

Keep the Wonder Going

Ideas sorted by how much energy you have left — because that is the real problem this solves.

Every December a small helper turns up in living rooms around the world. He hides, naps, makes mischief, and leaves a new surprise for the kids to find each morning. By week two most grown-ups are out of ideas and out of energy. This guide is for exactly that moment. Use any small elf, gnome, or figure you already have. Pick the tier that matches tonight.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN — seven ways to protect the magic

Decide the rules once. Can he be touched? Does he talk? Where does he nap? Write your answers on the House Rules page so every grown-up tells the same story.

Small beats big. Some nights move him less than a foot. A tiny change is funnier than a perfect scene, and it takes two minutes.

Mix it up. Rotate through fun, funny, and lessons, and make every few nights about kindness. Wonder lasts longer than pranks.

Plan three rescue nights. Pick them now from the Emergency section for the nights you will be too tired.

Lead with wonder. Try “I wonder where he learned that” instead of “he is watching you.” Delight lasts longer than leverage.

Let the kids steer. Ask “What do you think he should try tonight?” Then quietly use their answers.

Keep it safe. Nothing near heat or candles. Only cool, unplugged appliances. Mind food allergies, and keep small parts and glow sticks away from toddlers and pets.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE There is no order. Pick what fits tonight’s energy, mark the open box with a pen, and write the date. Jot what the kids said on the Wonder Log and the Night Tracker at the back.

IN THIS GUIDE: 30-Second (22) · Five-Minute (22) · Hide-and-Seek (14) · Bigger-Reaction (16) · Interactive & Kind (16) · Lessons (14) · Evidence-Only (10) · Emergency (10) · Arrivals & Goodbyes (10)

thesagedad.com · Print, play, repeat.

1. THIRTY-SECOND PLACEMENTS

for the nights you remembered at the last possible second

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| <p>☐ Cereal Box Dive date _____
Leave only the helper's legs sticking out of an open cereal box. A few cereal pieces nearby sell the scene.
<i>Note: "Tried to be breakfast. Failed."</i></p> <p>☐ The Slipper Bed date _____
Tuck the helper into an oversized slipper with a tissue or washcloth as a blanket.</p> <p>☐ Behind the Curtain date _____
Hide the body behind a curtain; leave only the boots visible at floor level.</p> <p>☐ Fruit Bowl Visitor date _____
Place the helper in the fruit bowl with a banana or orange under one arm.</p> <p>☐ Mug Hideout / Hot Tub date _____
Sit the helper inside a large mug or mixing bowl. A few marshmallows turn it into a tiny hot tub.</p> <p>☐ Laundry Dive date _____
Bury most of the helper under clean laundry so only the head or legs show.</p> <p>☐ Bookworm date _____
Slide the helper halfway into a large picture book so only the legs stick out.</p> <p>☐ Shoe Ride date _____
Put the helper inside a child's shoe near the door, sitting upright.</p> <p>☐ Stocking Hideaway date _____
Tuck the helper into a Christmas stocking so just the head or boots poke out.</p> <p>☐ Paper-Towel Throne date _____
Sit the helper on top of a paper-towel or toilet-paper roll as if it claimed the highest seat.</p> <p>☐ Only the Boots date _____
Slide a book or cushion in front so only the boots peek out. Hiding in plain sight.</p> | <p>☐ One-Inch Move date _____
Slide him one inch and tilt his hat. Add a sign: "Big move!"
<i>Note: "Big move!"</i></p> <p>☐ Tissue-Box Tumble date _____
Stand him in a tissue box with only his boots poking out. Pocket pack of tissues beside it.
<i>Note: "Achoo! Too dusty in here."</i></p> <p>☐ Costume Change date _____
Nothing moved, but he is wearing a different hat or scarf (rubber band + scrap of paper).</p> <p>☐ Glove Bed date _____
Tuck him into a winter glove as if it is a sleeping bag.
<i>Note: "Five-star hotel!"</i></p> <p>☐ Remote-Control Ride date _____
Sit him on top of the TV remote as if it is a sled or spaceship.</p> <p>☐ Coat-Hook Hangout date _____
Drape him over a low coat hook or the corner of a chair so he looks like he is climbing down.</p> <p>☐ Spice-Rack Spy date _____
Perch him on a spice jar or among the seasoning bottles on the counter.</p> <p>☐ Sock Nest date _____
Curl him into a clean sock with only the head showing, as if the sock is a sleeping bag.</p> <p>☐ Mug Edge Sit date _____
Sit him on the rim of an empty mug as if he is fishing or waiting for cocoa.</p> <p>☐ Under the Rug Corner date _____
Tuck just the boots under the edge of a small rug or doormat.</p> <p>☐ Picture-Frame Lean date _____
Lean him against a picture frame on a shelf so he looks like he is posing for a photo.</p> |
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2. FIVE-MINUTE SCENES

a little more setup, still made from things already in the house

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| <p>☐ Stuffed-Animal Meeting date _____
Circle three or four stuffed animals facing the helper with a scrap of paper: "Important Meeting."
<i>Note: "1. Who gets the window seat? 2. Cookies."</i></p> <p>☐ Kitchen Inspector date _____
Helper beside a wooden spoon and measuring cup. Note: "Inspection complete."</p> <p>☐ Toy Train Passenger date _____
Place the helper in a toy truck, train, wagon, or shopping cart with tiny packed objects.</p> <p>☐ Cookie Investigation date _____
Helper beside the cookie jar with crumbs and a makeshift magnifying glass (jar lid).
<i>Note: "I am investigating."</i></p> <p>☐ Christmas-Light Trouble date _____
Loosely wrap the helper in unplugged Christmas lights as if it got tangled while decorating.</p> <p>☐ Fridge Expedition date _____
Helper inside the fridge beside the milk, with a tiny ribbon scarf.
<i>Note: "Colder than expected."</i></p> <p>☐ Bathroom Assistant date _____
Sit the helper by the toothbrushes with a folded washcloth as a towel.
<i>Note: "I brushed twice."</i></p> <p>☐ Toy Construction Crew date _____
Build a small block structure; helper in the middle as foreman with a "Do Not Disturb" sign.</p> <p>☐ Tiny Library date _____
Stack kids' books; helper sits with review cards: "Too many bears," "Excellent dragons."</p> <p>☐ Piano Player date _____
Helper at a piano or keyboard with a tiny paper music sheet full of ridiculous notes.</p> <p>☐ Sock-Puppet Theater date _____
Slip a sock puppet on his hand, line up paper tickets, seat stuffed animals as audience.
<i>Note: "We put on a show at 2 a.m. You missed it."</i></p> | <p>☐ Tape Swing date _____
Paper-strip + masking-tape swing from a cabinet handle; set him mid-swing.
<i>Note: "Hold my calls."</i></p> <p>☐ Mug Everest date _____
Tape ladder up the side of a mug; plant him at the top with a paper flag. Cocoa packet inside.
<i>Note: "Everest: conquered."</i></p> <p>☐ Toaster Stuck date _____
Tuck him into a cool, unplugged toaster with only boots showing.
<i>Note: "I am toast!"</i></p> <p>☐ Paper-Plane Airport date _____
Fleet of paper planes on a hand-drawn runway. He is the control tower on a stack of books.
<i>Note: "Air traffic control is hard."</i></p> <p>☐ Cookie-Cutter Parade date _____
Line up cookie cutters in a marching band across the counter, led by him with a spatula baton.</p> <p>☐ Levitation Night date _____
Hang a few small toys from the ceiling or doorframe on clear thread so they seem to float.
<i>Note: "I learned to float! Or maybe it is string."</i></p> <p>☐ Fruit-Bowl Mustaches date _____
Stick paper mustaches on the apples and oranges.
<i>Note: "Your fruit needed mustaches."</i></p> <p>☐ Pantry Rename date _____
Cover a few pantry labels with sticky notes: cinnamon becomes "Dragon Dust." Kids guess the real ingredients.</p> <p>☐ Sink Boat Race date _____
Float container-lid boats across the sink with him at the helm. A grown-up stays close to the water.
<i>Note: "The rubber duck beat me."</i></p> <p>☐ Last Puzzle Piece date _____
Leave a nearly finished puzzle with the final piece in his hand.
<i>Note: "Finished it at 3 a.m. You are welcome. Almost."</i></p> <p>☐ Tape Obstacle Course date _____
Run masking tape across the floor as a winding course. He waits at the finish.
<i>Note: "I made a course. Can you beat my time?"</i></p> |
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3. HIDE-AND-SEEK PLACEMENTS

when the discovery itself is the fun

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| <p>☐ Behind the Family Photos date _____
Place the helper partly behind framed photos so it appears to be photobombing everyone.</p> <p>☐ Cabinet Climber date _____
Hide among pots, pans, or containers in a kitchen cabinet. Leave one door slightly ajar.</p> <p>☐ Couch-Cushion Cave date _____
Tuck deep between cushions with only a hand, hat, or boots visible.</p> <p>☐ Backpack Stowaway date _____
Inside a backpack with head sticking out — a morning surprise before school.</p> <p>☐ Plant Explorer date _____
Position safely beside or behind a houseplant as if exploring a jungle.</p> <p>☐ Wreath Intruder date _____
Nestle gently into a large wreath as though it climbed in and got stuck.</p> <p>☐ Toy-Box Camouflage date _____
Hide among stuffed animals so the child has to notice one “toy” does not belong.</p> | <p>☐ Under the Table date _____
Position underneath the dining table so kids discover it while sitting down for breakfast.</p> <p>☐ Bookshelf Spy date _____
Slide him between two books on a low shelf so only the hat or boots show.</p> <p>☐ Shoe-Rack Hiding Spot date _____
Nestle him among the shoes by the door, peeking out from behind a boot.</p> <p>☐ Curtain Rod Climber date _____
Hang him from a low curtain rod or the corner of a curtain with a tiny rope of yarn.</p> <p>☐ Pillow-Fort Scout date _____
Tuck him just inside a pillow fort or blanket tent so kids find him when they crawl in.</p> <p>☐ Closet Peek date _____
Place him just inside a closet door, peeking out as if deciding whether to come in.</p> <p>☐ Laundry-Basket Hide date _____
Nestle him among clean clothes in the laundry basket so only the hat shows.</p> |
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4. BIGGER-REACTION SETUPS

a little more effort, still no complicated crafts

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| <p>☐ Great Toy Parade date _____
Line of small toys marching behind the helper. Helper holds a paper flag at the front.</p> <p>☐ Household Olympics date _____
Three tiny events: cotton-ball push, spoon balancing, sock toss. Helper is the referee.</p> <p>☐ Doorway Toll Booth date _____
Helper beside a low ribbon across a doorway: "Toll: One Good Joke." Easy to step over.</p> <p>☐ The Snowstorm date _____
Surround with cotton balls, crumpled white paper, or tissue "snow." Spoon as a shovel.</p> <p>☐ Great Escape date _____
Stack wrapped gifts or boxes; leave only the helper's legs sticking out.
<i>Note: "Everything is under control."</i></p> <p>☐ Almost Magic Trick date _____
Helper beside an upside-down cup: "Do not look under here." Under the cup: "Made you look."</p> <p>☐ Breakfast Restaurant date _____
Bowls and spoons around the helper. Tiny menu: "One Cornflake," "Air Pancakes."</p> <p>☐ Movie Night date _____
On the couch with stuffed animals facing the TV. Tiny bowl of popcorn or cereal.</p> | <p>☐ Great Sock Heist date _____
Scatter socks across the room; helper beside the laundry basket collecting them.</p> <p>☐ Stuffed-Animal School date _____
Toys at a table with scrap-paper worksheets. Helper stands at the front as teacher.</p> <p>☐ Building-Brick Jailbreak date _____
Surround him with a jail of building bricks and tiny figures as guards.
<i>Note: "They said I took a brick. I did."</i></p> <p>☐ Superhero Landing date _____
Plant him face-first in a pile of pillows with a napkin cape sticking out.
<i>Note: "Superhero landing: 10 out of 10. Face: 0 out of 10."</i></p> <p>☐ Glow-Stick Cave date _____
Turn a blanket fort into a cave lit by a few sealed glow sticks. Keep away from mouths.
<i>Note: "Northern lights in your living room."</i></p> <p>☐ Cloud Night date _____
Hang cotton-ball clouds on thread across a doorway (away from lights/heaters). He lounges on the biggest one.</p> <p>☐ Giant Shadow date _____
Prop a flashlight behind him on books aimed at a blank wall. His shadow looms three feet tall.</p> <p>☐ Cardboard Workshop date _____
A box becomes his workbench: spoon for a hammer, tape roll for a wheel, half-wrapped gifts.
<i>Note: "Rush order. Need hands."</i></p> |
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5. INTERACTIVE & KIND

the child participates — and wonder lasts longer than pranks

- ☐ **Tell Me a Joke** date _____
Note asks the child to write or tell their best joke. Next morning leave a handwritten rating.
- ☐ **Finish the Story** date _____
One sentence: "Last night I discovered a secret door behind..." Child adds the next line all December.
- ☐ **Secret Kindness Mission** date _____
Note assigns a tiny act of kindness: set the table, make a picture, say something kind to a sibling.
- ☐ **Mystery Object** date _____
Three random household objects beside the helper. Ask: "What do you think happened here?"
- ☐ **Treasure Hunt Starter** date _____
One or two simple clues leading to a small object, note, or breakfast treat.
- ☐ **Name This Invention** date _____
Ridiculous object from blocks, spoons, cups, or cardboard. Ask the child to name it.
- ☐ **Compliment Trail** date _____
Sticky notes with specific, true compliments in unexpected places, including for the grown-ups.
- ☐ **Wonder Bag** date _____
Empty bag marked "For someone else." Kids fill it with toys or books to donate.
- ☐ **Thank-You Chain** date _____
Paper chain starts with one link: "Thank you for ____." Everyone adds a link each night.
- ☐ **Good-Deed Coupons** date _____
Tiny coupon book: "Good for one extra story, one hug, one silly dance, ten extra minutes of play."
- ☐ **Captain Kindness Cape** date _____
Napkin cape and a note: "Today I am Captain Kindness. Join me." Kids earn it by one kind act.
- ☐ **Calm Corner** date _____
Pillow, blanket, and glitter jar in a quiet corner. Make the jar together.
Note: "I made a calm corner for big feelings."
- ☐ **Happy-Notes Hunt** date _____
Hide five happy notes around the house with a simple map. Each holds one kind thing.
Note: "Treasure hunt: five reasons you are great."
- ☐ **Cookie for a Neighbor** date _____
Note: "The neighbors at number ____ could use a cookie." Kids bake and deliver it together.
- ☐ **Thanks to the Grown-Ups** date _____
He leaves a thank-you for the grown-ups, maybe next to a cookie or coffee mug.
Note: "Thanks for the cookies. Signed, your winter visitor."
- ☐ **Found Your Lost Thing** date _____
He finds a long-lost toy from under the couch and sits with it.
Note: "He said he missed you."

6. LESSONS (sneaky learning in disguise)

science, reading, kindness, and problem-solving without feeling like school

- ☐ **Frozen in Ice** date _____
Freeze a small toy or paper-clip “key” in a bowl of water. Warm water and a spoon do the rescue.
Note: “Free me before breakfast.”
- ☐ **Spot the Five** date _____
Two matching toy displays; secretly change five things in one.
Note: “Spot the five differences before the cocoa gets cold.”
- ☐ **Pocket Post Office** date _____
Cut a slot in a shoebox lid. Kids post notes; helper answers in tiny handwriting.
Note: “What made you feel brave today?”
- ☐ **Sorting Mission** date _____
Helper sorts candy-coated chocolates or beads by color. Kids turn the rows into a bar graph.
Note: “I sorted. Then I ate the research.”
- ☐ **Jar Guess** date _____
Helper tried to count the beans and lost count. Kids guess, then count by twos or fives.
Note: “There are 42. Or 43. I got hungry.”
- ☐ **Wobbly Letters** date _____
Helper tried the alphabet and made mistakes: backward B, missing D. Kids play teacher.
Note: “My Bs look like snowmen. Can you fix them?”
- ☐ **Secret Crayon Message** date _____
Write in white crayon on white paper. Kids paint over it with watercolor; the words appear.
Note: “Paint me to read me.”
- ☐ **Crayon ER** date _____
Tape up a broken crayon and tuck it into a tiny tissue bed.
Note: “We fix things in this house.”
- ☐ **Plant Patrol** date _____
Helper stands beside a thirsty houseplant with a bottle-cap watering can.
Note: “This one said it was thirsty!”
- ☐ **Fact of the Night** date _____
Helper holds a card with one surprising animal or science fact: “Do you think this is true?”
- ☐ **Ceiling Constellations** date _____
Aim a flashlight through a cutout star shape so it casts a constellation on the ceiling.
Note: “Practicing for night flight.”
- ☐ **Weather Report** date _____
Draw tomorrow’s forecast on the window with washable marker.
Note: “100% chance of giggles, scattered snow angels.”
- ☐ **Apology Tour** date _____
He leaves tiny apology notes. Talk about what makes a good apology: say what happened, say sorry, fix it.
Note: “Sorry I ate the last blueberry.”
- ☐ **Book of the Night** date _____
He sits with a picture book and a tiny bookmark.
Note: “This one made me snort-laugh. Read it tonight?”

7. EVIDENCE-ONLY NIGHTS

he stays put and the clues move — magic without moving the doll

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| <p>☐ Flour Footprints date _____
Dust a baking sheet with flour and press tiny boot prints toward the cookie jar. One mini cookie left behind.
<i>Note: "Evidence of a snack run."</i></p> <p>☐ Scarf Left Behind date _____
A tiny scarf on the counter, or a kid-size scarf by the door. He does not move; the scarf appears.
<i>Note: "Forgot my scarf! Stay warm."</i></p> <p>☐ Snow Puddle date _____
Small saucer with a few drops of water and a damp tiny mitten near a window.
<i>Note: "Brought a bit of the North Pole. It melted."</i></p> <p>☐ Donut-Hole Plate date _____
Plate holds two donut holes and one tiny bite mark. Share the rest at breakfast.
<i>Note: "Donut tell anyone I ate two."</i></p> <p>☐ Jingle-Bell Trail date _____
String or scatter jingle bells from the kids' door to a small gift or the tree.
<i>Note: "Follow the jingles."</i></p> | <p>☐ Oatmeal / Sugar Trail date _____
Thin trail of oats or powdered sugar from his spot to the pantry or cookie jar.
<i>Note: "Carb loading for flight training."</i></p> <p>☐ Lost Mitten Basket date _____
Small basket labeled "Lost: one mitten, elf size." Kids return it; he leaves a thank-you.</p> <p>☐ Tiny Note Only date _____
Leave only a handwritten note in his usual spot: "Went for a night flight. Back before breakfast."</p> <p>☐ Mirror Message date _____
Write on a dry bathroom mirror with a dry bar of soap (or dry-erase). Words appear when the shower steams.</p> <p>☐ Fortune Slips date _____
Tuck a paper fortune under each cereal bowl with a small promise for the day.
<i>Note: "Hot cocoa after dinner."</i></p> |
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8. "I COMPLETELY FORGOT" EMERGENCY IDEAS

permission to keep the tradition alive without turning it into a nightly performance

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| <p>☐ Same Spot, New Excuse date _____
If the helper did not move, leave a note: "I fell asleep too."</p> <p>☐ Invisible Adventure date _____
Move only a few inches and write: "You should have seen what happened last night."</p> <p>☐ Caught Mid-Move date _____
Place the helper halfway between yesterday's spot and somewhere new.</p> <p>☐ Tiny Sick Day date _____
Wrap in a tissue "blanket" with a note: "North Pole sniffles."</p> <p>☐ Day Off date _____
Handwritten card: "Even magic needs a day off."</p> | <p>☐ Out of Battery date _____
Leave him where he was with a tiny sign: "Low on cocoa. Recharging." Warm cocoa nearby.
<i>Note: "Low on cocoa. Recharging."</i></p> <p>☐ Overslept date _____
Tuck him under a washcloth blanket in a bowl with a sign: "Overslept. Back tonight."</p> <p>☐ Still Reading date _____
Leave him in the same spot with an open picture book and a note: "Couldn't put it down."</p> <p>☐ Costume Change Only date _____
Nothing moved, but he is wearing a different hat or scarf. Kids love spotting what changed.</p> <p>☐ One-Inch + Note date _____
Slide one inch, tilt the hat, and add: "Big move!" Kids study the tiny difference like detectives.
<i>Note: "Big move!"</i></p> |
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9. ARRIVALS AND GOODBYES

start and end the season with a bang

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| <p>☐ Parachute Drop date _____
Coffee-filter parachute and string. Hang from the tree or a curtain rod.
<i>Note: "Landed. Mostly on target."</i></p> <p>☐ Special Delivery date _____
Arrives in a small box with air holes, a "This Side Up" label, and "Do not shake."</p> <p>☐ The Ticket Home date _____
Last night: tiny suitcase, hand-drawn boarding pass for next December, and a proud note for each child.</p> <p>☐ Star Trail date _____
Line of paper stars from his last spot to the front door. Trail ends at the doorknob with a jingle bell.</p> <p>☐ Goodbye Breakfast date _____
Stack of three tiny pancakes and a note. Serve the real thing.
<i>Note: "Last day! Thanks for the magic. See you next year."</i></p> | <p>☐ Seed Send-Off date _____
Seed packet: "Plant in spring and think of me." Kids plant a few in a cup of soil.</p> <p>☐ Letter to Next December date _____
Kids write a letter to themselves to open next year. Seal it and tuck it away.</p> <p>☐ Return Ticket date _____
Paper ticket to the North Pole and a tiny suitcase (matchbox works).
<i>Note: "Ticket home. Save me a seat next year!"</i></p> <p>☐ Mini Cocoa Bar date _____
A tiny cocoa bar waits: a mug, a packet, and three marshmallows.
<i>Note: "Made you cocoa. Do not tell anyone I used all the marshmallows."</i></p> <p>☐ Lost and Found date _____
A small basket labeled "Lost: one mitten, elf size." Kids return it; he leaves a thank-you.</p> |
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THE THREE RULES THAT SAVE DECEMBER

1. Move <12 inches some nights. Small change beats a big stunt. Tiny boots poking out from behind books is funnier than a perfect scene.
2. Evidence-Only nights: don't move it at all. Leave flour footprints, a scarf, a melted snow puddle. Magic without effort.
3. Every 3rd night = kindness, not mischief. Fix a crayon, match socks, leave a thank-you. Wonder lasts longer than pranks.

OUR HOUSE RULES

write them once so every grown-up tells the same story

His name: _____

Where he naps: _____

Can he be touched? _____

Does he talk or write? _____

He arrives on: _____

He leaves on: _____

MY OWN IDEAS

the ones only you would think of — mark the box when you use it

☐ My idea date _____

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☐ My idea date _____

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☐ My idea date _____

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WONDER LOG

the funny, sweet things the kids said this season

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