

The day after Halloween, I dropped my boys off at their dayhome with a goody each. Walking in the door, I found one of the other little attendees engrossed in a conversation with the dayhome patron. She was saying that today, November 1, was Christmas because her parents told her that Christmas came after Halloween.

“It’s Christmas!” she sang in her high pitched voice, practically vibrating with happiness. Our dayhome lady laughed gently and told her Christmas doesn’t come right after Halloween, that there’s time in between.

Now, nearing the end of November, with shopping and planning to do, it certainly feels like that little girl was right; there is no time in between.

Therefore, I decided to compile a lists of Christmas ideas for kids. The lists include places to get toys, stocking stuffer ideas, presents I’ve purchased in previous that my children still play (good bang for your buck), and gifts that were a big old flop (not worth your money). It is my hope that these ideas will be useful to you during your holiday. ☺

Locations to Get Toys and More

Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch

This fabulous charity provides a Christmas party every year which usually includes fun activities, a hot lunch, a free winter coat, one special present for each child (uniquely ordered beforehand) and a tour of their donation cabin (free clothes). Partnered with in the past, KARA staff know just how to get in touch with this lovely organization should you wish to attend.

Once Upon a Child

This really is too good to be true – a consignment store that sells gently used toys, books, and clothes, and also buys them back from you! I shop here almost exclusively for my children’s clothing – they just grow too fast to justify new wardrobes. The staff is pleasant and helpful and you never know what you are going to find because inventory changes daily! They also provide a coupon card for 20% off when you’ve purchased/sold enough to fill the stamp card. A nifty chain of stores with clothes that were just once upon a child.

Kijiji

Not enough can be said for shopping online when you have little ones at home. An alternative to Amazon is Kijiji! This is the place to get quality items that are hard to come by and also fit your budget. Most of my Christmas list is checked off by my Kijiji purchases – an historical WW2 newspaper clipping for my Dad, a large rocking horse for my sons, an antique hand tool for my

husband – it all comes together with Kijiji. My only warnings of caution is to take someone with you or meet your seller in a very public place and don't accept payments/purchases online.

Ready to dress up in a big red suit and beard? I hope you're ready to stuff those stockings because these ideas will knock your socks off!

Stocking Stuffers

Food and Treats

I always pack my kids' stockings with their favourite foods. It shows your child that Santa knows them well enough to tickle their taste buds, plus it's a money saver. Food favourites in this house include pistachios (healthy and available this time of year), Love Child's duck shaped corn puffs (a healthy alternative to chips and perfect for young eaters), Baby Gourmet Mushies (another healthy snack that packs a punch for taste), individual chocolate flavoured almond milk "juice" boxes (my kids love having their own straws to sip on chocolate milk), and raisins (because who doesn't enjoy raisins). All of these favourites can be found at most local grocery or department stores.

Random Goodies

I also like to pack in a few other items like Band-Aids (my kids love them and I can get the ones with their favourite TV characters), hockey cards (inexpensive and fun to play with), toothbrushes (it's a tradition in this house), board books related to Christmas and big fluffy socks.

I have always found that stockings are a great way to double your efforts by getting necessities but personalizing them to match your family's interests.

Now for the presents from Mom and Dad. Toys that engaged my children and lasted one or more years include:

Gift Idea Reviews for the Kiddies

Activity cube

The one I purchased off of Kijiji, the Zany Zoo activity cube, has kept my children entertained for years. Originally purchased for my first born son when he was less than one year old, it has now lasted through three years of rough play. It still looks fantastic, not a noticeable scratch on it, and knowing it previously belonged to another family just adds to the impressiveness. This one is a keeper.

Play Kitchen

Another Kijiji find, our play kitchen has always been a hit. By buying used, I was able to get it for a fair price and purchase some utensils and grocery item toys with it. This big ticket item is well worth the cost because my children get a lot of use out of it. It fosters role playing, sharing, imagination, and social interaction, not to mention inspiring some lovely tea parties. I've even asked two of my friends who regularly look after my children which toy my kids play with most at their house and the answer was the play kitchen both times. A good find.

Beach Balls

This inexpensive gift has made our home into a regular party house. Hours of enjoyment have been had by passing these balls around. It's not your typical go-to for Christmas shopping because they are more available in stores during the summer months but these balls are fairly sturdy, brightly coloured, and lightweight. They have yet to cause injury or break anything in my house so I give them a thumbs-up.

Dress-up Costumes

The best costume I ever purchased for my children was a simple, child-sized cape. They loved it so much, I bought a second one. It takes seconds to put on (Velcro) and makes for hours of enjoyment. Purchased for five dollars each, I got them just after Halloween. My eldest son loves dress-up and has a number of lavishly expensive costumes but his cape is his favourite. Go figure.

Ride-on Toy

Both of my kids love ride-on toys, especially ones that have a secret compartment like the Moover truck or the B. Buggly Wuggly. We currently have four ride on toys and they've all passed the tests for being indestructible and engaging. I rotate toys in my home to keep areas clean and not overwhelming but the ride-on toys never seem to make it into the storage room because my children never get off them. A great choice if you haven't already got one and very easy to find at a consignment store or on Kijiji because they last for years of play.

With these toys reviewed, I thought it was also a good idea to mention that some toys just don't last or don't keep the little minds engaged. A few flops that I fell for included these well-known ideas:

Musical Toys

Perhaps my children just aren't interested in being the next Mozart – I'm not sure – but I do know that I have owned a children's piano, drum set, and banjo and all of them captured only fleeting engagement. Both of my boys would pick these instruments up for seconds at a time and then

put them down in a hurry, never eager to play me a tune. Sadly, I have packed these toys up and stored them away in the hopes that they will enjoy them at an older age.

Stuffed Animals

I'm sure some parents out there will contest with this categorization but from my experience, children only like one or two stuffed animals and discard the rest. My boys both chose their favourite stuffed animals in the store and have never engaged with stuffed animals brought home by me. Perhaps there's a personal bond they build during this consumer type "adoption" that I'm unaware of. Perhaps their interpretation of cute is different than mine. Either way, I've come to respect that each child finds one or two stuffed animal friends and has little love for the rest so I don't bother with this gift idea anymore.

Small Plastic Toy Sets

In my experience, plastic food for the play kitchen or plastic menagerie sets only last so long. Small inexpensive plastic toys like these break very easily or their paint rubs off, which is very concerning to me from a safety perspective. I try to stay away from aisles that contain these types of toys as much as possible. There's no bang for your buck here if they don't last more than a couple weeks.

So there you have it, a short comprehensive list of a few Christmas ideas to get you started this holiday. Hopefully you find it useful or can relate! Preparing for Christmas can be fun and a little stressful but I hope I've given you and your family a few ideas to make the season jolly!