

How to avoid 'toy overload' this holiday season

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(HealthDay)—Santa's sleigh may be brimming with toys, but some

experts say an excess of dolls, trucks and other playthings can overwhelm a child.

Instead of giving more toys this [holiday season](#), think about giving children memory-creating [experiences](#) such as lessons or family outings, the experts suggest.

"Toy overload is real, and something we see every holiday season," said Joshua Klapow, a [clinical psychologist](#) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Just make sure you choose an experience that is truly for the [child](#), rather than something for yourself that you think the child will enjoy, Klapow said in a university news release.

However, many kids have a hard time with the abstract nature of a destination gift, he noted.

"They can't see it, touch it, understand it. If you can include pictures, videos or some approximation of what they are going to experience, it will help drive the meaningfulness home," Klapow said.

For example, if you give a child a zoo membership, it could be accompanied by a plush toy of the child's favorite zoo animal.

"The effect, a feeling or the energy created during an experience, is often what stays with us over many years. For this reason, and many more, we are strongly encouraging families and friends to give an experience for the holidays, instead of an object or a toy," said Amy Miller, director of engagement at the university's performing arts centers.

Her advice? Base the [gift](#) on a child's interests. For example, an aspiring

dancer may enjoy a community dance class while an avid reader may enjoy a creative writing class.

"You never know how one artistic moment may inspire someone, especially a child," Miller said. "Plus, a new creative outlet is beneficial to their general health and development."

Ideally, Klapow said, a mix of gifts might be best.

"A few smaller gifts (immediate reinforcement) and maybe one or two destination gifts that occur later will allow children to satisfy their developmentally appropriate desire for immediate gratification while still preventing toy overload," he said.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics offers [holiday health and safety tips](#).

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