

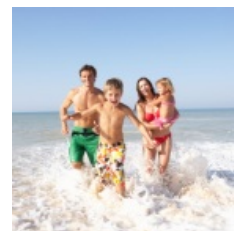


Making Family Events Special

How can we make family events like parties or vacations more special?

Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, weddings, and summer vacations - these are special times in a family's life and can create lasting memories.

However, as treasured and important as these events are, some families try to make too much of them. Parents may try to turn each birthday party into the best one ever. Or they feel they have to fulfill every wish on their children's gift lists. Inevitably, that kind of attitude creates anxiety and disappointment, since few events turn out perfectly.



How To Make Parties More Special

Tell your child to draw up a list of things he wants so that you and others who plan to give him gifts have something to choose from. Have him underline or indicate his top preferences in some other manner. This way, he will understand from the beginning that he won't get everything on the list, and he won't be disappointed. And if you can, try to surprise him with something not on his list.

If your family budget does not allow you to buy your child most of what he wants, do not feel guilty; instead, buy one or two gifts that will mean the most, rather than a dozen that don't. Even if you can provide for your child's every wish, some selectivity can teach him to set priorities and to learn values.

More important, spend time with and show your love for your child; this is much more significant and lasting than material items. Remember that special events - from family gatherings to attendance at school recitals - are times to demonstrate the specialness of the people you care about.

Family Vacations

A summer vacation needs careful planning, not only taking the children's input into account, but also paying attention to how the adults want to spend it. Planning vacations is a good opportunity for families to sit down and talk together. A family vacation needs to be everyone's vacation, and that may mean not going to the place that the children have put at the top of their list. ("Dad and I have decided that we're not going to Disney World again; this summer, we're going to a national park for some camping.") As long as your destination has something there for your children, you do not necessarily have to go where they want to every year.

In making decisions about vacations, think back to the summers of your own childhood. What did you like most about your family vacations? What do you wish you had done more often? The answers to these questions will help guide you toward what may be important to your own child. More than anything, children remember that their vacations took them to locations other than their home, that the family got to spend time together, and that there were long days and memorable experiences they did not get to enjoy the rest of the year.

Finally, when planning your vacation, be realistic. Too often, parents try to squeeze too much into the vacation, and the family ends up finding their time together stressful, not relaxing.

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