



The Oxford Learning Holiday Guide to Keep the Brain Active Over the Holidays

Instructions:

In the spirit of the Holiday Countdown Calendar we've compiled this list of holiday activities to keep the kids mentally active over the break! Feeling creative? Why not cut out each tip, put them in a bowl, and have the kids choose their daily mental to-do activity? Or better yet...hang them on the tree and have the kids pick one a day!



Snuggle Up With A Book. Reading is one of the greatest ways to work on school skills over the holidays. Books help media-saturated children unplug. They help children learn how to sustain their attention and develop vocabulary and reading comprehension. Pick a book, read to yourself, or make it a group activity and read out loud to each other!



Take a Hike. Studies have shown that physical activity isn't just good for the body, it's great for the brain as well. Increased blood flow to the brain helps improve memory function. Get the blood pumping, and the wheels start turning! Take advantage of the holiday weather—whether it's blistery cold or balmy and beautiful—and take a family hike. Chase the kids around. Have a snowball fight. Walk around the neighbourhood and look at the lights.



Play Video Games. Research shows that video games might not be as detrimental to kid's mental development as we think. In fact, certain interactive video games might actually help children develop skills (math, literacy, and social) that pay off in the classroom. Spend some quality time with your kids doing something they love! Pick up the controller, and get the kids to teach YOU how to play. Putting the kids in the instructor's seat forces them to think systematically, logically, and analytically about the game and how they play it.



Roll the Dice. Board Games are more than a way to spend a rainy afternoon—they actually teach valuable learning skills. A simple roll of the dice helps kids develop higher-level learning skills such as critical thinking, strategy, analysis, planning, creativity, cooperation, organization, rule-following, as well as improving basic school skills such as addition, subtraction, and reading comprehension.



Do Some Schoolwork. While likely to not be the most popular holiday activity, staying on top of schoolwork is important. The return to class will be here before you know it, so don't get caught unprepared. Open up the book bag, take out the school agenda, and spend an hour or two making headway on schoolwork. If no holiday homework has been assigned, review notes and recharge the academic memory.





Go to the Library. Libraries are more than just a place to locate books. For the developing reader the library can help foster a certain sense of discovery and motivation to learn. Whether it's researching a topic and locating the corresponding books, or discovering a book about an unknown subject simply by wandering the stacks, the experience of going to the library and borrowing books can help kids feel a sense of ownership in the reading process.



Keep A Holiday Journal. Journaling doesn't have to be about sitting down and writing for a period of time, a task that many kids find daunting. Journals can be about anything at all. They can be used to sketch, or to make lists, to keep track of favourite quotes, or to create mind-maps or collages. There really are no rules. The point is to put pen to paper and get introspective. Put aside some time every day to think actively and document the thought process.



Go Surfing. Task the kids with doing an online research project. Any topic goes, whether it's a favourite animal, or what model of snow blower is the best value. Ask the kids to locate the information for you, and then have them tell you what they discovered. This is also a great opportunity to have important conversations about online safety and evaluating information sources.



Send Holiday Thank You Cards. Everybody sends cards before the holidays, so why not start a new tradition of sending holiday thank you cards after the holidays? Make a list of recipients and their addresses. For younger kids, have them decide what they want to say and write it out for them on a sheet of paper that they can use for reference. Then grab the pens and get writing! It's a great way to practice penmanship and try out some new vocabulary words!



Get Puzzlin'. Crossword puzzles. Search-a-words. Puzzles. Sudoku books. All of these not only make great stocking stuffers, they are a great way to challenge the mind. Sure, they can be frustrating, but the process of trying to figure out a problem, and work systematically through the steps needed to reach a solution get the mental synapses firing! You can turn these otherwise solo activities into group games by attempting a puzzle together, talking through the steps, and explaining your reasoning to each other.



Crafts: Crafts are a great family holiday activity because they reinforce many important school skills such as attention-to-detail, following instructions, maintaining focus, as well as encouraging creativity and imagination. Visit your favourite crafting website and get crafting!

