

## Building Skills for the Holidays

The holiday season can feel like a time of stress and panic, but it doesn't have to. Why not choose to simplify and use this special time to do activities with your children that will not only teach them the true spirit of giving, but also build their independence and confidence as individuals. These activities can be a unique way to introduce new forms of expression where children can discover abilities and talents they never knew they had. For example, creating homemade gifts using drawing, painting, baking, sewing, photography, or flower arranging can open doors to self-expression that children can use as an outlet as they grow older. Creating a family collage is a great way to learn more about each other as you explore favorite colors, likes and dislikes.

Part of developing self-esteem and courage is seeing oneself as a capable individual. When you take the time to teach your child a skill, you not only help them become more capable, but also give constructive ways of achieving independence and responsibility. In fact, teaching your child a skill empowers them in a very positive way and enriches your relationship with them. The following steps can help you teach a skill effectively:

1. **Motivate:** Encourage your child to *want* to learn the skill by explaining the value the skill has to the child or the entire family. For example: *"Once you learn to write your name, you can help sign the holiday cards."*
2. **Select a good time:** Pick a time when neither you nor your child will be rushed or upset by other things.
3. **Break the skill down into small (A to Z) steps:** When skills are learned one step at a time, there are more successes that help build courage and motivation. For example: *The first step is to get all of the ingredients on the counter; the butter, the flour, and the sugar."*
4. **Demonstrate:** Show your child how to perform the skill, explaining slowly as you do. For example: *"Next, watch how I measure the amount of sugar we need to make our cookies."*
5. **Let your child try:** Let your child perform the skill while you stand by, ready to offer help if they need it. Be gentle about mistakes, and let it be fun. For example: *"Okay, now you try it. Just pour the flour into the measuring cup."*
6. **Encourage, encourage, encourage:** Make plenty of encouraging comments that acknowledge your child's efforts and results. For example: *"Great! That's the way to do it."*
7. **Work or play together:** Once your child has learned a skill, you can use this to work or play together, so that you can both enjoy the companionship of the activity. For example: *"Let's eat our homemade cookies!"*

The opportunities for teaching your child new skills during the holiday season are almost endless. Show your children the importance of going green by using objects from nature to create unique gifts, such as pine cones, leaves, and tree limbs, or reusing magazines to clip pictures to make personalized cards. Make cookies or seasonal arrangements together to take to a local retirement center to share with elderly residents who are away from their own family. This special time spent together can start a family tradition that becomes a part of every holiday season and will be a gift that will last for many years to come.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the **ACFC website**, click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.

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