

GIFTS THAT KEEP GIVING

With the holidays soon upon us, it's easy as parents to get lured into the trap of trying to fulfill our adolescent's every holiday wish. But consider that the most meaningful and important gifts we can give our children this season – and every season – are not the kind we can wrap into fancy packages. Yet they are often the most memorable and can last a lifetime. Consider these simple gifts that cost little but can linger long after the holiday season...

Time

Be around and be available -- to listen, to drive them some place, to bake cookies, play a game, watch a video together. Let them know that you have time to be with them and honor what they would like to do together – or at least *be willing* to do together. (Yes, it can sometimes take a little creative, out-of-the-box thinking to come up with ways to connect with moody adolescents.)

Listening

Commit to being open for deep, undivided, full-focus listening – when *they* want to talk, not just when it's convenient for you. Stop what you're doing and grace them with eye contact as well as an occasional nod of interest and understanding. Keep an open mind, and if you don't understand something or disagree, ask an open-ended, non-judgmental question. But don't interrupt or spend the whole time they're speaking thinking of what *you're* going to say next. Really listen. Sometimes the best response is simply, "Thanks for telling me about this."

Sharing

Look for opportunities to share things that are important to you – your favorite music, a special painting, a family photo album, a novel that made an impression on you at their age. This offers them a way to get to know more about *you* and what makes you tick, what excites you, who you are now, and what your childhood was like.

Memorable experiences

Take them to do something they've always wanted to do – whether it's something adventurous like zip-lining or something as simple as visiting an old friend in another town or attending a concert by their favorite band. Invite them on an excursion that is meaningful to you – a museum visit, a walk in the Arboretum, a movie you'd like to see.

Generosity

Pay it forward. Whether it's volunteering at a food pantry or the ASPCA or donating to charities, show your children how important it is to be kind and lend a helping hand. Do something especially nice for an elderly or infirm neighbor. Bake cookies and package them up for friends. Look together for a volunteer opportunity in which the whole family can participate. Consider letting your kids each pick a charity or two to which they'd like the family to donate, perhaps chipping in some allowance or work money of their own.

Role modeling

Remember that for better or for worse, we parents are the most influential adults in our adolescent's lives. From our digital media habits to how responsibly we drink alcohol to the way we treat others in simple daily interactions, what we do is being seen and processed by our children. The strongest messages we impart to them are not in what we say, but in how we behave. Respect, courtesy, and fairness are not just abstract words but positive ways of connecting to the world. Show your kids how it's done.

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