HOLIDAY PRESENTS

Here come the holidays! Glitter and glitz, and enough advertising aimed at children to make you want to throw up your hands in despair. Their little heads are filled from every direction with the idea that they need this toy, that game, gifts here and presents there. How do we help children think beyond the ‘I want’ stage, to the ‘What do I give?’ stage? And, how do we help them think about what are good gifts, not just fancy presents?

This month we have several games involving giving gifts. You can use paper bags, or the mystery can you might have made from the directions last January. Or you can make a mystery box using a shoe box. For the ‘gifts’ to put in the bags, start now saving grocery store ads and magazine pages with pictures of foods, meats, fruits, vegetables, breads and cookies. If you have a collection of food pictures and models, use them.

Start these activities by talking with the children about gifts. Why do we give gifts? Not just at Christmas time, but for birthdays or baby showers. We give gifts to our friends because we want to make them happy. So, do we want to give gifts that could make someone sick? No, we want to give gifts to keep them healthy!

If we invite someone to eat at our house, do we make some food that might make them sick? No, we make food that will help them feel healthy! So, what kinds of foods will make good gifts?

If you have been talking about some of the different vitamins, ask them what kinds of food they would give to a friend who has trouble with their eyes? (Vitamin A) Or to a friend who has weak blood? (Meat and foods with lots of iron.) Someone who has weak teeth and bones? (Milk and dairy foods with calcium.) What about someone who gets bruises very easily? (Fruits and vegetables with vitamin C.)

Giving Good Gifts

What you need:
- a small paper bag for each child
- pictures or models of foods
- colored paper
- colors or paints
- ribbons or stickers
- glue or tape

Activity 1.

Have the children work in pairs. Let each child decorate their paper bag like a present (Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah), using the colors, ribbons and stickers.

Let each child find a picture of the food gift they want to give their partner. They cut out the picture and stick it on the colored paper. If they are able, they can write a note on the paper about why they chose this good food for their friend. Or, when they give the...
bag to their partner, they can tell the friend what they want the food to do for them.

Or, make it a guessing game. After each child presents the gift to their partner, the one who received the gift has to guess what the food is good for and how it will make them healthier.

Activity 2.
Like the first activity, but instead of giving the gift to a partner in the classroom, let each child pick a family member. After they find the food and put it in the bag, they tell the class who their gift is for, and why they chose the food they did. They could take these home to parents.

Activity 3.
Like the first activity, but have the children pick a celebrity. They decorate their bag, find the food, and then tell who they picked, and why they think the celebrity needs that food. Let them use their imaginations. For example, maybe Barney is purple because he got bruised all over, so he needs more vitamin C! Or maybe Dr. Honeydew of the Muppets needs more vitamin A so he won’t need glasses anymore!

Mystery Gift

Make a mystery box out of a shoebox. Wrap it like a present. Put a model, or a real, food in the mystery box. Let the children take turns putting their hand into the box to feel the ‘present’. After everyone has felt it, let them guess what the food is and tell why it would be a good gift for them.

1. Cut a hole large enough for a child’s hand in one end of the shoe box.

Healthy ‘Cookies’

Rather than having Christmas cookies with all the sugar and butter, let the children cut out holiday shapes from bread or graham crackers, and decorate them with jam or jelly. You can use bread on the menu as a snack, or get extra for an additional treat. For a multi-layer ‘cookie’ the children could cut both bread and a slice of cheese into the holiday shape, and spread it with mustard or ketchup.

What you will need:
1 (or more) slices of bread for each child. Use whole wheat, or a mixture of brown and white breads, or graham crackers.
Several colors of jam or jelly, or use some of the light, fruit-flavored cream cheese or other spreads
plastic knives or spoons to spread with Colored sprinkles, raisins, etc.
Cookie cutters in appropriate holiday shapes

What to do:
Have each child use a cookie cutter to cut a shape out of their slice of bread Let them decorate their slice of bread with one or more colors of jam or spread, then add a few raisins, sprinkles, etc.

NOTE: Also take a look at the Parent’s newsletter this month for another cookie idea.

2. Tape or staple the top part of a sock inside the box, over the hole. Make it tight.

3. Wrap the box like a present, but leave the hole open so they can put their hand in.

4. Put a food or model inside, and let them feel it, then guess what it is. No peeking!