

Christmas: what will children remember?

Consumerism has a way of trapping us, pulling focus away from what matters most. Are we truly spending enough quality time with our children?

Opinion

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Christmas

Children

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Children carrying candles attend a mass held by Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa marking the beginning of the Christmas period at the Holy Family church at al-Zaytoun neighbourhood, in Gaza City. Photo: AFP

What truly matters to young children at Christmas? Is it the gifts or is it the memories? To answer this, simply reflect on your own childhood. For many of us, the most cherished moments are not the toys we received but the laughter, warmth and togetherness we experienced with our loved ones.

Today's world is different from what it was in the 20th century. Outdoor adventures have been replaced by screens, technology has woven itself into children's lives from birth and many parents juggle full-time jobs just to provide the essentials.

Amid these changes, it is more crucial than ever to focus on creating meaningful memories that meet young children's need for connection through joyful and playful experiences – the foundation for their well-being and lifelong learning.

The festive season offers a golden opportunity to pause, reflect and prioritise.

Consumerism has a way of trapping us, pulling focus away from what matters most. Are we truly spending enough quality time with our children?

When our children seek attention in ways we interpret as misbehaviour, could it be their way of asking for connection, quality time? Do we truly listen to them? Let them guide play? Understand their interests?

If your answers lean toward 'no', this Christmas could be your chance to turn the page and act in your child's best interest – both for their present and future.

Start by observing your child closely. What sparks their curiosity? What do they gravitate toward? Respond to their cues. If they point at something, acknowledge it. If they ask questions, engage in open-ended conversations that sustain their thinking.

These back-and-forth interactions aren't just bonding moments – they are brain-building learning opportunities, as research from Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child shows.

Encourage creative expression through open-ended play and process art. Let your child experiment with messy art rather than rigid, pre-designed crafts. Allow them to create their own masterpieces, driven by their imagination.

“ Let your child experiment with messy art rather than rigid, pre-designed crafts

- Charmaine Bonello

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This fosters perseverance, resilience, a strong sense of identity and achievement.

Take advantage of Malta's outdoor spaces and cultural offerings. Visit places like Buskett, Ta' Qali, Mdina or Valletta. Explore traditional boat trips, theatres, culinary experiences and contemporary art displays.

These activities not only build cultural capital but also ignite a sense of wonder about our island's rich history and traditions.

Christmas is also an ideal time to teach children the value of giving. Even from a young age, children can learn to think of others in simple yet meaningful ways. Let them experience the joy of giving, which is a priceless lesson that transcends the festive season.

Children have the right to be listened to, taken seriously and to play in ways that are meaningful to them – ways that provide a quality start to their journey on this planet. Be the parent who kindles their flame of awe, wonder and curiosity, not the one who extinguishes it.

This Christmas, choose memories over materialism and give your child the gift of connection, creativity and cultural richness. After all, these are the moments that will stay

with them – and with you – long after the decorations are packed away.

As we reflect on our own lives and the lives of our children, let us not forget those who face unimaginable challenges this Christmas – children who are unwell, displaced or living in war-torn areas. They too deserve to create memories they can cherish, even amidst hardship.

Let's pull the rope together, as a global community, to ensure that every child has a chance to experience love, joy and hope this Christmas and beyond.

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