

# Keeping the Holidays Fun and Festive During the Age of the Coronavirus

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Last winter, just as families were wrapping up their holiday celebrations, there was only a whisper about a fast-spreading virus that was making itself known half a world away. Just a year ago, nobody could guess just how much it would eventually impact our daily lives, including disrupting this year's holiday plans.

According to the recommendations of numerous scientists and the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/), Americans should play it safe this holiday season, limiting festivities to household members. While the advice is disappointing for many adults who look forward to the season, it is even more devastating for children, who have already been socially distanced from friends and managing a school year like no other. What's more is that kids are young only for so long, and the holidays hold a certain magic for our little learners that slowly fades away as they grow older.

With all that in mind, what can parents do to ensure that their children don't miss out this Christmas? First, it's important to address the natural disappointment the whole family may feel about celebrating the season under extensive Covid-19 restrictions. But don't forget that there are still plenty of activities that for kids that can be active, fun, and still be done while social distancing.

Social distancing for kids might not be easy, but let's take a look at how to talk with kids about expectations for this year's holiday season before exploring exciting opportunities for festive fun.

## Dealing with Holiday Disappointment: Kids and Social Distancing this Season

In any other ordinary year, Christmas plans often involve traveling far and wide to see the family, or about waiting expectantly for those same family members to arrive at your doorstep. For kids, this time of year has a magical quality, bringing with it not only the anticipation of spending time with loved ones, but also the excitement of gift-giving, time-honored traditions, and fun outdoor play sessions in the snow while school is out.

It's only natural that our littlest family members will feel sad or disappointed that some of that sparkle will be missing this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. To help, try the following tips:

- Listen to him/her. It's important to be cognizant of the fact that the disappointment they might feel is very different than the usual whining or sadness that many kids are apt to feel over other smaller issues. As young learners, they are in the process of forming coping mechanisms that will eventually give them resiliency in facing life's challenges. For that reason, it's crucial that parents allow children to be open about their feelings, while listening to them to make them feel heard and important.
- Validate your child's feelings. As adults who are facing our own stress and disappointment, it might be easy to feel annoyed when children vent their emotions, especially when there isn't too much anyone could do to fix what is happening in the world this year. However, it's critical never to minimize a child's emotions and to validate their feelings to let them know that what they feel is real and normal. Don't be afraid to be open about your own emotions, as kids can learn how to deal with them through your modeling.
- Give your child a voice in the holiday planning. While holiday plans must be changed this year, they are worthwhile ways to celebrate! Offer children the chance to voice their own wishes and ideas. Alternatively, construct a list together, or offer a menu of choices that kids can choose from to create new traditions.

After the hard task of managing the emotions, it's time to get to work planning what could be done to enjoy the season. Take a look below at some worthwhile options to explore.

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## Staying Active While Social Distancing: A Holiday Guide

While the Christmas classroom parties might be put on hold this year, there are still many ways for kids to celebrate at home and around the neighborhood. Try the following ideas to keep the holidays fun and festive this year:

### Caroling Around the Neighborhood

An oldie but goodie, there's a better way to social distance than by traveling to friends' house to treat them to carols from afar! If your family is uncomfortable with going around the neighborhood caroling, create a list of friends that would appreciate your child's sweet singing voice.

Better yet, mask up and head outdoors with a friend or two to carol together in a way that is much safer than spending time indoors. Create a playlist of songs to sing, dress for the weather, and make it a joyful day spreading holiday cheer!

### Organize a Christmas Cookie Swap with Friends and Family

The virus isn't known to spread through food, and goods can be delivered and dropped off at doorsteps, making cooking and baking an ideal way to celebrate by giving scrumptious gifts! Fire up the oven and find favorite holiday recipes and create a menu of festive treats that can be delivered to others. Drive your child around town delivering the goods and dropping them off at the door, complete with a bow and card!



## Don't Forget to Make and Send Holiday Cards

Making Christmas cards serve as a way to give your child an artistic outlet while still communicating with those he or she loves. Make them even more special by purchasing special paper, ribbon, stickers, glitter, or anything that will make the cards special to your children and the recipients. Make an afternoon of it by creating cards together and use it as a learning opportunity for teaching young learners about addressing envelopes and using stamps.

Don't forget that military personnel and the elderly in nursing homes also need some Christmas joy! Another card-making project can include creating cards and writing letters to troops overseas or folks at a nearby retirement center.

## Read Christmas Bedtime Stories Near the Tree

This year, it might be a good idea to begin new traditions, to take the place of older ones that simply cannot be completed this year. Try adapting your usual routines for the holidays by making it a new tradition to read Christmas stories by the fireplace or Christmas tree! Plan ahead to find festive titles that are widely available at your local library, online, or at discount bookstores.

Make it like an Advent calendar, where a different book will be revealed each night leading up to Christmas. Heat up some cocoa and top it with marshmallows to making the tradition even more cozy and special.

## Deck the House with Festive Decorations

While decorating the tree is probably already in your Christmas plans, don't be afraid to go all out this year! Help kids stay active and engaged in the season by involving them in the decoration planning and preparation. Create a wreath for the door, and hang up garland, bows, tinsel, and Christmas lights around stair railings and windows.

Take the time to learn how to string popcorn, especially if your child has never tried it before. This is the year to complete all the crafts and try decorations that your family simply never had time for in the past!



## Organize a Candy Cane Scavenger Hunt

Around Easter, many kids enjoy an annual Easter egg hunt in which kids search through the house or the yard to find eggs stuffed with candies or other surprises. This year make a fun Christmas-themed scavenger hunt using candy canes! If you live in a location that experiences snow and the weather forecast is just right, hide some candy

canes in the grass outside before a snowfall. The next day, bundle children up to dig around in the snow to find them. For each cane they find, give them a small surprise!

Alternatively, for families who live in a warmer climate or if the weather just isn't right this year, take the fun indoors by hiding the candy canes in the house, perhaps near or in the tree.

## Social Distance Games for Kids

One way to still see dear family and friends over the holidays is by using a teleconferencing app to connect with them. Why not play a few social distancing games over the web? For instance, charades is always a favorite game, and can be played virtually. Make it Christmas themed to act out common holiday characters or symbols.

Another idea is to play virtual Pictionary using the digital whiteboard that is accessible on videoconferencing apps. Alternatively, help kids share the desktop screen and use a computer program such as Paint. Take turns guessing each other's pictures to still spend the holidays in the company of cherished loved ones.

While the pandemic has certainly put a damper on many family's holiday and travel plans, it's still possible to enjoy the season, even for the youngest of children. Make your child's days bright by addressing the seriousness of the pandemic head-on and creating a new plan filled with refreshed traditions and activities. Consider the above ideas for a socially distanced, yet fun-filled holiday season.

