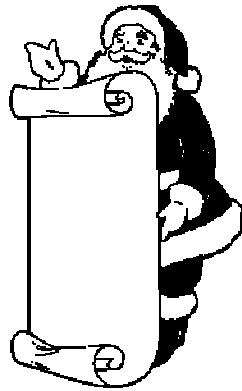


Today is Day One and already you are counting the days until the end of holidays. I have days like that at school, too, except then it's only 9:20 and I'm wondering how the kids have tornadoed through all the activities I'd planned for the day and whatever can we do next. Here's some kid-tested suggestions:

The key strategy is to have a routine. While that seems contrary to the idea of holidays, a routine actually gives more freedom. Each day does not require the reinvention of the wheel. Instead, each day flows along and can be adapted as needed. Children function better with boundaries and limits and once they learn the routine, they can be more independent and responsible. Even little kids. A routine gives a sense of security and knowing to both younger and older children. Holidays do require considerable juggling of routines, but a basic plan can create order out of chaos and make it easier once holidays are over.



Here's a sample routine to show how it works:

8:00 – 9:00 (more or less): getting up, having breakfast, getting dressed, making the bed

9:00 – 10:00 (approximately): necessary chores. Kitchen tidied after breakfast (prep a bit for lunch here to save having to clean up the kitchen twice) and make a special snack for later, or wash some fruit, mix up some Reindeer Munch which is some dry cereal, nuts, seeds, raisins, etc. Wash some veggies to have on hand for the arsenic hour just before supper. There's the bigger housework, too. One day could be for vacuuming, one day for laundry, one for groceries, one day for the running around and one to pack for going away, (not *running* away, visiting). You can be Mrs.—or Mr.—Claus and need 'elves' to help.

Mid-morning break: Ahh, time to enjoy that snack and some sit down time. This is an ideal part of the day to do some reading. No matter the age of your kids, spend a few minutes with books to keep the parts of the brain that are involved in reading well exercised and lubricated. Discuss some options for the rest of the

day and make a plan. Does the schedule for another day need to be adjusted for a special event?

It's now about 10:30 or 11:00, but the chores are done, part of lunch is ready and busy kids have less time to argue with their brothers and sisters. The kids may be able to play with their toys for awhile before lunch while you have a cup of coffee or tea and check your email and facebook.

11:30 to 12:30: time for lunch. Kids can help with this, too, setting the table, getting out the bread, helping to clear the table, etc.

12:30: For some lucky parents and caregivers, the kids may nap about this time. Mine never did although my mother said she could always get the kids to nap at her house. At her house, they remembered please and thank you without reminders, too. I think there's a gene that's activated only when in the presence of certain adults. It has something to do there being wonderful advantages to impressing them. Have you noticed this phenomenon?

Afternoon: The rest of the afternoon is now available for projects, events, play-dates, visits, going outs, adventures, excursions, all the things that we wished we had time for but usually don't. This is treasure time. (Check the next section has for some ideas and suggestions.)

Just before the end of the day: this seems to be the peak for kids' energy and the valley for adults'. There's some veggies waiting in the fridge to keep them occupied for a few minutes so you have some time for supper/dinner prep. The day has been filled with lots of other activities so the kids could probably be allowed some TV time without creating guilt on our part. Cranky kids can often be comforted with some water play. Some warm water in the sink, a few plastic cups, small bowls and spoons, straws for blowing bubbles and a little one will play for quite a length of time. Water cleans up fairly easily, most of the time.

Supper, bath, a story or two, some cuddles and snuggles—calm ones so the kids don't get wound up before sleep time—and then off to bed. They may not be as ready as we are so let them enjoy listening to some songs or allow them to take a few books into bed with them. A rule that the kids can stay up for awhile in their rooms as long as they are quiet may be workable. A bedtime routine makes it easier for kids *and adults* to maintain a sleep pattern. Ah, peace and quiet.

Now, to the holiday days. Find a calendar with big squares. Check out how many days there are before school starts again. Mark off the days for any family visits planned and big events. Wow, bet there's lots of days left for fun! Are there any community events, festivals, fairs, markets, etc.? Color these in on the spaces. Let the fun begin.

Playgrounds: This is an obvious choice for kids but it endures as a favorite, even in winter. Take along a blanket and maybe some hot chocolate in a thermos to break up the playtime. After a little rest, kids are ready to play some more.

Libraries: Story time may be offered at your local library. If it's not available when you are, a visit to the library for some new books and movies can use up a whole afternoon and add some choices for the whole family or troupe.

Used bookstores sometimes have a section for children's books and this is an alternative to the library, especially if you need to stock up for a car trip.

Galleries and Museums: Little kids can enjoy galleries and museums in kid-sized doses. Children may enjoy looking at all the colors and shapes in paintings. Take along a little sketchpad and draw some interesting lines. Sculptures have lines and shapes and may capture kids' attention, especially if you have made some playdough and are checking out ways that grown-ups use it, too, when it's called clay or bronze or marble.

Your own block: I Spy can be an outside as well as an inside game. Make up a page with some shapes, numbers and colors and walk around the block to see how many you can find. May need an inside treasure hunt first to round up hats and mitts and other warm clothes.

Imaginative Play: The obvious choice at this time of year is to have a Santa's workshop. Put some left-over wrapping paper on the outside of a couple of boxes and let kids pretend they are elves getting ready. Can toys be used in some imaginative play? Maybe they can be props in a store. Santa's kitchen changes washing dishes into playtime but you may have to sing to maintain the illusion.

Children may enjoy recreating a library. Boxes on their sides can hold books for browsing. A little table can be the checkout desk. Make up a library card and find a pillow to sit on. No worries about fines.

Cereal boxes make great picture frames. Drawing or painting a few masterpieces and framing them can be a very involved project. If you are concerned about not taping them to the wall, tie a string between the backs of two chairs and hang the pictures up with clothespins.

To make a playground in an available space, round up some basic materials, such a fairly big box or two, a couple kitchen chairs, and an old blanket. The kitchen chairs covered with the old blanket can make a great tunnel for crawling through. It can also double as a fort. The box is for climbing into. Planning where things go, how to set them up and then playing in the 'playground' will keep them busy and out of trouble, maybe?

GORFs, good old reliable forts, are fairly easy to recreate with blankets on the back of the sofa or over the table. The advantage with draping one over the

kitchen table is that you can sometimes work in the kitchen and hear the kids easily but they are not underfoot. A large cardboard appliance box can be a house, a bus, a fort, a store, or a boat. It will need coloring, decorating, equipping and cooperating, and that can use up days. At this time of year, turn it on its side to be Santa's sleigh. Picking up all the toys on the floor is now fun!

Have an at-home afternoon at the movies. Color a few tickets, make up some popcorn, and decide on the choices. Line up the chairs, collect the tickets, and enjoy an afternoon with your feet up. As another alternative, have a puppet show. For live performances, kids like to act out favorite stories. Stuffed toys love to be the audience.

Restaurants and tea parties can be more fun at home than going out.

Just in case ideas: Playdough and puzzles are useful supplies to have on hand. Food coloring mixed with water can be used instead of paints. It may stain so cover any exposed surfaces. Wooden blocks are amazingly versatile.

See how much fun holidays can be? Not only are all these activities enjoyable, they provide rich learning opportunities for kids. They cover physical, social, emotional, intellectual and creative development. There are choices for visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. The multiple intelligences of word smart, shape and space smart, math and reasoning smart, people smart, self smart, nature smart, body smart and picture smart are all included. Like school there's language, math, science, art, music, socials and crafts. These can all be done on a budget and imagination is affordable for everyone.

Holidays can be crazy days but they are treasures. All too soon, your children will be older and will scorn having to do anything with parents or other adults. (That's easy for those of us who have grown-up kids to say and I accept that you probably cringe when you hear that and want to scream instead of smile.) I encourage you to try as few or as many of these ideas as appeal to you. The time we spend with our kids can be the best gift of all. Memories last for a lifetime.

