

Social Tips for Giving and Receiving Gifts

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Dear Parents,

The holiday season is always a very special time of year! Families gather...gifts are exchanged...greetings are given. This year, the holidays will take on an even greater significance for most American families. Most of us will find that the customs and rituals of the holidays will serve as a balm for the pain and hurts of September 11. The holiday season will enable us to connect with familiar people, places, and things.

The holiday rituals require us all to be socially aware and responsive. This, of course, is exceedingly difficult for many kids with LD. Despite their best efforts to "fit in" they often unintentionally offend, upset or -- at best -- confuse their relatives and friends. Their inability to respond appropriately in social situations is a source of puzzlement and angst for relatives. I well remember a mom of a child with LD who was asked by the child's grandparents to arrange for a sitter for the child rather than have him disrupt the family holiday celebrations. What a painful situation for all.

As the parent of a child with LD, you must come to understand (and embrace!) the fact that you have two responsibilities that you must attend to whenever you place your child in a challenging, complex or new social situation. You must:

Prepare the child for the situation and prepare the situation for the child.

In this spirit, you should begin to focus your child on the social expectations and demands of the holiday season and assist him to navigate these activities.

Below are some basic "tips and tricks" that you can teach your child in order to prepare him for the rituals of the holidays.

Social Tips on Buying and Giving Gifts

- **Give each gift very careful thought when you are shopping.**
Remember: It is the thought that counts! A perfect gift is something that the recipient will really enjoy and use. A gift related to a person's interests or hobbies is always appreciated, and it shows that you are listening and paying attention.
- **Remove the price tag.**
But try not to damage the gift when you do.
- **Wrap the gift.**
If you don't know how to wrap, ask someone to teach you...it's a valuable skill. If you really can't wrap, use a gift bag or aluminum foil. But don't give an unwrapped gift or one in a plain brown bag. Tacky!
- **Include a card.**
Buy one or make one...but include it inside or taped to the outside of the package.
- **Be confident and positive when presenting a gift to someone.**
Do Say: "Happy Birthday!" "Happy Hanukkah!" "Merry Christmas!" "I hope that you like it!" "When I saw it in the store, I thought of you!"

Don't Say: "I couldn't spend very much!" "I didn't know what to get you!" "You probably already have one of these!" "I know you won't like this!"

- **Remember the "STPT" of gift giving.**

- Selection: What is the relationship between the gift and the recipient? Is it appropriate?
Inappropriate gifts: A Smashing Pumpkins CD for Grandma; a Shakespeare collection for a 4-year-old; a motorcycle helmet for someone who doesn't own a motorcycle; a box of candy for your aunt who owns a candy store; a Britney poster for your minister.
- Timing: Give a gift on or before the special day, if possible. That demonstrates your thoughtfulness.
- Proportion: What is the relationship between the giver and the recipient? How much time and money did the gift cost? Too much? Not enough?
- Taste: A gift should never be offensive or insulting; joke gifts can backfire! Giving a "Bald Joke Book" to your hairless uncle might not be too cool if Uncle Frank is in a bad mood when he receives it! Gift-giving is an opportunity to be nice and kind!

Social Tips on Receiving and Accepting Gifts

There are only two appropriate ways to accept a gift:

- With **great** pleasure
or
- With **greater** pleasure

Some neat things to say when you open a gift:

- "Thank you so much!" "It will look great in my room." "I know that I will enjoy reading/using/wearing it!" "These will keep me nice and warm!"

Some crummy things to say when you open a gift:

- "How much did it cost?" "Not another sweater/wallet/watch?!?" "Why did you get me this?"
Even if you are disappointed with a gift, remember: It is never appropriate to hurt another person's feelings.

Social Tips on Returning Gifts

It's okay to return a gift to the store if you already have an identical one (e.g. CD, book, etc.) or if it doesn't fit (e.g., sweater, gloves, dress, etc.).

The important thing is to avoid hurting anyone's feelings.

It's best not to tell the giver that you returned it...unless they ask.

If they ask, then say something like, "I really loved the *NSync CD. In fact, I liked it so much that my friends gave me the same CD for my birthday last month. So, I returned yours and got the new Britney CD. It's great!"

Writing Thank-You Notes

It is important to write thank-you notes.

Don't think of this as a chore...rather, view it as an opportunity to make the giver feel good.

It's not required that you write a thank-you note to a person you have already thanked verbally...but, it's not a bad idea.

It's impossible to over-thank!

Write a note as soon as possible after you receive the gift.

Again, this demonstrates your thoughtfulness and good manners.

Write by hand, if possible.

Although it's okay to write a thank-you note on the computer, it's best to do it in your own handwriting. If you do type it, make sure that you sign it by hand.

Don't begin the note with "Thank you for..."

Give some news first. For example:

Dear Grandpa,

We had a great time at your house last week and the plane ride home was fun. I never flew on a small plane before. The pilot showed me the cockpit.

I wanted to thank you for the great computer game you gave me, etc.

Always mention the specific gift that you are acknowledging.

Example: "I really love the Who Wants to be a Millionaire CD-Rom that you gave me for Christmas," or "All of my friends love the snowflake sweater you gave me." Avoid: "Thanks for the gift. It was neat."

If someone gives you money, use the thank-you note to tell the person how you will spend it.

Example: "I will use the money to buy a new baseball glove," or "I will save the money for our March trip to Disney World."

A Final Note...

Your child with LD should be viewed by all as an important and contributing member of the family who should participate fully in all traditions and rituals that your family cherishes. A little extra planning and coaching will ensure that this occurs!

Watch this column! In a few weeks we will run a special feature designed to assist your child in becoming a gracious host and a welcome visitor.

Happy Holidays!

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