

It's *Can Be* the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

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Sarah here. With only 1 month left in 2020, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve are right around the corner. Winter break is fast approaching for school-agers. Some college students are already home for the holidays, as some universities opted to have students complete the semester remotely after Thanksgiving break. No matter how your family usually celebrates the holidays, how you all typically ring in the New Year, or what you do over winter break, chances are that things will be different this year. In thinking about how 2020 has been different and what that means for the holidays, I came across a few amusing gift ideas:



Has 2020 been a challenging year? Absolutely. Have families experienced a tremendous amount of stress this year? You bet. Will winter break be more stressful than usual this year? In some ways yes, in some ways no. I mean, there's the potential stress that always comes with families having a lot of unstructured time. There's the stress of having a long list of things to get done. And there's the stress of deciding how you and your family are going to spend the holidays. Trying to figure out the "right thing" to do in a global pandemic is pretty exhausting. Between late October and the end of the year, there are multiple holidays and occasions that usually involve larger gatherings with family and/or friends. This means that there are multiple times in close succession that parents have to figure out what's best for their family, then make and execute plans. So, at this point in the year, you and many other parents may be feeling more stressed and burned out than usual.

But, don't despair. Because this year, there's also some stress that you may be opting out of for one reason or another. This year, a lot of families are sidestepping travel and back-to-back social engagements in favor of something smaller and lower key. Families are also less likely to be hosting huge gatherings. This means that they will have a slower, less hectic pace and fewer responsibilities during the holidays.

A lot of families are also scaling back on massive purchases and are instead making presents (using the many talents and hobbies that they uncovered during quarantine) or opting for modest gift budgets. And, when it comes to shopping, going to smaller, local stores, utilizing in-store pickup at larger stores or shopping online can take a lot of the stress out of gift buying.



When it comes to the holidays, people always talk about spending time together. We often hear parents stressing about "quality time" or worrying about not appreciating those moments that they're "supposed to" treasure because their kids "will only be this age once." This year has involved a LOT of together time for most families. Like, *way* more than usual. Do you love your family? Of course. Are you tired of spending so much time with your immediate family? Quite possibly. Do you long for the days when your teens or college-aged kids were rarely home? Definitely, maybe. Does that make you a terrible parent? Not even a little.

I am someone who really, really enjoys spending time by myself. Actually, it's more than that. As an introvert, I *need* time by myself to recharge and to feel content. That doesn't mean anything bad about me, about how I feel about my family or about how much I love and care about them. That's just part of who I am- I am someone who genuinely enjoys being alone. So,

while the holidays typically do involve spending more time than usual together, this year, I am hopeful that I'll actually have a little down time by myself.

You may also be in this boat. A lot of family members love each other, enjoy spending time together, are thankful that everyone is safe and healthy...*and* they may feel less than enthused about spending a ton of "quality time" together this holiday season. That's okay! This winter be sure to approach yourself and your family with an attitude of compassion. It's been a tough year, even for people who have made it through 2020 relatively unscathed. Instead of feeling sad, frustrated, angry or resentful about things being different this December, remember that it's okay for things to be different. Sometimes change can be good, even when we don't like it. If we accept that things are just different this year and that they won't be "perfect," then it frees us up to enjoy how things are right now. That means we don't have to compare this holiday season to what it usually is or what it "should be" like.

To help you get through this December, Lisa created a *Holiday Survival Guide* just for you. Check it out and jot down your thoughts about how you'd *like* for things to go this holiday season as well as what you absolutely *need* for things to be enjoyable this holiday season. It's sort of like coming up with your holiday wish list and then deciding which people, things, activities and/or traditions are critical to your enjoyment of the holidays. My guess is that you can still keep a lot of those essential ingredients in the mix, even if the recipe is a bit different this year.

If baking and decorating cookies with your family is what you look forward to every December, but this year you're just too tired to make cookies from scratch, that's okay. Why not buy premade cookie dough? Heck- you could even buy premade cookies and decorate them with icing and sprinkles. Does being surrounded by decorations make it "feel like" the holidays but you are just too burned out to decorate this year? Why not do *some* of your own decorating at home? Inside and/or outside- just keep it simple. Then you and your family can drive around in your neighborhood or even farther away to check out holiday hotspots. You still get to enjoy decorations- in this case, it'll just be other families' holiday decorations. The bonus here is that

you won't have to do all of the cleanup come January. 😊 It won't be the same as usual, but if you keep to the spirit of the activity, then different is okay.

And who knows? Maybe 2020 has helped you and your family discover new activities and interests that you will want to incorporate into future holiday traditions. Whether you're modifying traditions, streamlining holiday plans or devising some new ideas, let yourself off the hook for having the "perfect" holiday. While winter break *can be* one of the most wonderful times of the year, it often isn't...because having lots of expectations and competing demands creates a lot of stress. Do yourself a favor and use our *Holiday Survival Guide* to develop your own unique recipe for holiday success!

