

Child development expert says parents must set the tone when it comes to children's Christmas lists

December 17 2014, by Alexandria Moran

The best gift parents can give their children for Christmas may be helping them understand less can be more, according to a Kansas State University child development expert who has advice on what gifts are best to give young children for Christmas.

Bronwyn Fees, an associate professor of family studies and human services who specializes in [child development](#) and early education, said what a young child will and can expect for Christmas reflects directly upon the parent.

"Be careful not to confuse more things with more love," Fees said. "Often, the best gifts are not purchased, but are the time spent and memories made with the ones they love and who care for them. Spend time reading together, taking a walk or cooking simple treats together."

From birth through kindergarten, [children](#)'s expectations are based on what they see and hear from their parents, but Fees said that the older the child gets, the more their peers have an influence on what they want for gifts.

Parents have the responsibility to create a Christmas holiday for their children that is consistent with the beliefs of the family, Fees said. So when thinking about gifts for a child, she recommends that they meet some specific criteria.

The gift should be age appropriate, she said. If the child is 3 and the toy is for ages 5 and up, it wouldn't be the best idea to purchase that particular toy. It may not be safe for the child and require skills the child has not yet developed.

"The more open-ended the gift the better," Fees said. These gifts can include, but are not limited to, picture books, building blocks, paint, puzzles and big sheets of paper, markers and crayons. Games and toys that inspire imagination and creativity may last much longer than a repetitive video game or electronic device, she said.

It should also be individually appropriate—something that fits the unique interests of the child.

Another criteria that a good gift should have is that it encourage socialization.

"Researchers have argued that [young children](#) learn best when engaged with someone more mature, such as an older peer, sibling or adult. Children want and need your time," Fees said.

An example of this type of gift would be board games for multiple players, which offer opportunities to help children learn how to socialize with others, a skill they need in elementary school.

Fees said it's also important for parents not to promise more than they can give. When children ask for a specific toy for Christmas and parents accept or promise to get it for them, it is important that the parent realizes an expectation has been set, Fees said. If the [child](#) does not receive the promised [gift](#), it will lead to disappointment and possibly a loss of trust, she said.

More information: For more ideas on appropriate gifts for young gifts

for young children, see www.naeyc.org/ecp/resources/goodtoys.

Provided by Kansas State University

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