



PRESCHOOL



ELEMENTARY



MIDDLE SCHOOL

Preschoolers are just beginning to understand what all the holiday fuss is about. Since time (especially distant, future time) can still be an abstract concept for them, preschoolers love to participate in the right now.

The best traditions for preschoolers involve hands-on activities that result in instant gratification.

DECORATING CHRISTMAS COOKIES*

Dust off your favorite cookie recipe and set up a decorating station complete with red and green icing and toppings. Try to ignore the mess as your preschooler uses their artistic skills to create colorful Christmas confections. (P.S. There's no shame in using break-and-bake cookie dough!) Divide the cookies in half and place a portion of them in a disposable container. Choose one person or family each year to share your beautiful baked goods with!

ABBREVIATED ADVENT

Counting down from 30 will feel like an eternity for your preschooler . . . and for you! Try using a smaller number for this phase, like a 10-day countdown. Say things like, "There are only 8 days until Christmas! Can you show me the number 8 using your fingers? In 8 days we will celebrate Jesus' birthday with some fun surprises!" Make the countdown tangible for your preschooler by creating a Christmas-colored paper chain and tearing a ring off each night or morning.

NEW YEAR NO-NOS

Whatever you do, do not put your kids to bed on New Year's Eve by saying, "See you next year!" If you do, you're likely to find your little concrete thinker attached to your leg for the next 24 hours. The week leading up to the New Year, and especially New Year's Eve, read a New Year's book with your preschooler. (We love *Happy New Year, Spot!* by Eric Hill, but there are tons of options.) Each time you read the book, get out a calendar (your phone calendar works great) and show your preschooler today, then count how many days are left until the New Year.

If there is a "golden age" of building traditions, this is it. In this phase, kids have enough context for Christmas and New Year's to really ramp up their excitement level as the holidays approach.

Their energy is endless and their faith is BIG! Your major challenge with an elementary-schooler will be to remind them of the true meaning behind all the FUN! But don't get too caught up in creating serious moments . . . those happen best when they happen naturally. Feel free to get swept away by the momentum of their infectious joy this holiday season!

BOOK IT

Search your local thrift stores or discount shops and find as many Christmas-themed books (each short enough to be read in one sitting) as you can. Wrap them up and take turns letting your family choose a book to open and read aloud every few nights leading up to Christmas Eve. Bundle up on the sofa with blankets and pillows and read your way through the month together.

THE BIG GIVE

Make serving part of your holiday traditions by choosing a day on the calendar to give big. Maybe it's December 1, or maybe it's the first Saturday of the month. Whichever day you choose, mark it on the calendar and prepare by organizing and labeling bins as "KEEP," "TRASH," or "GIVE." Challenge your kid to go through their toys and clothes, giving away as many items as they keep. This will create space for any new things they might receive, as well as teach your kids to think about others during the holiday season.

MEASURING UP

Every New Year's Eve, make a big production out of measuring your kid's height. Paint or stain a piece of timber (a 2' X 4' is fine) and store it under a bed or in the garage—or even put it on display! Every New Year's Eve, break out the "measuring stick" and see how much your child has grown since last year.

This is the phase where you'll see the most transition when it comes to holiday traditions. You'll come to learn that a sixth grader is a far different creature from an eighth grader. But don't get too emotional, middle schoolers are still super fun! You just may have to adjust your traditions slightly.

ANNUAL ORNAMENT*

Every year, load up your family and drive to a store that sells a variety of Christmas ornaments. Set a budget and challenge each person to choose one ornament that represents their year. You could even designate a special tree in your house for all the ornaments to go on, even if it starts off fairly bare. It'll be cool years from now to look back on the meaning behind all the decorations you'll choose.

SOCK IT TO THEM!*

In the past, your kids may have worn the most adorable matching Christmas pajamas. But don't be surprised if your middle schooler rolls their eyes and "forgets" where they stuffed that snowflake onesie Grandma Ruth sent. Instead, try buying your entire family a new pair of Christmas socks to wear on the big day. You may even be able to coordinate a theme without them even realizing it!

MIDNIGHT MADNESS

The time has finally come for your middle schooler to ring in the New Year by staying up until midnight. (The real midnight—not the fake midnight you've been creating by changing the clocks up until now!) Let your middle schooler live it up by hosting a New Year camp-out in your living room or den. Have s'mores, lanterns, and a tent set up to create an atmosphere your kid will want to recreate for years to come. (Extra Credit: In this phase, everything is more fun with friends. Allowing your kid to invite their closest buddy will make this tradition everyone's favorite!)



HIGH SCHOOL

By this phase, holidays probably look very different for your family. You may find yourself begging your kids to wake up on Christmas morning, after years of praying they'd sleep until the sun rose. And come New Year's, you may just be hoping to catch a glimpse of your high schooler—much less spend quality time with them.

Yes, things may be different in this phase, but you can still plan intentional, meaningful, and fun holiday traditions with your teenagers.

GAME ON*

Let your teenager choose a game—a board game, video game, computer game, whatever they enjoy most—and create a family tournament bracket to battle it out all Christmas break. Get a prize that your family might actually want to compete for, post each round's results, and crown the champion with pomp and splendor.

GINGERBREAD FACE-OFF

Hold a huge gingerbread house competition for your family and some friends. Appeal to this phase by allowing your high schooler to invite their soccer team or small group to participate. Keep costs low by making it BYOG (Bring Your Own Gingerbread House) or by providing graham crackers, icing, and a few types of candy. Break out the Christmas tablecloths and play some classic carols as everyone competes for the grand prize.

NEW YEAR, OLD PLAYLIST

Ask everyone to submit their five favorite songs from the year. Each year, compile everyone's list into a master playlist that you share with your family. On New Year's Eve, have everyone take turns playing DJ, introducing their song and explaining why they chose it. Before midnight, have everyone vote on the best song of the year.



PARENT CUE

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS OR THE NEXT PHASE OF YOUR KID'S LIFE?

We've got some incredible resources just for you!

The Phase Project is a synthesis of personal experience, academic research, and gatherings of leaders and educational experts from across the child development spectrum.

There are 18 concise guides, designed to help you parent your child through every year.

Check them out at <http://phaseguides.com>.

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

THROUGH THE PHASES

Holiday traditions can create some of the most nostalgic, treasured memories for you and your family.

We know it's likely you already have an awesome list of things you do every year—maybe even some things you did as a kid! But we also know that as your kids grow and change, traditions need to grow and change, too.

That's why we've created a list of holiday traditions and organized them by phase. (But don't worry—we've included some suggestions that will work for all ages, noted by an *.)

Check out these ideas on how to celebrate Christmas and the New Year with your family.