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'Screen-free' holiday presents: Our power as gift-givers

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ONE of the most common concerns in my interactions with parents is their fear of whether their child has ADHD. Based on the National Institute of Mental Health, “Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a developmental disorder marked by persistent symptoms of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity that interfere with functioning or development. Symptoms begin in childhood and can affect daily life, including social relationships and school or work performance.”



According to the National Library of Medicine’s article “Screen time and childhood attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: a meta-analysis” published on May 11, 2023, their study found a positive correlation between screen time and the risk of ADHD. “Excessive screen exposure may significantly contribute to the development of ADHD in children.” (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37163581/)

As the holiday season approaches, I thought it would be great to spotlight the powerful role of family and friends as gift-givers and as positive influences to our children. As tempting as it is to reach for the latest gadgets and tech toys to give as gifts, there’s a growing movement to promote screen-free holidays, encouraging families to reconnect, spark creativity and foster imagination. Here are some thoughtful gift ideas to inspire a tech-free, fun-filled holiday season:

■ CLASSIC TOYS AND GAMES FOR FAMILY BONDING:

Puzzles and pretend play toys are my top picks. I found The Learning Journey Glow-in-the-dark puzzles are specially interesting because of the “wow” effect after the forming of the puzzle. Puzzles have so many benefits especially in teaching a child patience but in my experience, children find more fun if done together first with the family. For pretend play, I like the Melissa and Doug Salad Set, Sandwich Counter and the La Patisserie Bake Shop. It has recipe instructions that can be done together with our children. It is interesting to discover brain builder toys that combine pretend play like the Topbright Ice Cream Colorful Number Cognitive Learning Box.

■ BUILDING AND SCIENCE TOYS: Lego sets and building blocks encourage creativity and problemsolving skills. Science kits help develop critical thinking. Consider sets themed around interests of both your child and yours, like space, dinosaurs, or flags of the world. I love this new PLUS PLUS building pieces and sets from Denmark. Imagine one type of

puzzle block can form both flat and 3D structures. National Geographic kits are my annual gifts since it has many varieties and are gender-neutral.

■ **ARTS AND CRAFTS TOYS:** Art supplies like paints, crayons, markers and sketchbooks can spark creativity and imagination. I prefer gifting durable Crayola on-the-go sets which I encourage my parentfriends to bring when eating out so children's default is writing, instead of asking for your phone or tablet. DIY art tools are also lots of fun. I particularly like the Crayola Mini Marker Sprayer because I like the fun in creating free art together as a family. We can even encourage children to make homemade gifts like cards, artwork, or baked goods. These personalized gifts show thoughtfulness and effort. I remember a time when my daughter did a coupon book, where there were redeemable offers like "Special Smoothies".

■ **OUTDOOR ADVENTURES:** Encourage outdoor activity with sports equipment like pools, balls or bikes. Camping gears are great for families who love the outdoors, like tents, sleeping bags and backpacks that can inspire family adventures. Tents with airbeds are fun to set up even in our own backyard or even indoors for pretend play and a nice space to chat with our kids. I saw Bestway tents and airbeds at Ace Hardware.

■ **EXPERIENCES OVER THINGS:** Tickets to shows, museums, classes, workshops or events are great gifts to encourage learning new information and adventure. Consider tickets to a theater performance, concert, or sporting event. Local museums, zoos and aquariums often offer family-friendly exhibits and activities. Sign up children for classes in cooking, art, music, or sports. Plan family outings like picnics, hikes, or visits to historical sites. It is also good to remind our family about the value of trying to "un-plug" a little this holiday.

Here are some tips for screen-free moments this holiday:

■ **Set limits:** Establish clear guidelines for screen time during the holiday season. Consider a "screenfree zone" during mealtimes and family gatherings.

■ **Plan activities:** Create a schedule of activities to keep everyone engaged and entertained. Incorporate a mix of indoor and outdoor activities to cater to different interests.

■ **Lead by example:** As parents and caregivers, model screen-free behavior. Put away your own devices and participate in family activities.

By choosing thoughtful, screen-free gifts and planning engaging activities, you can contribute to a holiday season filled with play, connection, and happy family learning memories. ■