

# Holiday Gift Ideas for Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers



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According to recent US Census data, 30 percent of households have a child under six years of age. So there is a good chance that you are wondering what to get a baby, toddler or preschooler for the holidays. Before you give up and fall back on electronic screen ideas like you did when you last took your toddler to a restaurant, here are holiday gift ideas for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers from your Two Peds, by ages and stages of development:

**0-3 months:** Babies this age have perfect hearing and enjoy looking at faces and objects with contrasting colors. Music, mobiles, and bright posters are some age-appropriate gift ideas. Infants self-soothe through sucking—if you can figure

out what your nephew's favorite type of binky is, wrap up a bunch—they are expensive and often disappear mysteriously.

**3-6 months:** Babies start to reach and grab at objects. There are all sorts of crinkly, textured baby toys out there for babies to enjoy. Give items big enough to hold onto but safe enough to put in their mouths. Remember that any object small enough to fit inside a paper towel tube is small enough to be a choking hazard. Personalize a cloth or vinyl book. The baby will appreciate the book and parents will enjoy the personalization and ability to clean the book.

**6-12 months:** Around six months, babies begin to sit up. Intellectually, they begin to understand "cause and effect." Good choices of gifts include toys that allow a baby to activate- to make sounds, play music, or cause animals to pop up.

For a nine-month-old just starting to pull herself up to a standing position, a water or sand table will provide hours of entertainment in the upcoming year. Right now you can bring winter inside if you fill the water table with a mound of snow. Buy some inexpensive measuring cups and later in the summer a toddler will enjoy standing outside splashing in the water.

**12-18 months:** This is the age kids learn to stand and walk. They enjoy things they can push while walking such as shopping carts or plastic lawn mowers. Give gifts which promote joint attention. Joint attention is the kind of attention a child shares with people during moments of mutual discovery. Joint attention starts at two months of age when a parent smiles at their baby and their baby smiles back. Later, around 18 months, if a parent points at a dog in a book, the child will look at the dog, then look back at the parent, and smile. A

child not only shows interest in the same object, but will acknowledge that both she and the parent are interested. Joint attention is thought to be important for social and emotional growth.

Toddlers enjoy making music: there are plenty of percussion sets out there!

**18-24 months:** Although kids this age cannot pedal yet, they enjoy riding on toys such as Big Wheels “Fred Flintstone” style. Dexterous enough to drink out of a cup and use a spoon and fork, toddlers can always use another place setting. Toddlers are also able to manipulate shape sorters and toys where they put a plastic ball into the top and the ball goes down a short maze/slide. Avoid the marble runs though, this age still puts choking hazards in their mouths. They also love containers to collect things, dump out, then collect again.

This is the age when kids love making animal sounds. Consider a zoo membership . When you count up how many words your toddler knows, animal noises count as words. (What does the lion say? “Roar!”) Many zoos have animal cams that you can first watch from afar. Pair with a stuffed animal and the entire family will enjoy making animal sounds together.

**2-3 years:** To encourage motor skills, offer tricycles, balls, bubbles, and boxes to crawl into and out of. Choose crayons over markers because crayons require a child to exert pressure and therefore develop hand strength. Swiping a phone or ipad does not develop fine motor skills in the same fashion.

Dolls, cars, and sand boxes all foster imagination. Don't forget those indestructible board books so kids can “read” to themselves. By now, the plastic squirting fish bath toys you bought your niece last year are probably squirting out black specks of mold instead of water- get her a new set.

At three years, kids become more and more capable of self care. They start to pull shoes on themselves and can hang

their coat up on a hook. The problem? They often can not reach hooks. Offer to purchase a set of cute hooks to hang low in your grandchild's room or the mudroom.

## **Preschooler gifts**

**3-4 years:** Now kids engage in elaborate imaginary play. They enjoy "dress up" clothes to create characters- superheroes, dancers, wizards, princesses, kings, queens, animals. Kids also enjoy props for their pretend play, such as plastic kitchen gadgets, magic wands, building blocks, pretend food and of course, a stethoscope. They become adept at pedaling tricycles or even riding small training-wheeled bikes and balance bikes. Other gift ideas include art supplies such as paint, markers, or side-walk chalk. Play-doh helps develop fine motor skills and hand strength. Children this age understand rules and turn-taking and can be taught simple card games such as "go fish," "war," and "matching."

Three-year-olds recognize colors but can't read- so they can finally play the classic board game Candyland®, and they can rote count in order to play the sequential numbers game Chutes and Ladders®. Preschool kids now understand and execute the process of washing their hands independently. One problem: they can't reach the faucets on the sink. A personalized, sturdy step stool will be appreciated for years. Likewise, they love to help cook and will use a kitchen counter standing step with study sides for years to come.

Looking ahead, in the spring, a three or four-year-old may start participating in team sports (although they often go the wrong way down the field) or in other classes such as dance or swimming lessons. Give your relatives the gift of shin guards and soccer balls with a shirt. Offer to pay for swim lessons and package the gift certificate with a pair of goggles.

While three-year-olds still do not understand time, four-year-olds start to appreciate time better. Concepts such as

yesterday and tomorrow take on more meaning. A good starter clock is a color clock. They signal time by color and are often used to signal to children when it's time to get out of bed on weekends.

**5-year-olds:** Since 5-year-olds can hop on one foot, games like Twister® are fun. Kids this age start to understand time and charts. Get your child a calendar so they can count ahead to your next visit!. They can also work jigsaw puzzles with somewhat large pieces.

For any age, consider tickets to a junior high school musical or minor league sports game. Avoiding large venues not only saves money, but saves time parking and affords the ability to get in and out easily if needed.

The excitement of the surprise is sometimes as exciting as the gift itself. Hence, the reason unboxing youtube videos are as popular as ever. Wrap a child's gift in layers of sparkly crunchy paper and the smiles will come even before the gift is seen.

Happy gifting!

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