

No Toys for Christmas?

A recent parenting trend has called for a ban on toys for gifts, much to the horror of manufacturers and retailers everywhere! Is it a reasonable request?

I have been reading articles, spotting memes and hearing comments on this topic for a while now.

Here are a few thoughts that hopefully makes sense of the request to ban toys as gifts, but also offer a balanced solution to help prevent *Christmas Morning Meltdown* from disappointed kids, and also to create meaningful and fun ways to develop connection!



What happens to toys

Many's the year when my toddler would have been happy and occupied if I just wrapped an empty box and gave it to him.

Parents (not to mention grandparents and other relatives) spend a lot of time, effort and, of course, money to purchase gifts for the kids in their lives. For many adults, the gift expresses the degree of importance the child has for them. For some, the gift is simply an expectation set by the child or perceived by the family. For other adults, the gift can be a vicarious experience, where they buy something for their nephew that they really would have liked themselves as child.

Another big motivation for buying a child a particular gift is that he has seen it on TV/online, his friends have all got one, it's absolutely the best thing ever and he follows up by developing begging skills that would rival a hound dog. Regardless of intent, it is an unfortunate but common fact that within a few days, weeks or (if you're lucky) months, the gift is often discarded for the next big thing.

This may not always be your experience, but I do believe it occurs frequently enough for us to question our gift buying strategies.

Personally, I remember many a Christmas with my toddler rolling about in the wrapping paper, rather than playing with the toy it was wrapping. One year he played for weeks in the box which had held his brand new tricycle. He never really gelled with the trike, although he did use it to drag his ancient teddy around.

Is there a way we can do this better? I think there is, and it starts with being a detective of our own children.



Speaking your child's language

It may surprise you to know that human beings express love and connectedness differently and children are no different.

Psychologists over the last few decades have suggested that human beings communicate love in roughly five ways. I'd like to look at two of them in relation to Christmas and birthdays. As you read, be a detective and look for evidence of whether your child communicates in one or the other love language. (Or perhaps neither, in which case you can investigate other love languages further - visit our website for more details.)

Some children communicate and understand love through '**Receiving Gifts**'. This doesn't mean that they are greedy or consumeristic. It actually goes deeper than that. Children whose love language is *Receiving Gifts* strongly **associate the quality of the relationship with the gift**. This means that if it is a warm, stable, safe relationship, then even a little Kinder Surprise toy will sit on their windowsill for ages, because they associate it with feeling loved by you.

Of course, on the other hand, if your relationship is rocky, distant, or volatile, the expensive toy, 'Ricky the Trick-Lovin' Pet', will come to represent how the child feels about the relationship. In this case, perfectly good toys can get rejected and the child himself will not know consciously why.

Needless to say, improving the quality of your relationship with the child is a priority and is NEVER successfully replaced by giving 'stuff'.

The gift of experience

A new approach to gift giving which is altering the shopping trends of many adults, is giving experiences instead of tangible gifts.



I love the concept of broadening a child's learning and experiential opportunities, especially if it involves quality family time. Instead of a gift, a specially planned trip with the child can have a huge impact on him or her, and create lasting memories.

It could be sharing a cooking class, or a high tea in the backyard, or a visit to a favourite friend from their old school three hours drive away.



This concept of giving experiences instead of gifts aligns perfectly with another love language, which is '**Quality Time**'. For many children, they simply just want to do something **with** you, and unfortunately, busy parents are frequently time poor.



If you feel that you don't have time to plan and execute something of your own, tap into the many organisations that offer an afternoon or evening's activities where you and your child just turn up! Let your hair down a little, wear old clothes, get messy and let her see you having fun and simply enjoying **her!**



There are an unlimited number of 'experience' gifts that you can fine tune to suit your child's interests. (More ideas below.) While there are many that cost a small fortune (similar to the above mentioned Ricky!), there are loads that you can arrange on a small budget with a little bit of effort.

Experience ideas!

Use your detective skills to know what they like and your imagination to stretch yourself!!

The list below and in the following pages is my pick of ideas that are reasonably priced and a little unusual (and available in a variety of countries). I didn't include the local theme or water parks, zoos and athletic parks because I figure you already know those. This list is a little outside the box.

Pass these suggestions along to Aunty Kate, as well as the godparents, grandparents and anyone else. If Uncle Rob lives far away, many of these gift experiences can be bought online or as vouchers. (By the way ... how much fun is it for a child to get anything in the post!?) Encourage your child to take pics and email them to Uncle Rob so he can share the fun! Please feel free to email me with your creative ideas on giving an 'experience gift.'

And if anyone's looking for an idea for my birthday ... look no further! I'm definitely a Quality Time kind of girl! :)

IF MONEY IS TIGHT ...

- A home made high tea in your backyard (fancy china, tablecloths, etc)
- Movie night at a your place with pillow forts under the dining table
- Pamper day with all your old make up, nail polish and lotions
- Go fishing and bring a tasty picnic lunch.



IF YOU LIVE FAR AWAY ...

- A voucher for lessons in ... painting, horseback riding, pottery, cooking ... many more available
- A favourite book of yours with a personalized note of why you love it!
- Subscription to science or tech clubs (like www.kiwico.com)
- Some companies send free samples of products, depending on where you live (Including Lego!)
- Post a 'movie pack' with treats, a onesie and a DVD, then Skype and watch it together.

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IDEAS IN IRELAND



Garda Museum

Cost: Free :)

Location: Dublin Castle, Records Tower, Dublin, Ireland

A great, compact site with free tours (donations welcome), this museum is super interesting and well set out - great size for kids to get around without getting bored.



The Science Gallery

Website: dublin.sciencegallery.com

Cost: Free :)

Location: The Naughton Institute, Dublin 2

It may seem merely educational, but in fact the innovative and artistic exhibitions tackle different thought processes and never fail to impress and creatively inspire those who enter.



Imaginosity

Website: www.imaginosity.ie

Cost: Adults & Kids over 3 yrs, €8 (Under 3's, €6, Babies, €2)

This a child-centred space where kids and parents can engage in creative play. The exhibits are educationally designed to inspire learning through play, and it's a massive hit with kids.



Airfield Estate

Cost: Adults €10, Kids €5 (Family tickets available)

Website: www.airfield.ie

Location: Overend Way, Dundrum

This working farm teaches kids about food, farming and nature in an urban setting. It includes a zip wire, willow tunnel, and an imaginative play area for little ones.

IDEAS IN IRELAND (cont'd)



Malahide Castle

Web: www.malahidecastleandgardens.ie

Cost: Adults €12.50, Kids €6.50 (Family tickets available)

Location: Malahide Demesne, Malahide, *Not only do they have a seriously cool playground complete with zipline and diggers, there are butterfly gardens, tonnes of open space and a cafe for tired adults!*



Under 17's First Drive

Website: www.leinsterdrivingcampus.ie

Cost: €50

Location: Taghadoo, Maynooth
The perfect gift for your teens aged 14 - 17 years. Kids drive on a complex driving track, but with no traffic and no pressure. Each student learns at their own pace and receives a detailed record of the lesson.



Castlecomer Discovery Park

Website: ww.discoverypark.ie

Cost: varying costs, but the Timber Tumblers Playground and the Elf & Fairy Village are free :)

A non-profit social enterprise on an expansive well kept property, run by volunteers which provides an excellent day outdoors for kids of all ages.



Big Chef/Little Chef

Website: www.justcooking.ie

Cost: €60

Location: Killahane, Bohereens, Kerry
While there are many cooking courses for kids in Ireland, this one is where they can bring an adult! Professional chefs teach the 3 hour course with everything provided and tasty treats to take home.

IDEAS IN AUSTRALIA



Towri Bush Tucker Garden

Web: www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/botanicgarden

Cost: free :)

Location: Murphys Avenue, Keiraville NSW
The garden, in the grounds of the beautiful Botanic Gardens, is a dedicated space for finding medical and food uses for native plants - and maybe even tasting them too!



Bulli Foragers Market

Web: www.facebook.com/foragersmarket

Cost: free :)

Location: Grevillea Park Road, Bulli, NSW
Running most Sundays, this market seems to be evolving all the time. It has loads of organic and ethically produced food, often with toys, kids activities and live music thrown in. Great community vibe!



Kareelah Berry Farm

Web: www.facebook.com/kareelah-berry-farm

Cost: free :) Berries: \$1.60 to \$4.50 100g

Location: 522 Marshall Mnt Rd, Dapto, NSW
What is better than picking and eating your own berries! Keep an eye on the FB page to see when the crops are ready. Truly a fun, educational and delicious day out for the whole family!



E. G. Waterhouse Camellia Gardens

Web: internationalcamellia.org/egwaterhousegarden

Cost: free :)

Location: President Ave, Caringbah, NSW.
On the edge of Yowie Bay, over 2 hectares the lush garden is a haven for many native birds and wildlife. A beautiful picnic spot or enjoy arvo tea at The Teahouse.

IDEAS IN AUSTRALIA (cont'd)



Bondi Sculpture by the Sea

Web: sculpturebythesea.com/bondi

Cost: free :) (mid Oct - mid Nov)

Location: Bondi Beach, Sydney, Australia

This annual event never fails to entertain kids and adults. The easy 2km coastal walk is magnificent and there are 100 sculptures to see and interact with along the way. Wear your hat and sunscreen.



Cockatoo Island

Web: www.cockatooisland.gov.au

Cost: :) free (Ferry cost: adults \$6, kids \$3)

Location: Sydney Harbour (ferry from Circular Quay)

Historical, beautiful and right in the centre of Sydney Harbour, this island has loads to offer kids for a family day out. Bring a picnic or you can camp overnight as well.



Melbourne by Foot

Web: www.melbournebyfoot.com

Cost: \$50 for 3 hours (ask for family discounts)

Location: meet at Federation Square.

Best ever city experience! Ask for Dave - he's hip, knowledgeable and takes you from historical spots, to graffiti lanes to great coffee! Especially great for teens, but they offer a young kids' walk too.



Rooftop Cinema, Melbourne

Web: 2018.rooftopcinema.com.au

Cost: \$18 (concession)

Location: Curtin House, 252 Swanston St

This little known urban gem is a fantastic experience, especially for older kids. Watch the latest movie in comfy banana chairs, overlooking the city skyline. Drinks & snacks available. BYO blanket if it's winter.