

Bright Ideas for Gifts



It is time to start thinking about gifts for the children in our lives now that Christmas decorations are in the shops. I try to commit to purchase early in the shopping season to ease the pressure that invariably builds in December. It doesn't always work, but I have good intentions.

There will always be the latest fad and fashion in toys on the shelves, and there are numerous online games that are engaging and exciting. I recommend trying to get involved with those that the children are playing, as these can be very entertaining.

With summer coming, we want our children to be able to enjoy a broad range of activities.

The following suggestions are for getting the children active and involved in shared activities with broad appeal, both indoors and outside. Remind children to use sun protection at all times.

Inquiry

Stimulate your child into exploring and finding out:

- Magnets of various sizes and shapes - explore the magnetic properties of items around the house. Use paper clips attached to cut out fish shapes, and a magnet suspended on string to make a fishing game; put numbers on the fish and total once all the fish have been 'caught'. Children can trick Mum and Dad/grandparents/mates with metal cars that appear to move by themselves, aided by a small child under the table with a magnet. 'Magic!' Avoid iron filings.
- Magnifying glass – children from around 4 years old love the views of things up close. You can pick up solid plastic-framed magnifying glasses from news agencies. It is recommended that you don't show your child how to focus the sun's rays. They will find that out soon enough for themselves.
- Stethoscope – great for listening to your heart, digestive system, pipes in the bathroom/ laundry, and your pets' internal rumblings. A nurse's stethoscope can be picked up on eBay for around \$50.
- 'Slinky' - explore the properties of this spring in the heat/cold, underwater, etc. Great for travelling down stairs very slowly. Don't let it get tangled. Available from good toy stores.
- Stopwatch. Get one for your child so they don't use your phone. See how long it takes to tie shoelaces, drink a glass of water, run to the end of the yard and back, complete a puzzle, swim the width of the pool, and dive for water toys on the bottom of the pool. Endless possibilities.

Activities

To encourage activities, at any time:

- A soccer ball, football, netball or basketball; plus a hand or foot pump for keeping the ball tight
- Goals and markers – field markers (specialty sports/variety stores)
- Backyard tennis kits (variety stores)
- Packs of tennis balls – you can never have enough
- Badminton set – they come with everything required (variety stores)
- Cricket set (variety stores)
- Water toys. Choose toys that can be used in a variety of ways. Perfect for long summer days by and in the pool.



Games

Holidays with family and friends – and rain - can almost be guaranteed, so a stock of inclusive games is vital. Choose better quality games that will last longer than just the school holidays. The classics are classics because they have been enjoyed thousands of times.

- UNO – quick-thinking and strategizing; fun from about 4 years old. Be prepared for having many games as the younger children build their skills and confidence.
- Monopoly – 8 to adult. There is something about handling that much money – mathematical thinking and financial negotiating required. Not sure if this is ‘fun’ – it is ruthless. Some people love it. You need plenty of time.
- Scrabble – Great for exploring sounds in words, a vital skill of early literacy. Develops vocabulary and word skills. Start with your own family rules, such as no scoring, or no board, or allowing copying of words. Introduce and stick with the genuine rules as soon as your children can manage them.
- Cluedo – A strategizing game for ages 6 and older. Involves reading and writing - excellent for inferential thinking. Reasonable time commitment required.
- Guess Who? – identifying and eliminating characteristics to guess the opponents’ character.
- Connect Four – strategising; fast games.
- Pokémon cards and the handbooks – learn how to collect, play and appreciate the characters.



Books

A solid library of books is an investment in your child's learning.

Be guided by your own enjoyment, by books recommended by friends and book-sellers, and by best seller lists. Many books appear on these lists repeatedly because they have a story that children enjoy and can engage with on several levels, and are fun to read and talk about.

For lists of books and ideas:

- The Children's Book Council of Australia – have been organising Book Week for the last 72 years and really know about Australian books. cbca.org.au/
- Bookshops have lists of their top sellers. <https://www.dymocks.com.au/Kids-Top-51> (includes suggested ages); https://www.collinsbooks.com.au/Category/Childrens_Interest-Ages/ChiAge000
- Let's Read Australia – includes tips for families and suggestions for you and your child. <http://www.letsread.com.au/Families/Download-your-free-reading-pack!>

Other

Classics gifts that will get the children outside and using their bodies as they enjoy the summer:

- water pistols, and water bombs
- balloons – NOT helium-filled, just regular blow-up yourself ones
- super bouncy balls
- thick chalk.

Don't be talked into thinking you have to spend a fortune on things for children to do. Short-term engagement is frustrating for everyone, and you will find yourself on a treadmill of trying to keep the kids 'entertained'. You are better to put time into planning major outings that you can prepare for and all participants can contribute to.

- Plan full-day trips with limited travel and maximum time in the destination
- Take a packed lunch – plan it, cook for it, and pack it with your children. A couple of treats is enough, as they will need good food to keep up their energy

- Check out our fabulous National Parks, the local swimming pool, botanic gardens, adventure playgrounds, and the beach
- Orchards offer self-picking of fruit in the summer months – a great day out
- Prepare for bush-walks as they must be properly kitted-out. Check National Parks and Wildlife website <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/safety>
- Walk the neighbourhood, or trek to a friend's place. Follow a printed map. Call into a local park for your packed lunch
- Have feasts in the back yard, stuffed toys parties with decorated cardboard box furniture, illustrated menus and party hats – let the children develop these ideas
- Have night picnics for star-gazing. Check out resources at <https://astronomy.org.au/general/sky-guides/>

It's all about children and parents and carers being able to enjoy long, luxurious days and nights of play and exploration during our coming summer months.

Feedback on these, and further suggestions are always welcome.

