

GREAT GIFTS CAN LAST A LIFETIME!

If you have a special child in your life, you want to make that child happy. Gifts are one way of ensuring a smile ... but we often struggle to find just the right gift, one that fits our budget, or one the child will really love.

Think of the best gift you were ever given as a child. Of all the holiday or birthday gifts, which ones meant the most? Stumped? It may be difficult to recall any particular thing you were given. Often, what is most memorable is the experience of special times and rituals, and these times bring smiles even today.

The word gift can mean a present (reward, donation, contribution, offering) or a talent (ability, aptitude, flair). Below is a list of "gift options" that not only build your relationship with that special child but make a difference in that child's life ... in the long run and today.

GIFTS OF TIME

In the end, it is the time invested that pays the most dividends. Instead of spending hours looking for the "best" gift, spend special time with the child. It could be simply a couple of hours when the child gets to have you all to himself. Go for a walk, sing songs together, read books, play at the park, have a picnic, watch the trains go by, go swimming or play games. The options are endless. You don't even need a firm plan. Just schedule the time and follow the child's lead; let the child choose.

GIFTS OF EXPERIENCE

Is there an experience that the child is interested in? How about going to a water park, the theater, a zoo, a sporting event, a concert, or a local fire station? Has the child ever ridden on a city bus? What would the child rarely get to do that would make for a very special outing?

GIFTS OF NATURE

Today's children often spend most of their time indoors. Children need to get out in nature, run in the green grass, watch the river run, go "hunting" for special rocks, and play active outdoor games. A small amount of time outside can change a bad day into a good one. Run and kick a ball together, go sledding, compare rocks, dig in the sand, make a snow fort, ride the bike trails, or just walk and talk about the world around you.

GIFTS OF VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteering can be very rewarding and lead to feelings of thankfulness. Taking time to help others, your community, or the environment also increases a child's self esteem and sense of worth.

GIFTS OF RITUAL

Rituals are routines that have an emotional connection. You can have daily rituals (a special cuddle up bedtime book each night),



weekly rituals (pizza dinner with family game time), monthly rituals (go on a nature outing), or yearly rituals (a camping trip with gooey marshmallow smores). Lifelong memories are made while blowing out candles after a birthday song, eating a family dinner together using grandma's special china, singing songs while riding in the car to an auntie's, telling family stories, baking bread or decorating cookies. Routines with special emotional components can become rituals that give children a sense of belonging and meaning. Rituals create a lasting emotional impact and increase the connection between you and the child.

GIFT OF TALENT

Children love to learn new things. What talent do you have that you could share? Fishing, playing an instrument, whistling, snapping fingers, sewing, building, cooking, and making new things can all bring joy to a child. You do not have to be a teacher to share your talent. Lasting memories will be made while the child increases self-confidence. You may also create a shared interest that will last a lifetime.

GIFT OF SERVICE

How do you feel when someone does something for you? Gary Chapman, in his book "The Five Love Languages" observes that people feel loved in different ways. One way to show and receive love is through "Acts of Service." A great gift can be as simple as agreeing to do a task(s) at the child's request. Tasks such as: "Clean your room", "Cook your favorite meal", "Give you a backrub", "Play your favorite game" will leave children feeling loved and cared for.

WRAPPING IT UP

"But children love to unwrap presents!", you say? Agreed. So, do not forget to wrap your gift. You can use the event ticket, take a photo, draw a picture, or make a coupon to signify what the child is getting. For example, if you choose some gifts of service, you could make a little coupon book with pages stapled together. Children will feel extra special when they get to "cash in" a coupon.

Through these priceless gifts, connections will be made, smiles will be had, and important skills will be built that will help that child succeed in school and in life. Which will you give?

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SOME OF THE LOCAL FAMILY ACTIVITY IDEAS FOUND AT ROCHESTERFAMILIES.COM

Olmsted County History Center Museum

1195 West Circle Drive SW | 282-9447 | www.olmstedhistory.com/museum.htm

A variety of exhibits about the history of Olmsted County from settlement to present. Children will love to explore the experiences of days gone by in the Hands-On Cabin. The History Center also hosts several family-friendly special events throughout the year.

Rochester Art Center

40 Civic Center Drive SE | 282-8629 | www.rochesterartcenter.org

The Rochester Art Center offers Free Family Days on the first Saturday of each month providing an array of free family-friendly activities including, hands-on art activities, special docent-led tours of the exhibitions and family guides.

Pipsqueaks

903 W Center Street | 287-2000 | www.rochestermn.gov/departments/park/facilities/pipsqueaks

Ever feel like your kids just need a place to run, jump, scream, and play? Pipsqueaks is a public indoor play zone designed for children kindergarten-age and younger to play under parental or guardian supervision (children may not be dropped off). Pipsqueaks offers young children a safe, clean play space to burn off energy during the long winter months.

Rochester Public Library

101 2nd Street SE | 285-8000 | www.rochesterpubliclibrary.org

The public library is located downtown and offers several fun programs including: Story Time for Toddlers, Story Time for 3-5 year-olds, evening Bedtime Story Time for all ages, a summer reading program for all ages, Family Fun! programs on Saturdays during the school year, and Summer Fun @ The Library.

City Parks

www.rochestermn.gov/departments/park/parks/index.asp

There are more than 100 city parks in Rochester.

- Quarry Hill - 701 Silver Creek Road NE • 281-6114 • www.qhnc.org
- Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo • 775-2451 • www.co.olmsted.mn.us

City Trails

www.rochestermn.gov/departments/park/trails/index.asp

Maps out over 60 miles of recreational trails in Rochester.

Sledding Hills

www.rochestermn.gov/departments/park/activities/winter/skiing_sledding.asp

There are two areas within the city that are designated sledding hills.

- Schmidt Park - 6300 blk 24 Avenue NW
- Judd Park - 3rd Street & 36 Avenue NW

Chateau Theatre – Free Kids Movies on Saturdays

3450 East Circle Drive NE | 536-7469 ext. 115 | www.chateautheatres.com

A FREE Kids' Movie is held every Saturday at 11am. The fun begins with games & entertainment when doors open at 10am. Visit the website for a list of upcoming movies.



Rochester Women magazine is a founding member of the First Steps Business Alliance and is the sponsor of these two pages.



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