

THE ULTIMATE
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE III

Kids' holiday gift ideas that build social skills

(StatePoint) For young children, social-emotional development is one of the most valuable aspects of school readiness. This holiday season, focus on toys and gifts for preschoolers that will build children's empathy, communication skills and the ability to resolve conflicts and navigate challenges.

Here are a few gift ideas that do just that.

Experiential Gifts

A petting zoo can be a great place for kids to learn about compassion. A puppet show may teach important lessons about making new friends or learning how to navigate challenges. The gift of an experience will be an exciting life-long memory and a great opportunity for you to spend time together while kids hone important skills.

Interactive Toys

Those who want to help children learn important lessons might consider putting Zoonicornsn at the top of their holiday gift lists. Fun and engaging animated music videos, game apps, books and online activities capture children's imaginations while offering parents and children an opportunity to work through and overcome obstacles together.

Kids can watch inspiring music videos like "Yes, You Can!" on YouTube and play along with the soft and cuddly plush Zoonicornsn, which are a combination of a uni-



corn and zebra. The new Wish Me Zoonicornsn by Jay@Play have four touch points where children may interact with them. When kids kiss the Zoonicorn on the nose the horn glows and kids can make a wish.

The animated videos stories focus on tools children can use to identify and solve problems for themselves through the comforting animal characters of the Zooniverse.

Board Games

Playing age-appropriate card games and board games is a great way for kids to learn to follow rules, take turns, cooperate and be a good sport. Card games such as Uno and Go Fish make great stocking stuffers. As for board games, think classics like Candyland, checkers and Chutes and Ladders, or go for newer games designed specifically to familiarize kids with letters, shapes, numbers and colors.

This holiday season, consider how the gifts you give young children can help foster their social-emotional development.

Toys that encourage social skills make great holiday gifts.

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8 deals to score in December and January

Oh the weather outside is frightful. Rather than succumb to cabin fever, people can use the winter months as the perfect time to visit area stores and score a few deals.

Savvy shoppers understand that key items go on sale at specific points throughout the year.

December

1. Toys: Toys are perhaps the best items to purchase in December. Apart from Christmas gifts, it is a good time of year to stock up on toys children have coveted, which can be put away for birthday presents or other occasions. Retailers tend to lower toy prices as Christmas approaches.

2. Holiday decor: Decorative holiday items also tend to be heavily discounted in December. Stores slash prices on ornaments, gift wrap, artificial trees, holiday-themed baking items, and much, much more. If it has a passing connection to the holidays, chances are stores will cut prices by 50 percent or more once Christmas is over.

3. Televisions: It's possible to find discounted TVs even after the Black Friday sales have come and gone. Keep eyes trained on the circulars and jump when sales are advertised, as inventory may be limited.

4: Bubbly: Competition in the market will help drive down the cost of champagne and other sparkling wines. According to the wine resource GuildSomm, 22 percent of all champagne sales are run during the month of December.



January

5. Winter apparel: As the winter progresses, the amount of clothing stock in stores starts to dwindle to free up room for a new season's worth of attire. Starting in late December and continuing into the latter half of January, retailers are eager to liquidate their stock of scarves, sweaters, boots, and winter coats. This is a prime time to replenish wardrobes.

6. Linens: 'White sales' are traditionally in January, with home goods retailers running discounts all month long. These sales generally encompass towels, bed sheets, curtains, and other linens.

7. Fitness items: January is the ideal time to purchase a new gym membership or fitness equipment since these purchases tie into New Year's resolutions to get fit. Gyms may waive extra fees or offer discounted rates.

8. Travel and entertainment: Most people return home after the holidays, and that can generate a slow travel season afterward. The travel industry attracts new customers with discounted hotel rates and other deals. Tickets to Broadway shows and other theaters also may be discounted to encourage people to leave the house.

December and January are great times to grab steep deals on an array of products. Learning how to shop the sales can lead to considerable savings.

Remember to shop local whenever possible, it benefits you and keeps your local economy thriving.



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5 gift ideas to send to our troops

By LINDSEY ROMAIN
CTW Features

Holiday time is family time. But overseas deployment puts oceans between military families and their loved ones. That doesn't mean the gift-giving needs to end.

Food and other necessities are more important during the holiday season than any other time of the year.

However, sending packages directly isn't usually the best idea, as they often take many months to arrive, and the soldier's deployment could have ended by then.

Sending it through an organization also assures a more accurate delivery.

This doesn't mean your gifts aren't needed. Many groups package and ship items that anyone can provide. And for the holidays, it's best to send gifts that are both resourceful and meaningful.

1. Snack time

Gifting items that can be easily transported in backpacks is important. And what better gift for the holiday than food?

Hearty, boxed foods like macaroni and cheese are encouraged, as are instant drink packages like hot chocolate and tea.

Send instant soups, but not cans of soup, which are too heavy for easy transport.

Treats such as beef jerky, granola bars, gum, dried fruit, cookies and popcorn are recommended.



2. Warm tidings

When they're not in uniform, troops need other durable clothing items to help them keep warm during cold nights. Flannel pajamas, socks, mittens and hats are perfect unisex gift ideas.

Other warming gift possibilities: batteries for heaters, blankets and hand warmers.

3. Keep it clean

Toiletries are an obvious go-to care-package idea. They're durable, easy to ship and always needed. Large baby wipes, which come in handy for quick cleans, along with the norm: deodorant, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, body wash and razors.

Necessities such as lip balm, hand sanitizer, hand and foot lotion, tweezers and health-related products like aspirin, cough drops, eye drops and vitamins are needed too.

4. For their entertainment

When they're not saving lives, the troops have leisure time like the rest of us. Electronics to play music, movies and video games are a great way to give troops a route for escapism, as are batteries. Technology such as headphones and earphones are easy to burn through with heavy use, making these great gifts. Or keep things classic, with gifts like board games, puzzles and cards.

5. Home, sweet home

Nothing says Christmas like family, and giving troops a way to connect with theirs is perhaps the greatest gift of all. Stationery items like notepads, pens and envelopes can do just that. Sending your own card - a thank-you for their service, well wishes, happy holiday - lets a soldier know his or her hard work has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

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8 clever gift ideas for people who are hard to please

Struggling to find gifts for picky recipients can make anyone feel like a Grinch. Avoid the holiday shopping blues this season with this list of go-to gift ideas.

Whether shopping for an indecisive relative or your incredibly particular best friend, you can rest easy knowing you're covered with presents that appeal to everyone.



1. Tile

Perfect for those who can never find their car keys or constantly lose track of their phones, this Bluetooth tracker, paired with Tile's intuitive app, makes it easy to find everything. Gift it to your niece to keep tabs on her favorite stuffed animal or to a friend who always forgets where she parked.

2. "Good Housekeeping" Cookbook

Featuring 1,200 recipes, the newest edition of the "Good Housekeeping Cookbook" is great for every type of cook, from serious home chefs to kitchen novices. This culinary bible is one food guide friends and family will actually want to use... and maybe they'll test out their newly mastered recipes on you!

3. ME to WE Neema Necklace

The holidays are the season of giving, so consider selecting something that gives back to a bigger cause, like this necklace from ME to WE. Homemade by a woman in Kenya, your purchase gives healthcare access to a mother or child in the same community where the necklace is made, helping them live full, healthy lives.

4. Arbor pulldown kitchen faucet with MotionSense Wave

Whether it's for your friend who's constantly baking delicious -- but messy -- brownies, or your tech-obsessed uncle, this Moen faucet is the ideal present. Its touchless activation allows users to easily turn water on and off with the wave of a hand, providing added convenience and some serious cool factor in the kitchen.

5. Instant Pot

A smart choice for everyone from foodies to busy parents, this handy device does the work of nine common kitchen appliances and can prepare almost anything, from cake to rice to yogurt. Plus, it cooks up to 70 percent quicker than other devices and its functions make mastering one-pot meals a breeze.

6. Nespresso Creatista Plus

A coffee lover's dream, the Creatista Plus not only makes stellar coffee, but comes with a milk frother, too (a non-negotiable for many java addicts). It brews everything from an espresso to a mocha cappuccino with the touch of a button.

7. Amazon Echo

For the techie who dreams of a connected smart home, the Amazon Echo is a perfect place to start. It can play music, make calls, set alarms and timers, start a digital shower and control smart home devices via voice command -- just ask Alexa.

8. Osmo Genius Kit

This award-winning game system aims to turn any 5- to 12-year-old into a genius. It transforms a tablet into a hands-on learning tool to foster social intelligence and creative thinking. Those kids spend so much time on their devices anyway, they may as well learn something!

(StatePoint)



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Grainger: Irish Tune from County Derry

Pärt: Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten

Vaughan-Williams: Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis

Rautavaara: String Suite

Grieg: Holberg Suite

REDEMPTION

Saturday, May 11, 2019, 7:30 pm

Shacklett concert preview: 6:30 pm

Shostakovich: Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk Interlude Act I & II

Wagner: Tristan und Isolde Prelude & Liebestod

Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5

THE TRAVELER AND THE TITAN

Saturday, June 22, 2019, 7:30 pm

Shacklett concert preview: 6:30 pm

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Mahler: Songs of a Wayfarer

Mahler: Symphony No. 1

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Top-selling gifts from years past

A history of popular gifts from the 80s and 90s

If you grew up in the 1980s you may have hoped to find a wrapped Cabbage Patch Doll under the tree on Christmas morning, and your parents may have gone to great lengths to get that doll for you!

Cabbage Patch Dolls are just one example of a toy creating a shopping frenzy. Over the years, many toys have become the must-have presents of their times. The following is a history of some of the more popular gifts from bygone years.

1984: Transformers were a must-have present in 1984. Originally produced by a Japanese toy company, Transformers were eventually produced by Hasbro and became so popular they were a toy that spawned an animated series (not the series leading to the toy) and later block-buster live-action movies.

1985: Just about every child, and maybe even adult, wanted a Nintendo Entertainment System for Christmas in the 1980s. The system ushered in a new era of gaming, and helped make Super Mario Bros. a household name. NES continued its success for several years, selling seven million systems during the 1988 holiday season.

1986: Introduced the previous year, Teddy Ruxpin was an animatronic bear that told stories from a cassette tape inserted in his back.

1990: Were you a fan of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Donatello, or Raphael? Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were named after Renaissance artists, but they were just pizza-eating teenage heroes at the start of the 1990s. Kids obsessed over these action figures and the animated series that featured them.

1992: Barbie has always been a popular holiday gift, but her reinvented Barbie Dream House was something girls were clamoring for in the early 1990s. Barbie's trendsetting home featured a ringing telephone, a working doorbell and a fireplace that lit up.

1993: The Talkboy was a portable audio cassette player and recorder made popular by the movie Home Alone 2: Lost in New York.

1995: Beanie Babies were a popular line of collectibles that enjoyed their heyday in 1995. Rare Beanie Babies would later be worth hundreds of dollars.

1997: Tamagotchi made its appearance and became an immediate success. Industry insiders estimate that, at the height of its popularity, 15 Tamagotchis sold every minute across North America.

1998: Building on the Tamagotchi success, Furbies became a hit as well with 27 million Furbies selling in 1998 alone.

Pokemon cards, Razor Scooters, Nintendo DS, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and many other gifts have reigned supreme during the holiday shopping season. Last year L.O.L. Surprise Dolls were the sleeper hit, and who is to say which gift will capture the hearts of kids this year?



TECHNOLOGY:

Stretch your holiday budget by saving on refurbished mobile devices

With this year's holiday spending expected to rise over last year, according to the National Retail Federation estimates, you may be planning to spend more on décor, gift-giving and travel. If your seasonal plans also include upgrading mobile devices for yourself or for loved ones, keep in mind that you can make room in your budget for those other holiday expenditures by not paying the price for a brand-new model.

The alternative? A refurbished device. Experts say the idea that all refurbished devices were broken or had problems in a past life is a misconception.

"Whether you're bargain hunting or you're looking to go green and reduce electronic waste, you're in luck," says David Conti, senior director of eCommerce at MyWit. "In today's market it is very easy to find affordable, high-quality refurbished devices."

Indeed, many mobile phones, tablets and accessories that come from trade-in and upgrade programs were perfectly good devices that owners traded in for newer models. With so many consumers out there reliably seeking the latest, such trade-ins and sales are becoming more popular, making it easier to navigate the market for a previously owned device.

If you do go this route this holiday season, be sure to stick with reputable sources where you can trust the device to be in fully functional condition and opt for the longest guarantee available, at least 90 days. For example, those from MyWit undergo an extensive 65+ point inspection

of cosmetics, functionality and connectivity to ensure optimal performance. Tests verify every function that a customer can use (camera, audio, SIM, WiFi, Bluetooth, etc.) is in 100 percent working order and

connectivity tests ensure wireless devices deliver a consistent quality of connection and do not drop available signals.

When it comes to mobile upgrades, replacements and tech gifts, you can make

this holiday season merrier and affordable with refurbished devices that feel as good as new.

(StatePoint)



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Holiday gifts that help kids learn and grow

If you want your holiday gifts for kids to deliver fun long after the holidays, you may want to consider gifts that will help them learn and grow.

Boost Creativity

Art can inspire creativity, improve fine motor skills and even boost IQ. For beginners, art or crafting kits containing all the supplies they will need to create their own projects may be a great place to start.

Thinking bigger? Consider helping your gift recipient create an artist's studio. A craft or art table, an easel and a project caddy make a great combination gift for kids.

Spark Imagination

For toddlers, play time can be an extremely valuable opportunity to build skills and reach milestones -- with the right toys at hand. Maximize toddler fun with toys such as VTech's Go! Go! Smart Wheels playsets, which spark imagination and deliver multi-sensory learning, teaching first words, letters and more.



The line-up includes the new Launch & Chase Police Tower, which lets kids serve and protect with Po the Police Car. They can launch Po from the dual launchers and chase the Getaway Car through the switch tracks, trap doors, and road obstacles, promoting important motor skills. Po responds to SmartPoint locations through-

out the playset with lights, sounds and music, encouraging first words and imaginative play.

Another option from the line-up is the Tow & Go Garage, letting kids explore along with Trent the Tow Truck as they exercise important motor skills with this multi-level interactive playset. They can

give a friend a lift, go up the elevator to the repair platform, or race down the ramp and get a car wash while exploring SmartPoint locations.

Lastly, the interactive Go! Go! Smart Wheels Take Flight Airport playset strengthens fine motor skills as kids fuel up at the gas station, spin the weather vane and check bags at the luggage belt. They can also launch Aaron the Airplane to take off for flight, spin around the clouds and use the ramp to make a safe landing.

Encourage Movement

Habits formed in childhood can set the precedent for a lifetime. View gift-giving as an opportunity to encourage kids to engage in healthy hobbies. Whether it's a baseball glove and bat or a set of skates and protective gear, you can encourage kids to get active in a way that's fun, by outfitting them with all the equipment they need to play their favorite sports.

This holiday season, make sure your gifts for kids go further to enrich, engage and educate. (StatePoint)



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Outside the box gift ideas

Tradition is a hallmark of the holiday season. Religious services, family gatherings and trips to see Santa Claus are just a few of the many traditions people adhere to during the holiday season.

Many holiday shoppers also adhere to the time-honored tradition of last-minute shopping. The perfect gift can sometimes prove elusive, especially as the sand in the holiday hour glass keeps dwindling. These last-minute gift ideas may be just what shoppers need to put smiles on the faces of their loved ones this holiday season.

BOOKS: Books are often overlooked, especially now that so many readers use e-readers. But books can be an ideal gift and especially convenient for last-minute shoppers, who can easily visit a local bookstore where your neighborhood book seller will give you suggestions tailored specifically to your gift recipient.

EXPERIENCES: A 2017 survey by the global research firm NPD Group found that roughly 40 percent of holiday shoppers planned to give experiences as gifts

last year. Experience gifts open up a host of possibilities for last-minute shoppers stuck on what to give those loved ones who seemingly have it all.

What a great opportunity to spend more time with family and friends exploring local attractions, going to a show, summer camp tuition or music lessons.

FOOD/BEVERAGE: Television channels such as The Food Network have changed the way many people look at food. When gifting the family foodie, last-minute shoppers may not need to look further than the latest hotspot restaurant or specialty grocery store for the perfect gift. Take them out for a night on the town or give a gift card they can use at their convenience. The craft beer boom has created a host of devoted and knowledgeable beer drinkers, so a gift card or growler from a local craft brewery is sure to please people who love hoisting frosty pints.

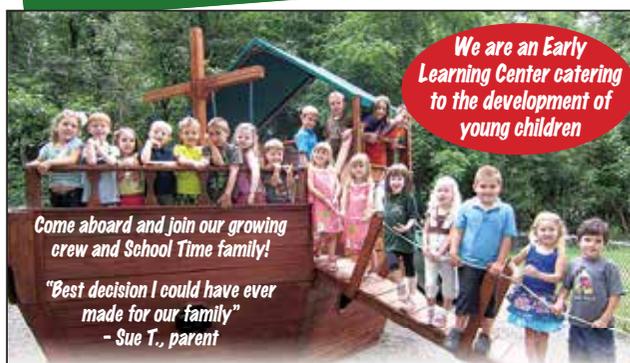
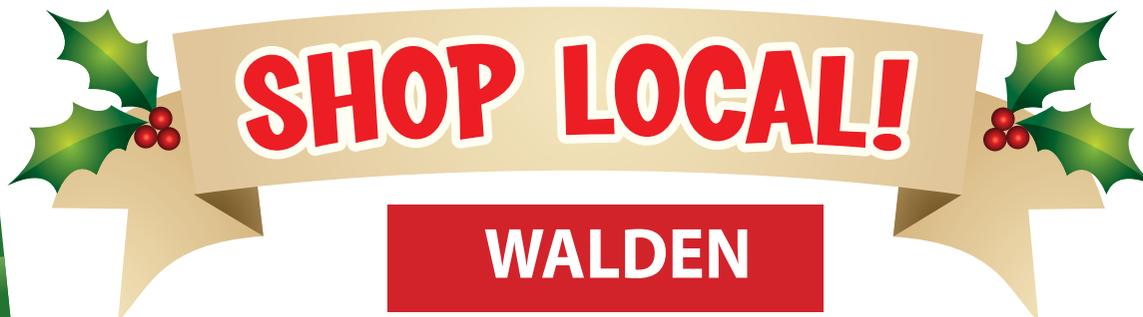
STREAMING SERVICE SUBSCRIPTIONS: Many people are cutting the cord with their cable companies in favor of



streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. Subscriptions to such services can make ideal and affordable holiday gifts. A six-month or yearlong subscription likely won't break shoppers' budgets and will

provide months of entertainment to loved ones.

Last-minute holiday shopping is easier than ever, especially for shoppers willing to think outside the box.



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