

25 Ways to Make Your Holidays More Fun & Meaningful

A collection of ideas offered by friends, family, and workshop attendees - Happy holidays!

1. All of my cousins get together the week before Christmas and practice singing Christmas carols. We're adults now, but we started doing this when we were in elementary school. We perform them for the family on Christmas Eve after dinner.
2. My family visits a homeless shelter and we help prepare Thanksgiving dinner.
3. Instead of getting into a gift unwrapping frenzy, each family member opens one gift while others wait. We want to encourage our children to slow down and appreciate each gift.
4. My friends and I draw names in advance. Then give the person a toy (you think) he/she would have wanted as a child. We take a picture of each person with his/her toy. They get to keep the picture, but the toys are collected and donated to "Toys for Tots."
5. Our family always buys gifts for foster children.
6. We visit assisted living facilities and nursing homes and sing Christmas carols.
7. Each year, for 24 years, we have taken videos of our children (and now grandchildren) at Christmas. On Christmas night, when everyone's tired out, we show videos and DVDs from years before, and laugh that some could now be used for blackmail.
8. My husband and I both come from large families and try to see as many family members as we can. But no matter what, we always reserve Christmas Eve for just the two of us. We have a quiet, relaxing candlelight dinner.
9. A family tradition for us is to sing the "12 Days of Christmas" at midnight on Christmas Eve.
10. We take donuts to the police and fire stations.
11. My family and I always drive to the mountains to a Christmas tree farm where they let you pick out and cut down your own tree. We spend the next day doing our holiday shopping.
12. Our family is so big now and we decided as a group that no one really "needs" anything. But we still like the fun of giving and opening gifts. About 8 years ago, we made the decision to draw names and made the rule that the gift exchanged cannot cost more than \$5.00 and has to be funny. In addition, each of us contributes \$25.00 (or more) to a charity or organization and we announce which one we have selected when we're all together on Christmas Eve.
13. Everyone in my family is encouraged to invite someone who doesn't have family in the area or doesn't have a place to go for the holidays. We never know who will be there but it's always great!
14. At our Christmas dinner, we collect money for Samaritan's Purse, an organization dedicated to providing aid for the world's poor and sick.
15. My sister and I rewrap the "least favorite" gift that each of us received for Christmas and we exchange them on New Year's Day.
16. In early December, my children clean out their closets and we donate clothes to the homeless.
17. We have huge family! At Christmas we all get together and have an "American Idol" contest. We even have a "Simon" and a "Paula."
18. On the first night of Hanukkah, all my cousins and their children get together for dinner and cookie making. All ages decorate sugar cookies with all kinds of candy and sprinkles.
19. In my family it's a tradition to ride around and look at all the holiday decorations. We take pictures, print them out and vote for the best ones on Christmas Eve. Some of the categories are "Best in Show," "Most Like Las Vegas," etc.
20. My grandmother always made a birthday cake for Jesus and we have continued that tradition.
21. My mom fixes stockings for all of us. But she always takes one small item from the stocking, wraps it up and hides it in the tree for us to find.
22. At my friend's house after dinner, her dad gave everyone 3 pipe cleaners and each person to make a Christmas ornament. Then we wrote a message on a note card to go with it. The message could be funny or encouraging. We drew names and exchanged the ornaments and notes. It was 5 years ago and I still have mine.
23. On Thanksgiving afternoon, we go on a nature walk with the young children and collect different colored leaves. We staple them to paper plates, make hats and have a parade.
24. One year everyone brought their favorite holiday recipes. We copied them and made a holiday cookbook.
25. On Thanksgiving afternoon, everyone in my family goes on a group walk - sometimes 30 of us. And our favorite topic of conversation? Food, of course!

