

Time for a quiz... What can the kids make for free that you can always leave at someone else's house? Answer: A Mess! Hey, take it easy, I never claimed to be funny, just mildly informative and hopefully helpful. Ok, really, time to get back to business. It's getting near that time of year when we think about what we can do for the people we love and appreciate. Oftentimes that appreciation will be expressed as a gift from us. The problem I frequently run into is I know a family well enough I would like to buy a gift, however I either a) cannot afford a separate gift for every member or b) do not know every member well enough to select appropriate individual gifts. This article will go beyond the standard fallback of a gift card for the whole family and help to make your gifts more personalized and hopefully better received.

The first thing you want to take into consideration is that individual family. What are their likes and dislikes, what do they do on the weekends? Are they pet lovers? Do they like to play outside or do they rarely come into the daylight? (Caution: if they avoid the daylight, don't give them garlic and stakes in their gift basket...again I repeat I am not a comedian.)

Families with young children

When I first put my oldest daughter into nursery school she brought me home an original work of art every Tuesday and Thursday. It took me about 3-months to realize I was not going to be able to keep taping every masterpiece up on my walls, cabinet, doors and just



about and flat surface I could find. Then I found an article in a parenting magazine that addressed my very issue. There are pictures that mount on the wall that have hinged frames so you can put in new art weekly and it holds up to 50 sheets of paper. I love them! These frames not only allow me to showcase this week's masterpieces, but also let me store 50 of them until later.

This next idea is not incredibly unique, I admit, and it is probably the first thing you think of when you think of getting the family next door a gift. A game, an age appropriate game to be exact, is still a great choice. When you pick a game make sure you use the youngest child's age as a criteria as to which game you want to get. Generally speaking, follow the label on the box. If the game says 8 to all ages, it won't be fun to try and play with a 5-year-old. Remember if you get an easier game sometimes the children can play it without the adults having to participate! That being said, I have been known to have a card stuck to my head or a few extra noses added to my own anyhow.

Gift Baskets



If you go to Amazon.com and type in gift baskets you get 363,161 results. I know that I can personally put together a more individual and personalized basket than I can buy. However, these are some very creative and noteworthy baskets I have seen over the years. Try putting together one of these next time. The Movie Basket includes popcorn, box candies, a movie certificate, a micro fleece blanket, and box of tissue (if

mom is a weeper). The Sundae Basket consists of a sundae bowl and spoons, some toppings and don't forget the maraschino cherries. The Game Basket might include dice, a couple decks of cards, poker chips, Uno or Yatzhee, a book of card games, and remember the pencil and pad of paper to keep score on.

Outdoor family

For the family that spends a lot of time outside try something based on their favorite activity or at least an activity they spend a lot of time doing. I know that my neighbors are outside a lot and like to entertain outdoors too. Consider an outdoor game such as Bocci Ball or croquet set.

If the family like to bike together, you could get them water bottles for their bikes or a odometer and a book of local trails (you can also print out a local scenic route for their next ride). Do they like to watch sports? What is their favorite team? For most sports buffs getting each member a T-shirt in their favorite team is always a hit, especially as kids grow out of them all the time (GO BLUE!).

For an outdoor family with pets that they dote on, how about some collapsible travel bowls? Or maybe they would like a doggie backpack.

My girls like to put the pack on the dog then the dog carries around their stuff. More than once I have found a dog carrying around a doll.



When asked for an explanation I was informed that Caesar (2-year-old German Shepherd) was the most reliable mode of transportation.

Although Carlie (4-year-old Greyhound) is fast there is no guarantee she would not bury the doll in the backyard, and Brutus lacks all

sense of urgency (12-year-old German Shepherd).

The Insiders

My mom bought a snow cone machine for the grandkids, and you know that is the first thing they ask for when they get to her house. Once you have the machine, the rest is relatively inexpensive. There are even reusable cups if you want to avoid the paper waste. Plus, the syrup comes in a thousand different flavors so there's always something new to try. It is also a good choice in snacks (if you keep your syrup in check).



Another idea I love is a picture clock. It's a functional way to brag, and what Mom (or Grandma) doesn't want to show off all her children (or grandchildren).

For a more recommendations head to the Beyond the Sippy Cup blog at <http://www.beyondthesippycup.com>.