Rainforest Action Network; to help end world hunger, you could volunteer at a soup kitchen.
- Interview an older family member and share/discuss the stories that emerge.

### **Winter season conversations**

- What would make this holiday most special if we did not get gifts? (Read The Hundred Dollar Holiday by Bill McKibbin for ideas).
- What is the most generous act you have done / seen / or heard about?

- What is the most generous thing someone has done for you?
- Where do the homeless go in the winter?
- Who in our neighborhood / community needs help? Have you ever needed help? Who helped you?
- What is your “light?” or special gift? How can you use this to help in your family, community or world?
- In honor of Human Rights Day on December 10th, visit [www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/declaration](http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/declaration) to view an “interactive” declaration of human rights and to find human rights stories of children around the globe. Ask what human rights your child / children most value and why.

## Grandparents & Grandchildren

- Children / teens record (written, audio, visual) grandparents’ stories of giving and receiving.
- Grandparents record your own stories for your grandchildren.
- Ask the grandparents what made their holidays special when they were young. What holiday traditions did they observe?
- Creatively pass along your values.  
*Example: Raymond is an Irishman with a lilting accent and a jolly spring in his step. On most days you’ll find Raymond sitting in the town square writing poetry in calligraphy in a beautiful bound book of fine paper. He has penned over 13,000 poems while sitting in the square – all for his little grandson, Liam. While Raymond knows he is not likely to live to see his grandson grow into an adult, he is recording his memories and his wisdom for the man Liam will become with the understanding that his volumes will be gifted to his grandson upon his twenty-first birthday.*

## Christmas

- Play “Civic Secret Santa.” Not everyone gets to take time off around the holidays. Firefighters, police officers and many other public servants give up their holidays to make sure that ours are safe and happy. Contact your local government (town hall) if you want help identifying places to go and to make sure a surprise visit would be okay. Then surprise the worker(s) with cards, treats and most of all your generosity. Story:

### Civic Santa Story

The Kelner family of Muskegon, Michigan, wanted to “give back” to the good-hearted folks who make their town run, so for the past several years they've gathered holiday cookies and other treats to bring to the local fire station on Christmas Eve. The first year, they were surprised to find only one firefighter on duty; he was thrilled to see them, and he invited them in to share the treats. For the Kelners, that one small act of generosity turned out to be the highlight of the Christmas season.

## Chanukah

- One tradition that children love is setting an extra place at the dinner table in case a hungry stranger wanders in. However, practically not wise. Capture the good-will of the idea by having your child prepare a bag lunch and giving it to a homeless person, working as a family in a shelter kitchen one evening, participating in a food drive, or contributing a portion of their allowance during the month of December to a local food bank.
- Give and Get: Rather than receiving presents for each night of Chanukah, alternate nights so that some are spent in service to another. Gather together blankets and coats, bake cookies then take the load to a senior center.

## Ramadan

- **Fast-A-Thons:** Muslim students at the University of Knoxville, TN decided to share Ramadan with their non-Muslim neighbors in a unique way by holding a "fast-a-thon" where local businesses pledged money to charity for each person who fasts for one day. Asking fellow students to "go hungry for a day so someone else won't have to," they raised \$500 for a local soup kitchen, educating the community about the meaning of Ramadan in the process. And so, a tradition was born. The following year the Muslim Student Association National got 30 other campuses to join in, and now there are too many campuses to count. At one campus alone (University of Maryland, College Park), 1,200 students fasted from sunrise to sunset, raising nearly \$10,000 and sharing a free communal dinner at the end of the day. Consider launching a fast-a-thon in your school, neighborhood or community and donating to a local or global effort to end hunger.

## New Years

- **Make a Giving Plan for the New Year.** What 3 activities might we undertake as a family to make our community or world better?
- The celebration of the New Year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. The early Babylonian's most popular resolution was to return borrowed farm equipment. Resurrect this ancient tradition by remembering what has been "given" to you over the past year and "returning" it by acknowledging others who have given to you (friends, relatives, neighbors, church / synagogue / mosque, teachers, coaches, etc.). You can make your own certificates of appreciation or simply thank them person to person.
- Begin a New Year tradition that marks the blessings of the year gone by and the hopes for the year ahead.

*Example: Write the year's blessings on strips of paper, stuff inside helium balloons and release at midnight.*

*Example: Order a Peppermint Pig from [www.saratogasweets.com](http://www.saratogasweets.com) then follow instructions for Victorian tradition of passing and hammering the pig as you declare your wishes for the New Year.*

## Chinese New Year

- As the date changes every year, please check [www.chinapage.com/newyear](http://www.chinapage.com/newyear)
- This holiday begins with cleaning out the house to rid it of bad luck. Take the opportunity to clean the house together, collecting unwanted items for a local shelter.

## Winter Activities

Activities with your child / family

- Gather blankets, hats, mittens, coats and socks and take them to a mission, shelter or other social service agency (older people who are ill are often cold even in mild weather). Come home and enjoy a cup of cocoa (with marshmallows) and dip into one of these conversation starters.
- Pair up with a lonely senior. Find out what they would most enjoy hearing and read to them, play their favorite music, write or video tape their stories. Visit [www.holiday-project.org](http://www.holiday-project.org) for tips on planning a successful visit.
- Mark the Winter Solstice (shortest day of the year, December 22) with a simple celebration of light for a calming break from the hectic holiday pace. Suggestions.  
*Ideas for a Celebration of Light (on the Winter Solstice)*  
*Keep your celebration down to earth--a candlelit dinner or trip into the backyard to stargaze is all it takes. Or shine a little brighter by making luminaries--decorative paper bags filled with sand and small candles. Decorate a brown paper lunch bag by tracing a simple pattern in pencil on one side, then punching out your design with a hole punch. Fill each luminary with about 2 inches of sand and sink a votive candle or tea light in the center. Place the luminaries along a walk, patio or deck and light them (a grown-up's job). Listen to the silence or sing / hum a favorite holiday tune.*
- Adopt-a-Grandparent! Visit [www.elderswithoutwalls.com](http://www.elderswithoutwalls.com)
- Celebrate international Human Rights Day on December 10th by organizing an SMS/text message campaign encouraging friends to read and know the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Visit the United Nations website for more ideas.