

# The Thanksgiving Family Activity Planner

*A printable companion to 30 Thanksgiving family activities*

Print this planner and keep it on the fridge through November. It gives you all thirty activities as a tick list, a supplies checklist, the gratitude jar method, place card templates, an hour-by-hour day plan and a next-year page — everything you need without scrolling back through the article.

## The 30 Activities, as a Tick List

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Tick what you actually did. Three ticks is a good Thanksgiving; more than five and someone will be tired.

- Host a meal with family and friends
- Go around the table and share what you are grateful for
- Watch the parade together in the morning
- Make a gratitude jar
- Write thank-you cards to people who will not be at the table
- Do a festive craft together
- Run or walk a Turkey Trot
- Volunteer as a family
- Break the wishbone
- Have a movie marathon
- Watch an NFL game
- Play board games or cards
- Make a Thanksgiving dessert together
- Watch a classic film the night before
- Draw or print a family tree
- Decorate Thanksgiving placemats
- Play a friendly game of flag football
- Go to the movies
- Decorate for Christmas
- Host a white elephant gift exchange
- Do a scavenger hunt
- Make and wear matching t-shirts
- Play Thanksgiving Pictionary
- Hold a backyard pumpkin sweep tournament
- Take a family walk
- Play thankfulness tag
- Pull out the gingerbread houses early
- Make a thankful tree
- Gift homemade ornaments to family far away

- Have your own family parade

## Choose Your Three

Write down the three you are actually doing. Naming them is what stops the day from dissolving into screens.

### Activity 1 — who runs it, and when

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### Activity 2 — who runs it, and when

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### Activity 3 — who runs it, and when

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## Supplies Checklist

| Section       | Item                                    | On hand? |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------|----------|
| Gratitude jar | A clear jar or vase with a wide mouth   |          |
| Gratitude jar | Small squares of paper or card          |          |
| Gratitude jar | Pens or pencils that actually work      |          |
| Gratitude jar | Ribbon, twine or stickers to decorate   |          |
| Table         | Plain paper or card for placemats       |          |
| Table         | Crayons, markers or coloured pencils    |          |
| Table         | Pressed leaves, twine, glue stick       |          |
| Cards         | Blank folded cards and envelopes        |          |
| Cards         | Stamps, if you are posting them         |          |
| Kitchen       | One dish per child, chosen in advance   |          |
| Kitchen       | Aprons or an old shirt for the youngest |          |
| Games         | A deck of cards and two board games     |          |
| Games         | Paper and pens for Pictionary           |          |
| Outside       | Balls, cones or markers for the lawn    |          |
| Outside       | Warm layers and a torch for the walk    |          |
| Craft         | Blank ornaments or card blanks          |          |

| Section | Item                                      | On hand? |
|---------|-------------------------------------------|----------|
| Craft   | Paint, glue, glitter and a wipeable cloth |          |

*Buy the paper and the blank cards in one go in early November. The single most common reason a gratitude jar never gets made is that nobody had anything to write on.*

## The Gratitude Jar: How to Start It

1. Set the jar on the table a week before Thanksgiving, not on the day. A jar that appears on the morning itself reads as an assignment.
2. Let the youngest decorate it first, with no instructions. Ribbon, stickers, paint — the messier the better, because they will defend it afterwards.
3. Write the first slip yourself, out loud, and put it in. Someone has to go first.
4. Leave the paper and pens beside the jar permanently. A jar you have to fetch paper for gets used twice.
5. Read three or four slips at the table before the meal, chosen at random. Do not read them all — the point is that there are more.
6. Keep it going after Thanksgiving. One slip a week is enough, and next November you will have fifty.

## Place Card Templates

Cut along the lines, fold in half, and write a name on the front. Leave the inside blank for a message.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## A Realistic Day, Hour by Hour

| Time          | What happens                                               | Who is on it          |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 8:00 – 9:30   | Parade on in the background, breakfast, no cooking yet     | Anyone awake          |
| 9:30 – 10:30  | Gratitude jar slips and placemats at the table             | Children, one adult   |
| 10:30 – 12:00 | Kitchen crew starts; the youngest on the easiest dish      | Whoever volunteered   |
| 12:00 – 1:00  | Outside: walk, lawn game or the pumpkin sweep              | Everyone who can walk |
| 1:00 – 2:00   | Quiet hour. Screens allowed. This is not a failure         | Everyone              |
| 2:00 – 3:00   | Table set, place cards written, cards to absent family     | Children, one adult   |
| 3:00 – 4:00   | The meal                                                   | Everyone              |
| 4:00 – 5:00   | Wishbone, dessert, the game that always causes an argument | Everyone              |
| 5:00 – 6:00   | Clean-up as a group, then the film or the game             | Everyone              |
| 6:00 onward   | Nothing scheduled. Leave it that way                       | —                     |

## Games for the Long Afternoon

| Game                     | People                          | Room needed           | Runs for    |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Thanksgiving Pictionary  | 4 or more, split into two teams | A table and a pad     | 30 – 45 min |
| Thankfulness tag         | 3 or more, any age              | A garden or a hallway | 15 – 20 min |
| Board games or cards     | 2 – 6                           | A table               | 45 min +    |
| White elephant exchange  | 6 or more                       | A living room         | 30 min      |
| Scavenger hunt           | 2 or more, in pairs             | Indoors or out        | 20 – 40 min |
| Pumpkin sweep tournament | 4 or more                       | A lawn                | 20 min      |

## What Works at Each Age

| Age     | What holds attention                                 | What to avoid                       |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Under 2 | Being carried on the walk; tearing paper for the jar | Anything with small parts or a rule |

| Age     | What holds attention                                 | What to avoid                              |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 2 – 4   | Decorating the jar, scribbling placemats, the parade | Waiting for a turn; long games             |
| 5 – 7   | Place cards, the scavenger hunt, thankfulness tag    | Pictionary, which needs reading speed      |
| 8 – 10  | Kitchen jobs, Pictionary, the lawn game              | Being given a job with no real stakes      |
| 11 – 13 | Running a game for the younger ones; the wishbone    | Being treated as a babysitter all day      |
| 14 +    | Owning one dish end to end; the white elephant       | Busywork. Give them something that matters |

## Before the Meal Starts

- The three chosen activities are written down and someone owns each one
- The jar, the paper and the pens are on the table
- Every child has one kitchen job, and it is a real one
- The place cards are written and on the table
- Cards for absent family are written and ready to post
- One game is chosen, and one person has agreed to run it
- The quiet hour is protected, and nobody is pretending it is not happening
- Nothing is scheduled after six

## Next Year's List

Write this before you clear the table. It is the only page that gets better every year.

### What we did that worked

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### What we will not repeat

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### Who we want at the table next year

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