



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/holiday-family-time>

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## **Gifts are nice, but holidays are chance to boost children's development**

K-State expert encourages families to focus on time together

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – There is joy, for sure, in ripping through gift wrapping on Christmas morning.

Yet, while Christmas – and other holidays recognized this time of year – are typically a single day, all that goes on around the celebrations present an opportunity to teach children valuable lessons they'll carry with them all of their lives.

"There's a significant body of research indicating that family traditions are really important to a child's development, and actually will protect against risk factors related to academic achievement, drinking or even drug use," said Bradford Wiles, a child development specialist with K-State Research and Extension.

He adds: "Families that do things together...have specific rituals that spill over into many other domains, which makes children feel like they're part of a family, part of a unit, and there's a trust and reciprocity that comes with that."

Wiles said the specific ways in which families celebrate the holidays is less important than doing it together.

"If your family is just you and your child, that's okay," he said. "One of the best things you can do for a child is allow them to choose something that they want to do. So maybe it's a specific song that they want to sing every year, or maybe they choose a tree topper. Whatever it is, including them in your family traditions is such a great way to protect them and bring them even closer into the family."

Wiles also encourages adults to look past incidents that might cause some anxiety during the holidays.

“Nobody's going to care if your child didn't finish his potatoes; that's not something to get bent out of shape about,” he said. “It's really about recognizing the big picture, that those family events are the things that you're going to remember for a really long time, and some of those gifts are priceless.”

“The holidays give us an opportunity as human beings to enjoy each other's company and to celebrate just the tremendous opportunity that the season provides, and for us to be with friends and family and to be giving during that time.”

### **Yes, there is a Santa Claus**

Wiles says every culture has its mythical traditions, and he encourages parents to keep alive the spirit of Santa Claus for as long as possible.

“There are some really interesting questions about child development and Santa, such as are we lying to our kids,” he said.

“But you know, if the myth is that we're going to believe that somebody comes and gives presents and leaves them for good little boys and girls, well, I'm okay with that one. I think that Santa is essentially a state of mind for all of us.”

More information on child development [is available online](#) from K-State Research and Extension.

-30-

**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story  
Applied Research in Child Health and Enhancing Resilience, [www.hhs.k-state.edu/ahs/extension/child-development](http://www.hhs.k-state.edu/ahs/extension/child-development)

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