

Alternative Gift Exchange Ideas

HANDMADE GIFT OR REGIFT EXCHANGE

Family members exchange handmade gifts or regift items they currently own.

SECRET SANTA

Each family member's name is put on a piece of paper and tossed into a hat. Each family member then draws one name and purchases a gift for that individual. Many families set price limits for gifts.

ACTIVITY OR EXPERIENCE

Family members pool their money to purchase some sort of activity or experience (a weekend at the beach, a camping trip, a visit to an amusement park, etc.).

COOKIE EXCHANGE

Each family member bakes a batch of cookies. Draw names from a hat to choose who gets which cookies or put a couple of cookies from each batch onto plates so that each family member gets to sample all of the cookies.

RECIPE BASKET EXCHANGE

Each family member documents a favorite recipe and places the recipe along with the ingredients needed to prepare it in a gift basket. Draw names from a hat to choose who gets which basket.

VOLUNTEER AFTERNOON

Instead of exchanging gifts, family members spend a few hours together giving of their time. Serve at a homeless shelter, help build a Habitat for Humanity home, or whatever volunteer opportunity interests the family.

STOCKING STUFFER EXCHANGE

Family members exchange gifts that are small enough to fit in Christmas stockings. Examples include candy, pieces of fruit, gloves, boxes of tea, socks, pens, and small tools.

BOOK EXCHANGE

Each family member brings a copy of one of his or her favorite books. Have each family member include a brief note explaining why the book is so important to him or her. Draw names from a hat to determine who gets which book.

GIFT AUCTION

Each family member brings a wrapped gift for the exchange. Place various amounts of play money in envelopes and seal them; give one envelope to each member of the family. One family member acts as an auctioneer while the other family members bid on each wrapped gift. The highest bidder wins the gift.

ORNAMENT EXCHANGE

Each family member brings an ornament to the exchange. The ornaments can be left unwrapped and each family member can choose an ornament before he or she leaves or the ornaments can be wrapped and exchanged in some other manner.

THRIFT STORE GIFT EXCHANGE

Each family member draws the name of another family member out of a hat. Everyone then heads out to local thrift stores to purchase gifts. The object is to purchase the best gift you can for the family member whose name you drew without going over a predetermined price limit.

GAME OR PUZZLE EXCHANGE

Each family member purchases a board game or similar item (jigsaw puzzle, trivia book, etc.), wraps it, and brings it to the exchange. Family members play a simple game (such as musical chairs or rock, paper, scissors) and the winner gets to choose a gift first. This winner then sits out while the remaining family members play the game to determine the order in which they get to choose gifts.

WHITE ELEPHANT EXCHANGE OR YANKEE SWAP

Each family member brings one wrapped gift to the exchange. Family members then take turns selecting presents. The first person to go opens the gift he or she chooses. The next person has the option of selecting an unopened gift or stealing the previous person's gift (in this case, the first person would choose another gift). Family members continue using this approach until each family member has a gift.

SERVICE EXCHANGE

Each family member purchases a voucher for a service—a pedicure, a car wash, a massage, housecleaning, etc. Draw names from a hat to determine who gets which voucher. A variation of this exchange is for family members to provide the services themselves.