

A festive graphic for a holiday gift guide. The background is a light-colored wooden plank surface. Scattered around the edges are several wrapped gifts: some in white paper with red or yellow ribbons, some in blue checkered paper with red ribbons, some in grey paper with white snowflakes and yellow ribbons, and one in blue paper with white snowflakes and a yellow ribbon. A string of colorful Christmas lights (red, green, blue, yellow, pink) is draped across the lower half of the image. The text 'HOLIDAY gift GUIDE' is written in a large, black, hand-drawn font with a speckled texture. The word 'HOLIDAY' is in all caps, 'gift' is in lowercase, and 'GUIDE' is in all caps. The year '2016' is written below it in a similar black, speckled font.

HOLIDAY
— gift —
GUIDE

2016

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coping with HOLIDAY DEPLOYMENT

ERIN BETTIS | MILITARY ONE CLICK

Many of us have been there. We've had to endure the holiday season while our service member is deployed. Once past Halloween, panic settles in knowing that holiday parties, photo-ops and precious seasonal memories will happen without our spouse. Panic soon molds into sadness as lights are strung and stockings are hung. Mothers often find it hard to keep the spirit alive when she's dealing with her own heartache and loneliness. Some advise not to look at this time of year as a "holiday season" since that can feel overwhelming, and to only focus on the one day. To help combat the holiday blues, here are 4 ways to better manage those depressed feelings that often arise when a spouse is deployed over the holidays.

1.) LET GO OF "DOING IT ALL"

Break free from the rigid to-do list. Now is not the time to be the "warrior spouse" by doing it all. Instead, take a

step back to appreciate what you have accomplished, rather than what still needs to be done. For example, if you're unable to add lights on the outside of your home when it's done traditionally, try thinking about the clothes that were washed and put away or the story you read to your children before bed. Focusing on small accomplishments relieves the stress of what didn't get done.

Also, ask for help. It's sometimes easier said than done because vulnerability can be difficult, but no one can "do it all" with or without a deployed spouse. Call up friends who are in the same situation and organize a casual potluck dinner for your holiday feast. Ask a neighbor to shovel snow from your driveway. Ask a friend to help with gift wrapping. Seeking help from friends and fellow military spouses in a challenging time eliminates feelings of isolation and strengthens relationships.

2.) PRACTICE HEALTHY COPING

Free yourself from overindulgence with food, alcohol and spending as those tend to increase feelings of depression. Instead, keep your thoughts focused on lighthearted tasks to help you unwind. For instance, get in deep with a classic novel or a Netflix series. Try the Pinterest recipe or craft

you've been meaning to create. Expunge your deepest feelings onto the pages of a journal. Or, relax with a single glass of wine and a hot bath.

One of the fastest ways to lift your mood is through exercise. Even a brisk neighborhood dog walk can increase endorphins and send your brain into a meditative state. Endorphins are chemicals in the body that, when interacting with receptors in the brain, "reduce stress, ward off anxiety and feelings of depression, boost self-esteem and improve sleep," says WebMD.com.

3.) DEMAND-FREE TIME

A spouse acting as a single parent has a great deal of daily demands placed on themselves while their service member is deployed. Holiday stress can only pack on the feelings of overwhelm. Give yourself permission to be alone. And try not to feel guilty about it. Make it a priority to set aside time to be demand-free from children, work and the holiday have-tos.

There are several ways to be kid-free. For instance, Sittercity offers free access into their database of reliable, local babysitters with a valid DOD registration. You can even request a free background check to verify an identity. Also, many base Child Development Centers (CDCs) provide hourly care with some offering Saturday Getaways. If you can afford a helper, consider having a high school student come occasionally to play with younger kids while you help with homework or just have some time to catch up on errands or housework," suggests Healthy Exchange, a Dartmouth College publication specializing in health and wellness.

Healthy Exchange goes on to suggest setting realistic boundaries inside and outside the home. To prevent burn out at work, try setting your hours and the amount of responsibility you feel

comfortable taking. Sheryl Sandberg notes in her book, *Lean In*, that many employers won't stop making demands on their employees' time. It's up to us to know when to draw the line and determine how many hours we work in a day. In other words, the best way to make room for demand-free time is to make the choice deliberately.

4.) TALK TO YOUR SPOUSE

Talking to your spouse can certainly boost your mood through the holidays. There's a reason why many wives and girlfriends are glued to their cell phones so that they don't miss the rare phone call home. They're a family who cares very deeply for one another. Sharing holiday experiences with your spouse can make you feel that deep sense of connection that you're longing for.

There are many creative ways to feel connected to your spouse over the holidays. For instance, if Skype is available, try arranging family traditions around a Skype-chat so that you (and s/he) don't feel as isolated. If Skype isn't an option, handwrite a letter describing your feelings. The other person in the relationship is likely to understand since s/he is going through the same separation you are. Also, you don't need to be under the same roof to do the things you love – together. Many couples read books together, pray together and even exercise together. All of these are spirit-lifting ways to feel less alone and better connected to the one you love.

To feel free from the holiday ho-hum during a deployment, drop the to-do list, do more of what you love, claim your demand-free time and share the experience with your spouse. Braving a deployment in December can be tough, but this circumstance shouldn't rob you of your happiness – of which you're 100% in control.

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HELP MILITARY FAMILIES

this holiday season

STORY BY MILITARYBENEFITS

Military budgets, which are often already stretched to their limits, do not contain a lot of money for buying Christmas presents. However, military families are also some of the most deserving people during the holiday season. To help thank military families for the sacrifices made year-round, many organizations offer programs to make Christmas possible for deserving military families, especially those with children who deserve to have a joy-filled Christmas.

Here are some programs and options available to military families in need and how people can assist:

ADOPT-A-FAMILY

Numerous organizations offer adopt-a-family programs. Military families who can show proof of need, submit their wish lists to the organization and donors adopt the families by purchasing items from their wish lists for Christmas. Because of the popularity of adopt-a-family programs, you must fill out an application months before Christmas in order to get on the list. Pay attention to deadlines and get your application in as soon as the window opens because spaces fill up fast.

FULL CIRCLE HOME

Full Circle Home gives deployed servicemen a chance to send a gift box to their wives back home. Gift boxes contain pampering items, such as lotions, bubble baths and spa socks. They also feature a handwritten note from the serviceman.

MILITARY INSTALLATION SUPPORT

The family centers at military installations offer assistance in many forms during the holidays including programs such as Santa's Shop in which donations are taken for military families in need. Contact the local installation for how you can help. For assistance, reach out to the Family Readiness Group, Chaplain or MWR.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Operation Christmas Spirit supports local military families in the form of holiday gratitude by: "Adopting" over 100 families and fulfilling their Christmas wish lists with gifts for all family members and gift cards to do their own shopping; Sponsor gifts and crafts at unit holiday parties; "Adopt" single Marines and Sailors, giving them gifts and gift cards to celebrate whether near or far from their families.

OPERATION HOLIDAY JOY

Donate to Operation Holiday Joy. 100% of your donation goes to food and toys this holiday season and you can designate your donation to a specific program.

OPERATION HOMEFRONT

Operation Homefront offers many programs for military families throughout the year and Christmas is no exception. The organization partners with Dollar Tree to provide toys for military children. To receive a gift, you must register for your local Operation Homefront Toy Distribution. If your family lacks the funds for a holiday meal, you can also attend one of the organization's holiday meal events and receive all of the fixings for the perfect Christmas dinner.

RED CROSS

The Red Cross provides many military family services including, but not limited to, financial assistance and deployment services.

SPIRIT OF SHARING

The Adopt-A-Military Family program provides commissary cards, gifts, toys and more to military families in need.

SOLDIERS' ANGELS

Soldiers' Angels sponsors Operation Outreach Holiday Support. Lower enlisted families can sign up to receive a \$50-\$100 gift card to help pay for a

holiday meal and gifts for children ages 15 and under. Families must sign up for the program by December 15 and are matched with donors from around the United States.

TOYS FOR TOTS

The U. S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program collects new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to less fortunate children in the community in which the campaign is conducted. The program is for all children, including military kids. Donate or request a toy.

TREES FOR TROOPS

Every family needs a Christmas tree and Tree for Troops, sponsored by the Christmas Spirit Foundation, offers free Christmas trees for military families. Trees are available at 62 bases throughout the United States.

VETERANS SERVICE

Many Veterans' Service Organizations (American Legion, VFW, etc.) provide a wide variety of holiday support to service members, veterans, and their families. Program benefits often include meals, food, gift cards, and adopt-a-family, or adopt-a-veteran programs.

USO

Local USO offices provide a variety of holiday assistance programs to military families and veterans such as holiday dinners, events with Santa, toy and food drives and much more.

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

Donate to Wreaths Across America which coordinates wreath laying ceremonies on a specified Saturday in December at Arlington, as well as veterans' cemeteries and other locations in all 50 states and beyond. They organize a week of events including international veteran's tributes, ceremonies at State Houses and a week-long "Veteran's Parade" between Maine and Virginia.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO SUPPORT THE MILITARY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Care packages, holiday cards and letters, thanking our veterans and military families are all ways we can provide additional support.

ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS

Whether your service member is deployed or lucky enough to be home for the holidays, take advantage of the Christmas programs for military families to help you enjoy your holidays. Staying connected with your command or unit's Family Readiness Group can be a way to find out about local programs that offer gifts and meals for military families to help make your holiday even more special.

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how to simplify holiday GIFT WRAPPING

STORY BY YOUR DAILY PAPER

While holiday shoppers are often enthusiastic about finding great gifts for their loved ones, many are decidedly less excited about wrapping those gifts. Many holiday shoppers spend hours wrapping gifts each year, and as gift lists grow, so does the amount of time needed to get all of those presents wrapped, hidden, packaged and/or shipped. Shoppers can employ the following strategies to make the process go much more smoothly and to reduce gift wrap-related anxiety.

- Relearn the basics. Some people may think they know how to wrap gifts, only to realize it's harder than it looks once the paper, scissors and Scotch tape comes out. Relearn the basics by viewing online tutorials prior to wrapping gifts so the lessons learned remain fresh in your mind. Learn how to wrap standard clothing gift boxes and recognize that such boxes can often be used to house oddly-shaped items.

- Wrap as you buy. Instead of getting bogged down with wrapping all in one evening, wrap presents as you purchase them. This ensures that you don't leave everything for the last minute and reduces the likelihood that curious kids or inquisitive spouses discover gifts before the big day.

- Work on a hard surface. It may be tempting to lay everything out on your bed and wrap gifts while you're binge-watching the latest Netflix series. But hard surfaces make the best places to wrap gifts. This ensures there won't be any wrinkles in the paper and that you won't lose supplies in the bedspread.

- Rely on double-sided tape. For that professional look, invest in some

double-sized tape so you will not have any unsightly tape lines.

- Keep all of your supplies together. Store wrapping paper, scissors, tags, tape, ribbons, and whatever else you may need to wrap gifts in one convenient location. This cuts down on time wasted hunting for supplies around the house.

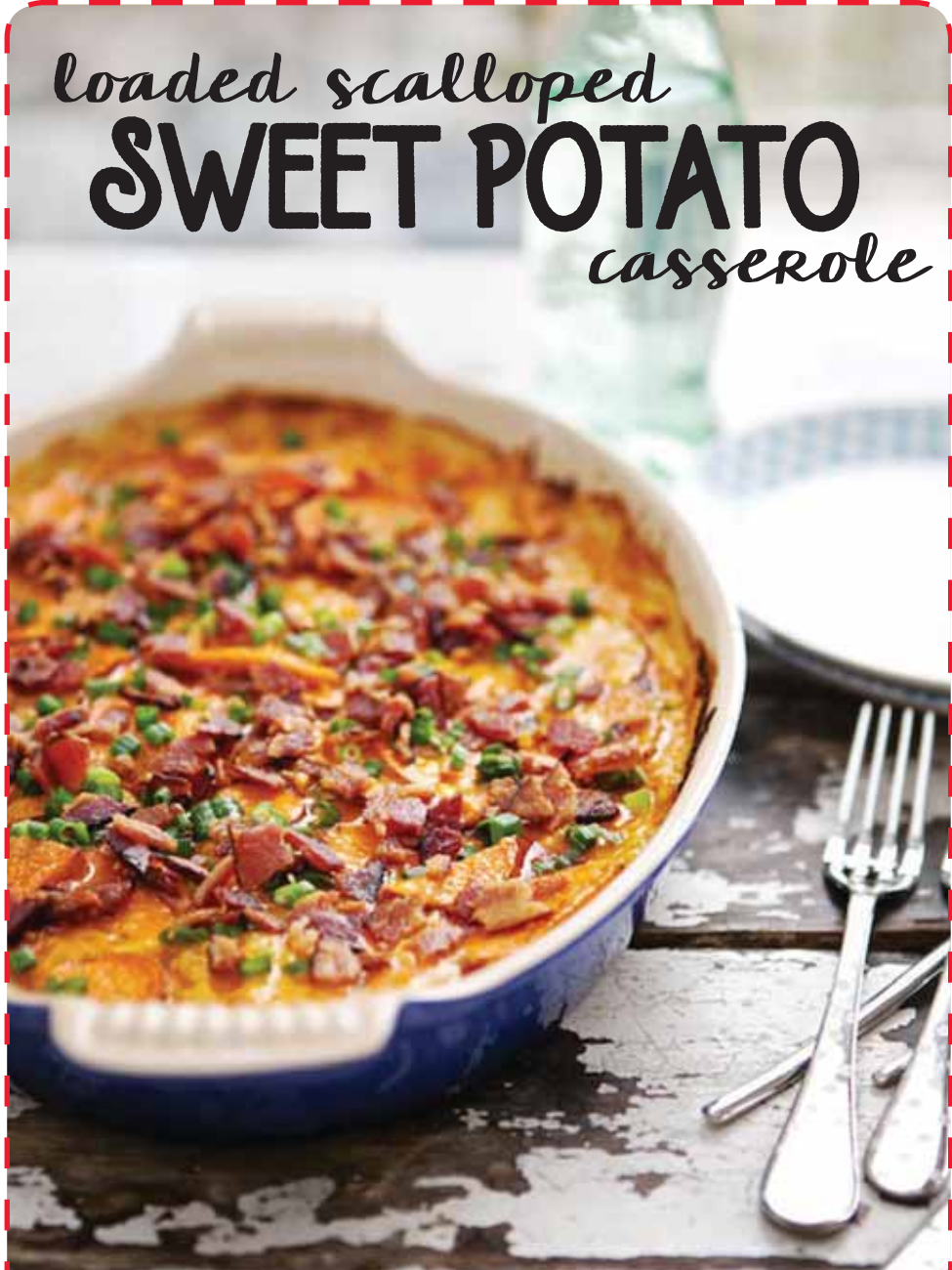
- Draw on plain gift boxes. Make your own "wrapped gifts" by drawing or stenciling on plain gift boxes if you're short on time.

- Identify recipients by gift wrap. Designate one gift wrap for each person on your shopping list. This way you can easily distinguish one person's gifts from another's. This can keep things more organized when sorting and visiting with friends and relatives later on.

- Keep gift bags on hand. Gift bags work in a pinch and make it easy to conceal gifts that are hard to wrap. Curious loved ones can easily peak inside gift bags, so be sure to wrap gifts in tissue paper before placing them in the bags.

- Less is usually more. Do not use too much paper when wrapping; otherwise, you will be left with bulky, sloppy folds. Before trimming the gift wrap from the roll, check that it overlaps the ends of the box by just a couple of inches. A sturdy paper will help you achieve crisper folds and prevent tears when wrapping. For the simplest wrapping design, try kraft paper (brown mailing paper), which can be dressed up with ribbons, cutouts or stamps.

The process of wrapping holiday gifts can go more smoothly when applying some time-tested tips and tricks.



loaded scalloped SWEET POTATO casserole

Ingredients

ROASTED SWEET POTATOES

- 4 Sweet Potatoes sliced 1/4 inch
- Olive Oil
- Garlic Salt
- Pepper
- Smoked Paprika

TOPPINGS

- 10 ounces Bacon, crumbled
- 2 Ripe Avocados, sliced & dipped in lemon juice
- 1/2 cup sliced Green Onion
- Salsa
- Sour Cream

CASSEROLE

- 4 tbsp Butter
- 3 tbsp Gluten Free Flour (or AP Flour)
- 2 1/2 cups Fat Free Milk
- 3 cups Shredded Cheddar Cheese
- 1 cup Shredded Mozzarella Cheese
- Cooking Spray

Method

- Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees F with the rack in the middle. Prepare a baking sheet with tin foil or a Silpat liner. Toss sweet potato slices in olive oil, garlic salt, pepper & smoked paprika. Arrange sweet potatoes on the sheet pan in a single layer. Bake about 20 minutes until potatoes are soft & slightly browned. Remove from oven & let cool a bit.

- Melt butter in a sauce pan, whisk in flour. Stir in milk & bring to a simmer. Set aside.

- Spray a 3 quart baking dish with cooking spray. Layer potatoes & 1 cup of the cheddar cheese, repeat this for 2nd layer. Add 3rd layer of sweet potatoes, pour milk mixture over the top. Top with 3rd cup of cheddar cheese & mozzarella.

- Cover casserole dish with tin foil. Bake for 60 minutes. Carefully remove the foil & broil for 5 -10 minutes. Cheese should be slightly browned & bubbling. Be sure it does not burn. Remove from oven & let sit a few minutes. Sauce will thicken as the casserole cools.

- Top with avocado, green onions & bacon crumbles. Serve with salsa & sour cream.

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TOY INSIDER'S HOTTEST TOYS OF 2016

INFANTS & TODDLERS (0-2 YRS)

PRESCHOOL (3-5 YRS)

GRADE SCHOOL (6-8 YRS)

TWEENS (9+)



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TALK-TO-ME MIKEY

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HOT WHEELS AI

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✂️ 👤 ❤️




SKYLANDERS IMAGINATORS

✂️ 👤 ❤️ ABC 📺



SNUGGLES, MY DREAM PUPPY

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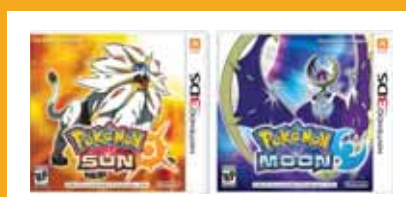
LEGO STAR WARS RESISTANCE X-WING FIGHTER

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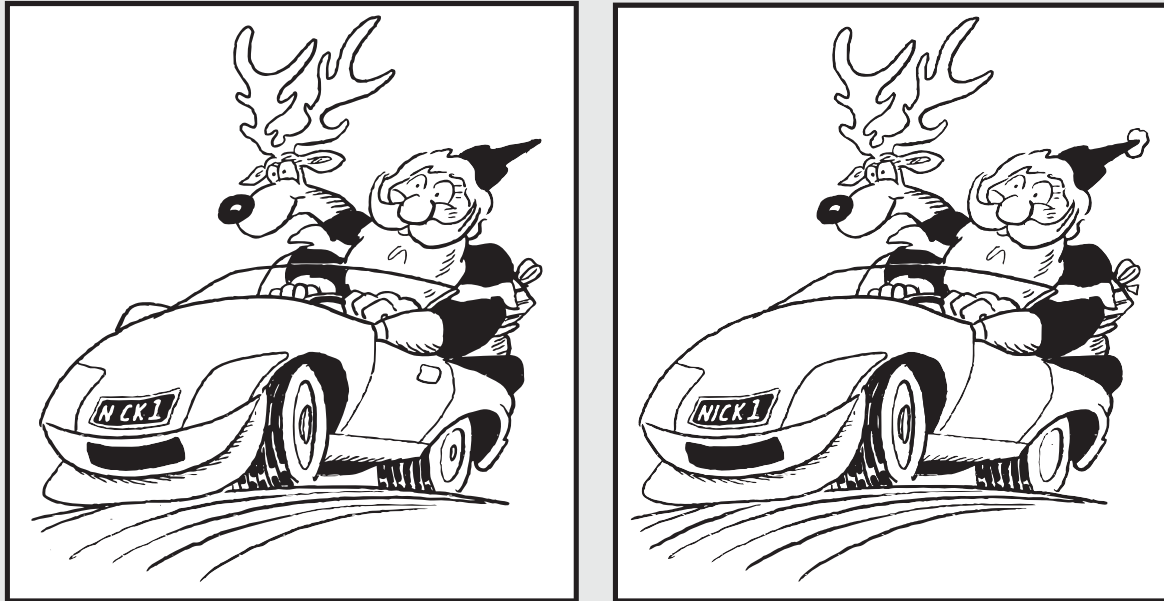
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Holiday Kids Corner



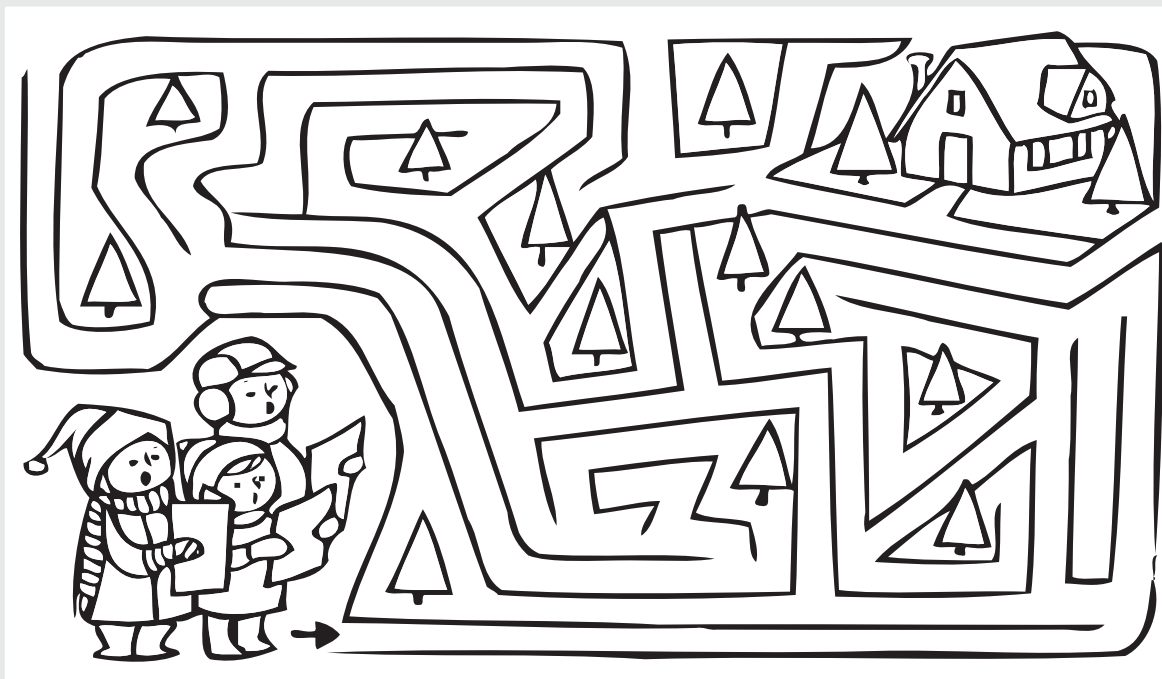
Spot the Difference

Can you spot all 7 differences between these two holiday themed illustrations?



Caroling Maze

Help the carolers find their way to the next home!

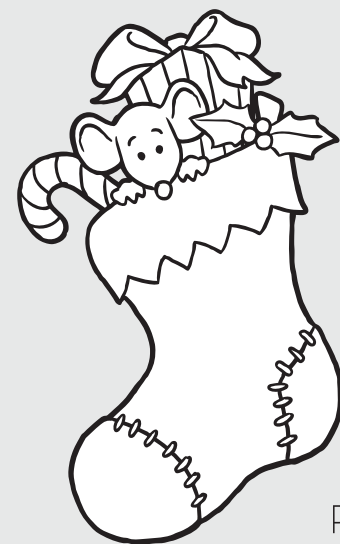
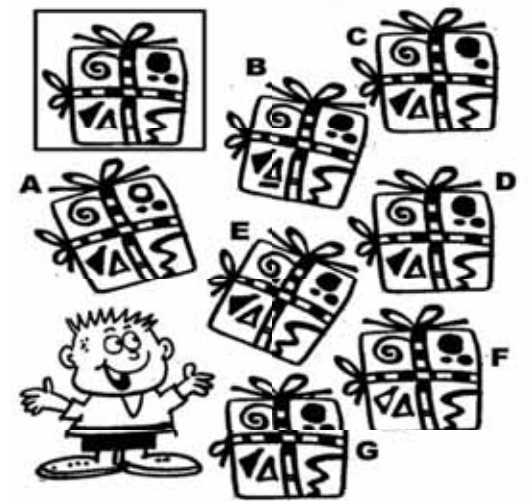


WORD SCRAMBLE

- NWOS - - - -
- TIMTESN - - - - - -
- LDOC - - - -
- NTEIWR - - - - - -

PRESENT PUZZLE

Only one of the presents is exactly the same as the present in the square. Can you find which one?



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ANSWERS TO ALL PUZZLES ON PAGE 8

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HOLIDAY SHOPPING TRIPS

with tots in tow

STORY BY YOUR DAILY PAPER

Holiday shopping has changed considerably since the dawn of the Information Age. Whereas holiday shopping once required shoppers to spend hours perusing stores at the local mall, nowadays many shoppers get the bulk of their shopping done online.

Shopping online may be convenient, but more traditional holiday shopping still affords shoppers the chance to find great deals, especially at the last minute. Parents may prefer to leave the kids at home when holiday shopping, but sometimes they don't have a choice. Fortunately, there are a few ways to manage holiday shopping trips with kids in tow.

- Encourage kids to create shopping lists. Keeping kids engaged on holiday shopping trips can be difficult, especially when shopping at stores that tend to draw crowds and long lines. But parents can engage youngsters by encouraging them to create their own holiday shopping lists for family members and then helping them find those gifts at the mall or wherever they plan to do their holiday shopping. Let kids bring their lists along and check off gifts as they purchase them.

- Let kids do their own shopping. In addition to creating lists, let kids do the shopping, including paying for gifts they purchase for loved ones. Kids might be

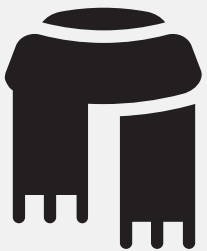
more interested when holiday shopping if they're allowed to search stores for potential gifts, pick them out, and then purchase those gifts with their own money.

- Break up shopping excursions with a meal. Kids enjoy dining out, even if their preferences lean more toward chicken fingers than steak au poivre. By breaking up shopping excursions with meals out on the town, parents can give kids something to look forward to at the onset of the shopping day. Such a break also gives everyone, moms and dads included, a chance to get off their feet and catch their breath. When the meal is over, promise kids a trip to get some ice

cream or hot chocolate at the end of the day so they once again have something to look forward to.

- Schedule some fun time. While parents pressed for time might not have much time to do anything but shop, kids are likely to grow impatient if the day does not include at least one fun distraction. Look for malls or shopping centers that feature fun things for kids to do, such as carousel rides or visits with Santa Claus. While this might require parents to spend more time at the mall or shopping center than they initially hoped, it can help keep kids engaged while giving them something fun to do at the same time.

ZERO Waste Gifts



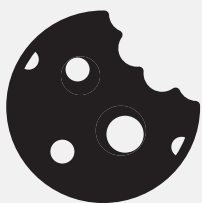
look for handcrafted gifts or make some yourself



buy treats in bulk & tie them up in a reusable bag



gift cards for places you visit, even places like the grocery store



baked goods in a reusable container, great option for the office or parties



something they really want, second hand if possible



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LAST MINUTE

holiday shopping tips

STORY BY YOUR DAILY PAPER

Holiday shopping season typically begins the day after Thanksgiving and extends all the way to Christmas Eve. While that's a considerable amount of time for shoppers to find gifts for everyone on their shopping list, many people will still find themselves putting holiday shopping off until the last minute.

In certain ways, last-minute holiday shopping is easier than ever. Thanks to online retailers who can ship products overnight, men and women who delay their holiday shopping have more options at their disposal than they did before the arrival of the Internet. And unlike the days of yore when the best deals were largely exclusive to Black Friday, some shoppers find that competition between online retailers and traditional brick-and-mortar stores is so great that deals can be found regardless of when they begin shopping. But while waiting until the last minute to begin holiday shopping may not be as risky as it used to be, shoppers may still benefit by sticking to certain strategies

so they can find the perfect gifts without breaking the bank.

- Stay within your budget. Even last-minute shoppers have holiday shopping budgets. But it can be harder for last-minute shoppers to stick to their budgets because they have less time to comparison shop and hunt for deals. As the holiday shopping season winds down, resist the temptation to go over budget. If a gift you had in mind is available but more than you can spend, look for something else. Overspending on holiday shopping in December is a recipe for debt in January, and no shopper wants to begin the new year weighed down by consumer debt.

- Shop local. National chains and big box retailers are renowned for rolling out great deals during the holiday season, but such stores may have very limited or unimpressive inventory left by the time last-minute shoppers begin shopping. Local retailers are often incapable of slashing prices as significantly as their larger competitors, and that may mean

they have more extensive inventories available throughout the holiday shopping season. In addition, shoppers who stick with local retailers won't have to pay shipping costs to ensure items arrive on time.

- Shop during off-peak hours. Shopping during off-peak hours can help last-minute shoppers make efficient use of the limited time they have to buy gifts for their loved ones. Visit stores early in the morning or late at night, or schedule a midweek afternoon shopping trip so you aren't spending what little time you have left waiting on lines or hunting for parking.

- Give something less traditional. Holiday gifts need not come from stores. Rather than spending their time shopping for gifts for loved ones who seemingly have it all, last-minute shoppers can give the gift of a donation in their loved one's name. Last-minute shoppers who want to give something more tangible can create a homemade gift that's both unique and

heartfelt. If your DIY skills are lacking, give a loved one the gift of a night out on the town at your expense.

Shoppers who wait until the end of the holiday shopping season to begin their searches for holiday gifts can still find great gifts without going broke.

KIDS CORNER ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 6

Difference Answers

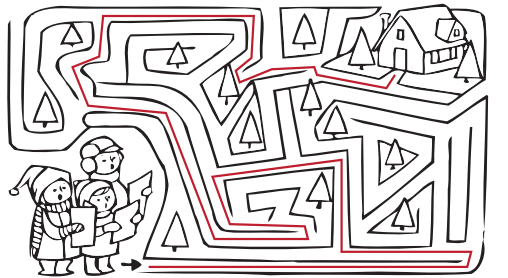
1. License plate
2. Santa's hat
3. Present box bow
4. Car door handle
5. Car side mirror
6. Lines on road
7. Rear car tire

Scramble Answers

1. Snow
2. Mittens
3. Cold
4. Winter

Present Puzzle

Answer: D



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