

A Parent's Guide to Christmas Shopping

Parents across the nation are beginning to compile Christmas lists and plan shopping trips.

If your kids are anything like the ones in my life, all you're going to see on their Christmas list is "I don't know" or something you've never heard of. So, here's a few tips on how to smash the shopping this year.

Labu-who?

Firstly, let's tackle the big issue: what do kids like these days? Maybe your children are very clear and reliable in that they've had a Spiderman cake for their birthday every year or still won't part with that Minnie Mouse dress, but if not, you need to do some research.

The bonus of an increasingly tech-savvy generation is that they're leaving a digital footprint – it's much easier to get a hold on what's popular by searching online. I found myself searching for "labubus" recently to see what the kids have been talking about; I now know what it is, but I'm not sure *why* it is. Most toy shops will have a Top 20 guide or you can filter search results by popularity, or if you want tried and tested reviews then Tik Tok is a great resource!

Know your demographic

Have you got a resident spaceman in training, a whizz kid or one who won't stop whizzing? If you know the type of toys, games or themes they like, search for related items; you might find hidden gems you'd never have considered. I never knew you could buy indoor high jump kits until my Olympics-obsessed brother was leaping across the living room and recording his own stats.

Also, finding something they need (a new duvet set, pyjamas, alarm clock, backpack, etc.) themed around a character or topic they already love is an easy way to make presents practical and fun.

Meeting needs

Carrying on the practical and fun theme, as we learn more about neurodiversity and understand our children's habits better, the market for fidget toys and anxiety relief grows. Help tackle the 'always wriggling in their seat' reports from school with quiet, soft, safe fidget toys as a release for all that energy, or consider weighted toys kids can hug when they feel stressed.

Have you heard of the five gift rule? The idea is you buy one item per category: something they want, need, can wear, can read, and finally, something to make memories. Think cameras (you can get ones specifically for kids 3+), scrapbooks, a personalised puzzle or, if you have the budget, tickets to a family event.

Making memories

At the end of the day, presents are only part of the magic. Spending time together, baking Christmas treats and decorating the house are the memories that will last. Next year, a new strange doll will be all the hype, but the mince pies and baubles stay the same. Whether you prefer to watch The Snowman with hot chocolate or Krampus with a coffee, celebrate Christmas your way, together. They won't be kids forever.

by Nicola Jacobs