

# Elf on the Shelf

## Props, Preparations, & Tips

- This is a copy of the complete activity for the facilitator to present. Use the Discussion Starters to help get a conversation going.
- If possible, bring in the [Elf on the Shelf and the book](#).
- Check the [Additional Activities](#) section for more information to bring to the activity.

Holidays are a time for traditions and family celebrations. A fairly new addition to the Christmas festivities is known as the “Elf on the Shelf.” This mischievous elf “appears” several days before December 25th to observe children’s behavior and report back to Santa so he can update his “Naughty and Nice” list. Let’s learn more about this popular holiday snoop.



## What is Elf on the Shelf?

*The Elf on the Shelf* is a children’s book that was released in 2005 telling the story of how Santa’s elves observe the children in each household in order to help him make his naughty and nice lists. According to the story, the elves visit people’s homes and then return to Santa’s workshop to report on who has been naughty and who has been nice. Each book comes with a small plush elf for families to “adopt” and name. Once the elf has a name, it is infused with the special Christmas magic that allows it to fly to and from Santa’s workshop. On each day of the elf’s visit, he moves around the house, and children have a fun time searching for him and seeing what he has “gotten up to.”

The elf comes to visit between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve before returning to give his report to Santa. Usually, the elf first shows up in a home when the family sets up their Christmas tree and other holiday decorations. Some families do things differently due to busy schedules or other obligations, and that can be fun, too! Families have different traditions about how the elf is posed and discovered each day. Each night the parent or parents in the household move the elf to a different location while the children are sleeping to give the impression that the elf is moving and can always spot the children and report on their behavior. Some elves are shy and can be seen just peeking from behind a cookie jar, while others are naughty and leave flour footprints on kitchen counters.

The book and accompanying toy have received several awards since they were released in 2005. It was awarded the Best Toy award in 2008 from Learning Express and was the #1 book on the *USA Today* bestsellers list in 2011. It has remained popular since its initial release, with more and more families adopting the tradition. The elf has become so popular that the company who makes it has created several spinoff stories and accessories to expand the brand. They include a visit from the elf on a child’s birthday and a pet reindeer for the elf to have. There are even tiny accessories like suction cups and swings to make more poses and elf hijinks possible.

## Discussion Starters

- Does anyone you know have an Elf on the Shelf tradition? If so, what are some of the things their elf has done?
- Do you think, as some people do, that the elf is just a way to trick children into good behavior around the holidays?
- At what age do you think children discover that their parents are moving the elf? Do you think they come to that realization before they stop believing in Santa Claus?
- What would be a good name for an elf?

## More Discussion Starters

- Is this a tradition that you would have liked to do as a child or with your children as they grew up?
- What are some other holiday traditions that you had in your family over the years? (advent calendars, paper chains, special recipes etc.)

## Did You Know?

1. **How long has Elf on the Shelf has been around?** *The Elf on the Shelf* was first introduced in 2005 as a book by the same name.
2. **Who invented Elf on the Shelf?** The book *The Elf on the Shelf* was written by [Carol Aebersold and her daughter Chanda Bell](#).
3. **How long does the Elf on the Shelf appear each year in people's homes?** According to the book, the elf appears on the day of or the day after Thanksgiving and stays until Christmas Eve, when he reports back to Santa.
4. **What term does Santa use to describe these elves?** Santa calls them his "scout" elves.
5. **What mystery does the elf solve?** It solves the mystery of how Santa knows who has been naughty and who has been nice. The elf serves as Santa's observer and reports back to him.
6. **What is the first thing that needs to be done when you get an elf?** You must give it a name before its mission can begin.
7. **Why are children cautioned against touching the elf?** Touching it will make it lose its magic.
8. **Why is the elf missing its feet?** There is no official answer to this question, so everyone gets to make up their own story. What is your explanation?
9. **In which famous parade did the Elf on the Shelf make an appearance in 2011?** The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The balloon replica of the elf is carried through the streets by people dressed in Santa costumes.
10. **Why do some people disapprove of the Elf on the Shelf?** Some people are concerned children will believe the elf is there to spy on them. They feel it is inappropriate to pressure children into good behavior with the idea of being placed on Santa's naughty list. Others question the rule of not being able to touch the elf and what that might say to the child. What is your opinion?

## Additional Activities

1. See the [Elf on the Shelf caught on tape!](#)
2. Here are many [different fun ideas](#) for your own Elf on the Shelf.
3. Ask visiting children to [fill out and color this booklet](#) by the folks at Elf on the Shelf.
4. Check out [these hints](#) on how you can use Elf on the Shelf to spread holiday cheer and good deeds throughout your community. It has wonderful activities the entire family can participate in, from kids to great-grandparents!