



## **12 Patriotic Ways to Celebrate Memorial Day with Kids**

**By Ellen Sturm Niz**

**1. Explain to your kids what Memorial Day is really about.**

First celebrated in 1868 when a Union general declared May 30 as the day to decorate the graves of fallen Civil War soldiers, after World War I Memorial Day became a holiday to honor Americans who died fighting in any war. In 1971, President Richard Nixon declared the last Monday of May as a federal holiday to honor the men and women who died while serving in any branch of the armed forces in all wars. (Veterans Day in November is when we honor all who have served in the military.)

**2. Read kids' books about the holiday together.**

Beyond understanding the facts of Memorial Day, kids can better understand its meaning by reading stories. Two great kids' books about the holiday are *The Wall* by Eve Bunting and *Memorial Day Surprise* by Theresa Golding. In *The Wall*, a young boy and his father travel to Washington, D.C. to visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to find Grandpa's name. In *Memorial Day Surprise*, a mom tells her son that there is a "big surprise" at the Memorial Day parade, which turns out to be his grandfather, a veteran, being applauded as a hero at the end of the procession.

**3. Make patriotic crafts to decorate your home or take to local celebrations.**

Have your children help you deck your front door with a Stately Striped Wreath made of tulle and sparkling star garland, and beckon revelers with A Star-Spangled Yard with white flour stencils. Or, turn an empty coffee can into a red, white, and blue Mini Marching Drum fit for a parade, and top things off with Hats Off to America caps made of red plastic cups.

**4. Make an Americana-themed dessert with the kiddos' help.**

Add patriotism to your usual backyard barbecue by creating a special dish together. Assemble a batch of Sweet & Salty Sparklers by covering pretzel rods with white chocolate and red and blue sprinkles and M&Ms, layer red and blue gelatin with whipped cream for a Star-Spangled Parfait, or bake some Fireworks Cookies by topping your sugar cookies with white frosting, blue sugar, and strawberry Pop Rocks.

**5. Teach kids how to fly the flag.**

As an important symbol of our country, kids should understand the significance of flying the flag. Explain that you'll fly the flag at half-mast, a position reserved for when the country is in mourning, until noon, before raising it to full mast for the remainder of Memorial Day. Practice saying the Pledge of Allegiance with your kids and talk about what the words really mean. You can also teach older children how to fold the flag properly.

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**6. Attend a parade or another community event.**

Most cities and towns have a Memorial Day parade, which you can find out about in local news or on [vetfriends.com](http://vetfriends.com). You can also watch the National Memorial Day Parade, which begins at 2 p.m. in Washington, D.C., live-streamed on YouTube and Military.com. Whatever parade you watch, teach your kids to stand and clap when veterans march past. Check your local news for ceremonies, runs, and other events you can attend to honor the holiday as well.

**7. Visit a war memorial or veteran's cemetery in your town.**

Have your kids help you pick out flowers or make a wreath that you as a family can leave there in honor of the soldiers who died fighting for our country.

**8. Make a trip to the veteran's hospital or a Veterans of Foreign Wars post.**

Though Memorial Day is about soldiers who died in war, veterans who may have lost fellow soldiers in service will appreciate being in your thoughts. Take your kids to meet and visit with military veterans at a local veteran's hospital or VFW post. Bring them cookies or donate books or movies to their library—or have your children prepare a song to sing for them like "America the Beautiful" or the "Star-Spangled Banner."

**9. Participate in the VFW's Buddy Poppy program.**

Each year for almost 100 years, disabled, hospitalized, and aging veterans make red paper flowers called the Buddy Poppy and ship them to VFW posts for community distribution to encourage donations to the organization. The VFW pays the veterans for their work making the flowers, and donation proceeds are used for veterans' welfare or survivors' benefits. Contact your local VFW to find out how you and your kids can participate in the Buddy Poppy program in your area.

**10. Send a care package to soldiers.**

Military personnel currently serving in the armed forces will also appreciate your thoughts on Memorial Day. Kids can write a letter thanking them for their service, send them a handmade craft, or ship supplies or comfort items through an organization like Operation Gratitude.

**11. Invite a military family over for the day.**

Do you know of a family who has a mother or father (or son or daughter, brother or sister) serving overseas? Invite them over to your barbecue and celebrate Memorial Day with those who are connected first-hand to soldiers who risk their lives in service of our country.

**12. Participate in the National Moment of Remembrance.**

In addition to the President or Vice President laying a wreath on soldiers' graves in Arlington National Cemetery each Memorial Day, the POTUS also issues a Presidential Proclamation - Prayer for Peace on the annual holiday and calls for a National Moment of Remembrance at 3 p.m. local time. Read the Prayer for Peace online with your children and come up with ideas for how you can honor the moment for fallen soldiers with the rest of the country. Light a candle, sing a song, or salute the flag? Let their imaginations be your guide!

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