

5 Tips for Finding
the Perfect
Christmas Gift
for your
loved one
with special-needs



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I have a sister with Down syndrome and a son with autism, so every Christmas I have loved ones with special-needs to buy gifts for. It isn't always easy.

My sister, Syble, gives us a detailed list that always includes something to do with her favorite football teams (the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos) and Disney Stars (if it's Jonas Brothers related, we've bought it for her over the years). Our biggest challenge is finding gifts that are appropriate for her interests.

My son, James, is tough to please. He has one request each year: a Blue's Clues notebook. (This year I ordered ten and hid them away, just in case they stop making them.) But more than one person wants to buy him a gift, so we need more than one idea. Our biggest challenge is finding gifts he would like that match his abilities.

Here are five factors I consider when buying gifts for my sister, my son, and others with disabilities.

1. **Consider their interests.** James's first love is Blue's Clues, so we search Amazon, Etsy, and eBay for Blue's Clues items. Since the show premiered 20 years ago, there aren't any new toys being made. I think we have them all at this point! He's also interested in letters and numbers, so this year I have puzzles with letters and numbers on his list. He'll love lining them up in order and spelling simple words. My sister loves writing letters. Pretty stationery and stamps are always a hit with her. We respect our loved one's feelings and abilities when we give gifts they are interested in instead of what we think they should be interested in.
2. **Consider their current developmental stage.** My sister will always love teen Disney stars. Her developmental stage is close to a pre-teen's, so we consider and honor that when buying her gifts. She'd much rather have a new leopard-print journal than things other forty year olds have on their lists. James is ten years old, but plays with toys marketed to preschoolers. He doesn't have the motor skills to play with small Legos, but he loves the Duplo size. Be sensitive if your loved one would reject a "baby toy," but make sure you're spending money on something they have to skills to enjoy.
3. **Consider their goals.** Especially for younger children, we can buy toys they would currently love, and we can also buy toys that would stretch them a bit—toys that could help them develop motor or social skills. A simple board game so they learn to take turns or match colors might be fun. Or a set of plastic bowling pins and a ball. Our older friends and family members may want to work on being more independent and will want a wallet to organize their money. Look at their skills now, but also where they want to be six months from now and equip them to reach those goals.

4. **Consider gifting experiences instead of toys.** The person you are buying for may not need anything new, but would instead love to experience something new. Maybe passes to the zoo or concert tickets would be fun! You could buy movie gift cards to a theater that offers sensory-friendly show times. Or consider a gift card to a favorite place to eat (our friends and family members with food sensitivities usually have a spot or two they love). Before my grandmother passed away a couple years ago, she would always send money for James's favorite treat—a strawberry slush from Sonic. She knew how much he loved them and didn't want us to have to say no when he asked for one. Experiences can be as much fun as new toys!

5. **Consider asking lots of questions.** I try to pay attention to what James is interested in during the months leading up to Christmas so I'm ready with ideas. James is mostly non-verbal and wouldn't be able to answer the "What do you want for Christmas?" question with anything other than "notebook." I appreciate when our extended family members ask what he'd like instead of trying to guess (especially our family members who only see him once a year). My sister loves preparing a list for us, but we can also ask questions about more ideas or ask our parents what she might need that's different from the "wants" she has on her list. Surprise gifts are fun, but our loved ones with disabilities are more likely to appreciate something they really want instead of a surprise gift.

I hope these tips helped spark some ideas! I'd love to hear what gift ideas you decide on for your loved ones. Connect with me on social media and let me know:

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