

In a pandemic year, here are 50 ways to celebrate holidays with your kids



The coronavirus pandemic has canceled many things. But don't give it the power to cancel the holidays. Here are some safe ways to celebrate the season with your family in 2020.

1. Talk honestly about your usual holiday traditions. Try to replicate the ones you can, allow everyone to mourn the ones you'll have to let go this year, and then commiserate

about a few you're maybe not so sad to say goodbye to. You may even want to continue the trimmed-down traditions in future years.

2. Make sure family members and friends who live alone aren't forgotten. Do something more than just sending the usual holiday card. Maybe a gift, a longer letter or an invitation to video chat.

3. Enjoying holiday lights lends itself perfectly to social distancing. Head out with your family to see [the downtown holiday lights](#). Or [Candy Cane Lane](#). Or [Winter Wonders](#) at the Boerner Botanical Gardens. Or your own neighborhood.

4. Every year, Cathedral Square Park is filled with Christmas trees decorated by Milwaukee schools and youth groups. The trees are coming back this year.

5. If a trip downtown to see ["A Christmas Carol"](#) or ["The Nutcracker"](#) has been part of your holiday traditions, plan to watch the online performances in December from the comfort of your own home.

6. This is the season of giving. Traditional fundraising events are different (or non-existent) this year, but there are still ways to give. [The Hunger Task Force Food for Families](#) fundraiser is virtual. So is United Way's annual [Holiday Giving Tree](#). [Toys for Tots](#) has an Amazon wish list.

7. Bake lots of cookies. More than usual. Different varieties. If you need inspiration, turn to some of the [past winners](#) of the Journal Sentinel's [Holiday Cookie Contest](#). Or check out the recipes from this year's We Energies Cookie Book. [This site](#) also has archived books from previous years.



8. Get out paper, crayons and holiday stickers to make Christmas cards to send to people in nursing homes, COVID-19 patients in hospitals, and doctors, nurses and essential workers. Take part in TimeSlips' [Postcard](#)

[Challenge](#) to send cards, drawings and greetings to people in participating care homes.

9. Caroling parties and visiting neighbors might not be a thing, but be neighborly by leaving secret surprises on their doorsteps. Make sure to follow [CDC food preparation safety recommendations](#) if you're preparing and giving food.

10. Have a caroling party of your own at home. Or you can walk around your neighborhood with your family, singing. Just make sure you're socially distancing and skip the door-to-door part.

11. Talk about Christmas future. What do your kids imagine a perfect holiday will look like when they're grown-ups? Have them write or draw the ideas, and keep them in a safe place to look back on when they're adults.

12. Not surprisingly, there are [virtual options](#) for you to have a personalized Zoom call with Santa this year.

13. [The NORAD Santa tracker](#) is a good way to see where Santa is on Christmas Eve (and a good incentive to get the kids to bed). Starting Dec. 1, there are also fun Santa-related activities on the site.

14. Santa may be the main elf, but you can also incorporate some lesser elves in your holiday celebration. Go all out with your Elf on the Shelf hiding places and costumes. And [Elf](#)

[Yourself](#). It's reliably hilarious.

15. Make hot cocoa, cookies and popcorn. Then sit down with your family with your treats to do some cozy virtual shopping for everyone on your list.

16. The cancellation of traditional holiday events will give some people more time for thoughtful homemade gifts. Brainstorm some crafts with your kids.

17. Think about the reasons you love your family and friends. Then write those things down to let everyone know how much they mean to you.

18. Buy and decorate miniature trees for different areas of your house (such as the rooms that show up in your children's virtual school backgrounds). Use extra ornaments, favorite ornaments or ornaments chosen around a theme.

19. Decorate one of the mini trees with candy canes of various flavors. Use the tree as a countdown — the kids get to eat one each day until Christmas.

20. Help the kids choreograph their own version of The Nutcracker ballet to perform for you.

21. Watch those holiday TV and movie classics that feel so nostalgic. Add a few new ones to your list.

22. Learn about wintertime holidays you don't normally celebrate, perhaps from other faiths or cultures. Talk about similarities, differences and what those holidays mean to the people who celebrate them.

23. Make decorations [with your kids](#). A village of candy could include gingerbread houses (or easier-to-make graham cracker houses), snow people made out of marshmallows and Styrofoam tree shapes decorated with gumdrops.

24. When planning your holiday dinner menu, research classics. Have everyone choose one you've never tried before.

25. Have everybody pick one of their favorite dishes. Work together to make a "favorite things" meal for your household.

26. Make a list of quirky things to celebrate through the holiday season. The first real snowfall? Have ice cream. The last day of (virtual or in-person) school before winter break? Have a snowball fight (use balled-up paper if there's no snow.).

27. Listen to Christmas music whenever you're in the car.

28. [Encore](#) is a board game where each team is given a word, and then teams go back and forth singing a song that

has that word in it. Do that with holiday songs.

29. Brainstorm some relevant groups for your friends and family members (people who love puzzles, artists, book lovers, athletes, whatever makes sense among your loved ones). Pick names for a gift exchange.

30. Set up a Christmas countdown around the door frame of each child's bedroom. Write a note for each day, so your child can take down a note every day to read another thing you love about them.

31. Have a holiday food taste test. Buy different brands or flavors of seasonal foods — like candy canes, cookies, fudge, anything flavored with peppermint or gingerbread. Vote on which foods taste the best.

32. If you can't get together with your extended family on Christmas, take some inspiration from YouTube and do unboxing videos of your gifts.

33. Gather up your holiday picture books (or order some). Cuddle under some blankets (or a blanket fort) with hot chocolate for a holiday story time.

34. You've probably recorded hours and hours of footage of your kids on Christmas over the years. But have you ever watched them? Dedicate some time to watching holiday home movies this year.

35. Pick a day every week until Christmas to scavenge around the house for weird toys, knickknacks or clothes you never use. Wrap them up and have a thrifted gift exchange.

36. Join your kids outside when it snows enough to have a snowball fight or build a fort.

37. Don't buy an ugly Christmas sweater this year. Pick out an old one to decorate your own!

38. Make your house smell like the holidays everyday. Bake cookies, light candles, or just keep apple cider with cinnamon simmering on the stove.

39. Spend an evening making a list. Best and worst holiday movies? Songs? Or customize it by ranking craziest holiday memories and family stories.

40. Do you usually write a Christmas letter for friends and family? Have the kids write (or dictate) it this year. It will be funnier.

41. Think of something good that happened each month during this weird year, and write it down on cardstock. Decorate the happy thoughts with glitter and markers. Hang them up as part of your holiday decorations.

42. Give the kids a holiday theme for each window in your house and let them go crazy with window markers.

- 43.** This year, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's "A Christmas Carol" tradition morphed into a one-actor show to allow for social distancing. Have each child choose their favorite holiday play, movie or story. See if they can act out a one-person show in 10 minutes.
- 44.** Have your own Christmas tree lighting celebration, with a countdown, holiday music and snacks.
- 45.** Forget a posed, professional Christmas card photo shoot this year. Let the kids plan their own outfits and set up a backdrop.
- 46.** Holiday parties that are geared toward kids have a few tables set up with craft kits from stores like Michael's or Joann. Buy your own supplies, and set up a few craft stations for your own DIY holiday party.
- 47.** Go for a walk on Christmas morning to get motivated to open gifts, after dark to look at the lights, or midday just to remember that other people exist in your neighborhood.
- 48.** Many of us have taken up new hobbies or found new interests during the pandemic. Buy gifts for your loved ones that reflect those new pastimes.
- 49.** What is the one thing that makes each person in your family happiest during the holiday season? What is it about the holidays that feels the most holiday-ish? Make a special

effort to provide that special something to everyone — in a pandemic-safe way.

50. Research about how holidays are celebrated in different parts of the world. Incorporate some of those traditions into your own.

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