



**Special points of interest:**

- Sleigh bells ringing, chestnuts roasting, snow is falling—it's *the most wonderful time of the year!* The holiday season is an opportunity to spend quality time with our loved ones, give thanks to one another and celebrate the arrival of a new year.
- It also means that the kiddos are out of school for an extended period of time, which may interrupt the learning structure of school.
- Don't worry, we are here to help! We've come up with simple and fun ways to sneak a little learning into your holiday traditions.



# Pulse!

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## Keeping your kids engaged over winter break

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It's December and winter break is here! It's a great time to relax, get away from school and work responsibilities for a little while, and enjoy time with your family. If you have a trip planned for those two weeks, you'll be busy until it's time for school to start again. If you're going to be home for those two weeks, however, you may wonder how to keep your kids' brains engaged until they head back to school. Suddenly, they have dozens of hours at their disposal and no homework to work on, no projects to complete, and nothing they need to do. It would be easy to let your child spend the break in front of their smartphone or video game system, but that's not helpful for brain development and could lead to a bigger struggle when they return to school. Below are some strategies to keep their brains engaged.

### 1. Talk about current events.

There's a lot going on in just American politics, and even more going on around the world. This creates the perfect opportunity to have conversations about current events. Chat about the potential repercussions of various political decisions and how things that seem to be happening a world away could impact your kids and your home.

### 2. Find a new book to enjoy.

If your child is an engaged reader who can't wait to get their hands on a new book, take them to the library or bookstore to choose a new book to read over winter break. You could also break out a Christmas gift a little early, while they'll have plenty of time to enjoy it. On the other hand, if your child is a reluctant reader, consider choosing a book to read together or offering them an incentive for finishing a book you think they'll love before winter break is over.

### 3. Take your child shopping with you.

Are you heading out for your regular grocery shopping trip over winter break? What about a big shopping trip for holiday meals? Take your child along with you as you shop. This is a great chance to talk to them about budgeting and making wise choices: generic versus name brand materials, for example. You can also take your child Christmas shopping with you as you choose gifts for other friends and family members or select gifts for the Angel Tree or other charitable donations. Talk to them about how you decide what to buy and how it fits into your overall holiday budget. The holidays aren't an excuse for learning to stop—and in fact, in many cases, your child can learn just as much during the holidays as they would during the school year.



#### 4. Check out a local museum.

In many cases, you might not ever have had the chance to explore your local museums—but winter break is a great time to put this activity on your schedule. Do a quick search for what museums are available in your area: children’s museums, art museums, and science and energy museums are all great choices, but anything that’s available locally is the perfect opportunity to explore with the kids.

#### 5. Cook together.

From baking cookies with little ones to inviting older kids to help put out the Christmas feast, cooking is an excellent opportunity to learn life skills while incorporating math and problem-solving. Need a substitute for sour cream? Let your child help you look up solutions that have been used in the past. Want to double your favorite cookie recipe so that you have plenty to share? Invite your child to help work out the math.

#### 6. Make it a challenge.

Ask quiz questions as you’re driving to the next holiday location. Drill spelling words as you’re wrapping holiday gifts together. Offer your child a challenge, then make it fun: this is one of the most effective ways to incorporate learning over your holidays.

#### 7. Pick up a book on something that interests your child.

If your child loves reading fiction, it can be easy to let nonfiction fall by the wayside—especially if you’re still reading with them on a regular basis. Over the holiday season, however, try out a nonfiction book on a subject you know they find fascinating. It will help encourage their interest in the subject and keep young minds engaged.

### ***Here are some other simple and fun ways to sneak a little learning into your holiday traditions.***

*Have your children help create your holiday menu by finding recipes in a cookbook together. They can practice their math skills by comparing prices of different brands of ingredients at the grocery store.*

*Make the most of holiday travel by turning car rides into a learning opportunity. For the older kids, test geography knowledge by trying to name all 50 states and their capitals. You can even have them point out license plates from different states. Younger kids can count the number of different colored cars.*

*Turn dreams of a White Christmas into meteorology fun. Children and adults alike, who doesn’t like waking up to a beautiful snow fall? Have your children research how many times it has snowed on Christmas day in the past 10 years. They can collect data on temperature, precipitation and snowfall amounts.*

*Build math and measuring skills into wrapping presents by asking your children to measure the gifts with a tape measure or ruler to determine how much wrapping paper is needed.*

*Explore your family heritage by creating a family tree. Many families spend the holiday season with extended family, so it’s a great opportunity to encourage your children to take an interest in learning more about their heritage. Have them come up with a list of questions to interview grandparents and other family members. It’s a unique way to hear family stories and learn about the childhood experiences of older relatives. Everyone will enjoy going down memory lane.*

#### **Upcoming Events:**

##### **December 20, 2019:**

Shortened Day

##### **December 23, 2019:**

Winter break begins

##### **January 2, 2019**

School begins

#### **Next Issue:**

January 6, 2019



*Mix-up your nightly reading routine.* Pick out some holiday-themed books to read by the fire place, your Christmas tree or make a nice cozy pillow fort. If you're traveling, take some audiobooks to keep the kids engaged in the car.

Whether you do one or all of these activities, you and your children are bound to have fun creating wonderful family memories this holiday season. And keeping your children's skills sharp will make the transition back-to-school after the New Year a smooth one.



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