

A Season for Celebrating Life, Light, and One Another

You just want to hug everybody and put an end to all the wars in this world, for everybody to understand you only live once and should enjoy it.... The world depends on us... [to] make this world better and friendlier together.

Anastasiia, 16 year old Ukrainian refugee

Sadly, too many children are living with war, whether in Ukraine, Gaza, or any of the 32 or so other countries around the world where conflicts are raging (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-currently-at-war>). How contrary this tragic reality is to the world adults claim to want to provide for their young ones! How contrary it is to the season we are entering when greetings of peace abound! But what can we do about it? What are we willing to do about it? If we have the will, there is actually a lot we can do. But let's first acknowledge that peace and a better, friendlier world are exactly what children like Anastasiia, quoted above, want, what ALL children want.

You're probably familiar with the commercial on TV where we hear children say how wonderful their experience at Disney World was, "but the best part was being with you." It may sound a bit artificial, but it's actually not. It's exactly what teacher Erin Kurt learned from her students over the years. You can read the full list of the top 10 things children told her they want here: <https://www.practicalparenting.com.au/what-children-want-from-their-parents>. All of them can be summarized in that phrase, "but the best part was being with you."

So how do we translate that into holiday gifts? Let's face it, children also enjoy getting things, but let's be conscious of what those might look like, gifts that are enjoyable and that we can do together to help make the world better and friendlier, as Anastasiia said above. Best of all, such gifts reflect the real meaning of the season, whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa? Games and toys that are great for fun, play, and even a little mischief can also stimulate learning, promote peaceful cooperation, and provide a sense of safety. And in doing so, they also respect the Christian commemoration of the birth of the one we call Prince of Peace; the Jewish commemoration of the divine miracle of lasting, light-giving oil; and the African-American celebration of family, community, and culture. Here we offer some helpful suggestions to make that possible.

When you choose gifts for the children in your life, please keep these questions in mind and **consider toys that:**

- ❖ Promote respectful, non-stereotyped, nonviolent interactions among children
- ❖ Can be used in many ways
- ❖ Allow children to be in charge of the play

- ❖ Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development
- ❖ Are not linked to video games, computers, TV, or movies
- ❖ Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play
- ❖ Will stand the test of time as children develop new interests and skills
- ❖ Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery
- ❖ Can be used alone or with others
- ❖ Can be enjoyed by boys and girls

Choose:

- ❖ Toys that foster cooperation and teamwork, like dolls and puzzles and some board games
- ❖ Toys for constructing, like building blocks and molding clay
- ❖ Toys that inspire creative arts, like craft supplies and musical instruments
- ❖ Toys that promote movement, like bikes, wagons, and sports equipment
- ❖ Toys that promote dramatic play, like costumes and props, puppets and magic sets
- ❖ Toys that enhance the imagination, new ideas, and problem solving, like science and nature kits
- ❖ Toys that respect the environment, that can be reused and recycled

And don't forget books, magazine subscriptions, Teddy Bears, and, again, YOU. There's nothing better than YOUR time!

Happy, Peaceful Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa! Happy, Peaceful Holidays to All!

Thanks to www.truceteachers.org for the information presented in this flier. Visit their website, as well as www.greenamerica.org (search "Gifts for Children") for more ideas about gifts that promote the positive values we want for our children and have the extra benefit of being sweatshop-free and non-toxic.

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For more information about Pax Christi, visit www.paxchristinys.org or www.paxchristiusa.org.

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