

Naughty or Nice? Santa's Elf is the Secret

Twinkling lights, brightly decorated cookies, and hearing Christmas songs in the store aisles means one thing to children -- Christmas! Their excitement and wonder begins to grow with each passing day; and adults, however briefly, cast aside their work-a-day cares to relive memories and join in the excited anticipation.

Santa Claus is a familiar figure in Christmas celebrations and a person children hope will visit their homes with a bag full of presents. But as every child knows, Santa has a discerning selection process when it comes to gift recipients. His "naughty or nice" list is not to be taken lightly.

Generation upon generation of children (and their parents) have wondered how Santa is so spot-on when it comes to recognizing the children who have been well behaved all year and those who need improvement. It's almost as if he has a scout in each and every house relaying this important information.

According to the trea-

sured book, "The Elf on the Shelf," by Carol Aebersold and Chanda Bell, that's just how Santa gets his detailed reports -- a scout elf watches over children's behavior.

The elf gets his Christmas magic when the family gives him a name of his own.

Each night, after the children are safely tucked into bed, the elf flies to the North Pole, where he informs Santa who has been naughty or nice that day.

Before the children awaken, the elf has returned to their home, but he is observing them from a new post in the house. The children race out of bed to discover the elf's new hangout for the day.

There is one important rule: Children should not touch the elf or he might lose his magic, thus jeopardizing any good reports he may have planned to give Santa. This rule ensures the children's interest in the elf won't wane, and it also teaches self-control.

There are so many enjoyable traditions to share as a family, and reading "The Elf on the Shelf" is one that will

delight children of all ages.

Sitting down and sharing the story also enables families to set aside the hustle and bustle of the holidays for a few minutes and spend quality time with the ones they love.

Children acquire all the benefits from reading and story comprehension, imagination and role playing, as well as learn the important lesson that good behavior brings just rewards.

This beautifully illustrated, hardbound book is innovatively packaged and comes with its own pixie elf seated on a shelf in an attractive keepsake box. Children can register their elf's name at elfontheshelf.com and receive a special letter from Santa Claus.

There are also two new surprises in store to further spread elf magic -- an interactive North Pole found at elfontheshelf.com and The Elf on the Shelf Christmas Activity Book.



Create a new holiday tradition with a clever story and interactive accessories that children and adults will enjoy. Visit www.elfontheshelf.com.

The new North Pole feature gives families a sneak peak at Santa's headquarters with their elf as a guide.

Families can catch a glimpse of Santa's busy workshop, look in on the stables to see the reindeer, take a stroll down Main

Street, or even visit the gift shop to order presents. The activity book helps keep little hands and minds busy with activities, puzzles, crafts, a sing-a-long music CD, coloring pages, and more.

Creating and reliving trea-

sured memories and traditions, as well as new family activities, is only one elf away.

For a list of store locations or to purchase The Elf on the Shelf online, visit www.elfontheshelf.com.

18 ideas for making holiday memories

Counting down to Christmas Day means many different things to people across the globe. Although families likely have several different traditions they anticipate each year, it can be fun to incorporate some new merrymakers into the festivities. Here are some festive ideas to include in the days leading up to Christmas - a special family calendar of fun finds.

1. Annual memento: Have the kids or adults make one new handmade ornament each year. This way the tree is always evolving, and

Writing to Santa

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been and engage in some polite conversation.

· Politely ask for the toys you'd like. Understand that Santa is busy, so keep the list brief.

· Thank Santa in advance for his kindness. Hopefully, he'll have time to reply.

· Write and mail the letter as early as possible, as things tend to get busy as Christmas nears.

everyone can track milestones.

2. Cookie day: Devote one day to making Christmas cookies. Invite friends or family members over. Distribute some cookies to elderly neighbors.

3. Holiday classic: Spend a night in and watch a classic Christmas flick you've never seen before. Streaming movie services often put classics and obscure titles into rotation during the holiday season.

4. Christmas concert: Host a gathering of children where they can sing or perform their favorite tunes for an audience. Take it on the road to a nearby nursing home.

5. Dine out: Take a break from cooking, shopping and hosting and stop into a restaurant you've been meaning to try. Keep it local to support nearby businesses.

6. Adopt a child/family: Volunteer with a charitable organization that provides for less fortunate families. Answer the Christmas desires of a needy child or family by purchasing an item on their wish lists.

7. See the sights: Pack the children into the family car to tour nearby areas and look at Christmas lights displays. Bring along cookies and hot chocolate.

8. Trim a tree: Get togeth-



er with adult friends at a tree-trimming party. Rotate the hosting house each year.

9. Play dress-up: A gentleman can dress up as the man in red and pop into a friend's holiday gathering.

10. Wilderness walk: Enjoy the crisp air and snow and see a local park from a winter perspective.

11. Acts of kindness: Choose any act of kindness and make it happen this Christmas. It can include feeding the hungry or helping a disabled person shop for the season.

12. Kids' Secret Santa: Spread the joy of giving by having the kids choose a sibling or friend's name from a hat and purchasing or making a gift for that person.

13. Hand out hot chocolate: Make a big thermos of hot chocolate and give it out

to shoppers or workers who have been out in the cold.

14. Read religious stories: Understand the true meaning of the season by reading Biblical passages.

15. Camp-in: The first night the tree is decorated, allow the kids to sleep beside it under the glow of Christmas lights.

16. Scavenger hunt: Plan holiday-themed trivia questions and hide small trinkets for children to find.

17. Surprise box: Put a gender and age nonspecific gift into a box. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, the person who finds a hidden gift tag under their chair at dinner gets to open the box.

18. Family portrait: Wear your holiday finery and pose for a portrait that actually will be printed and framed.



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