

PUBLISHED BY

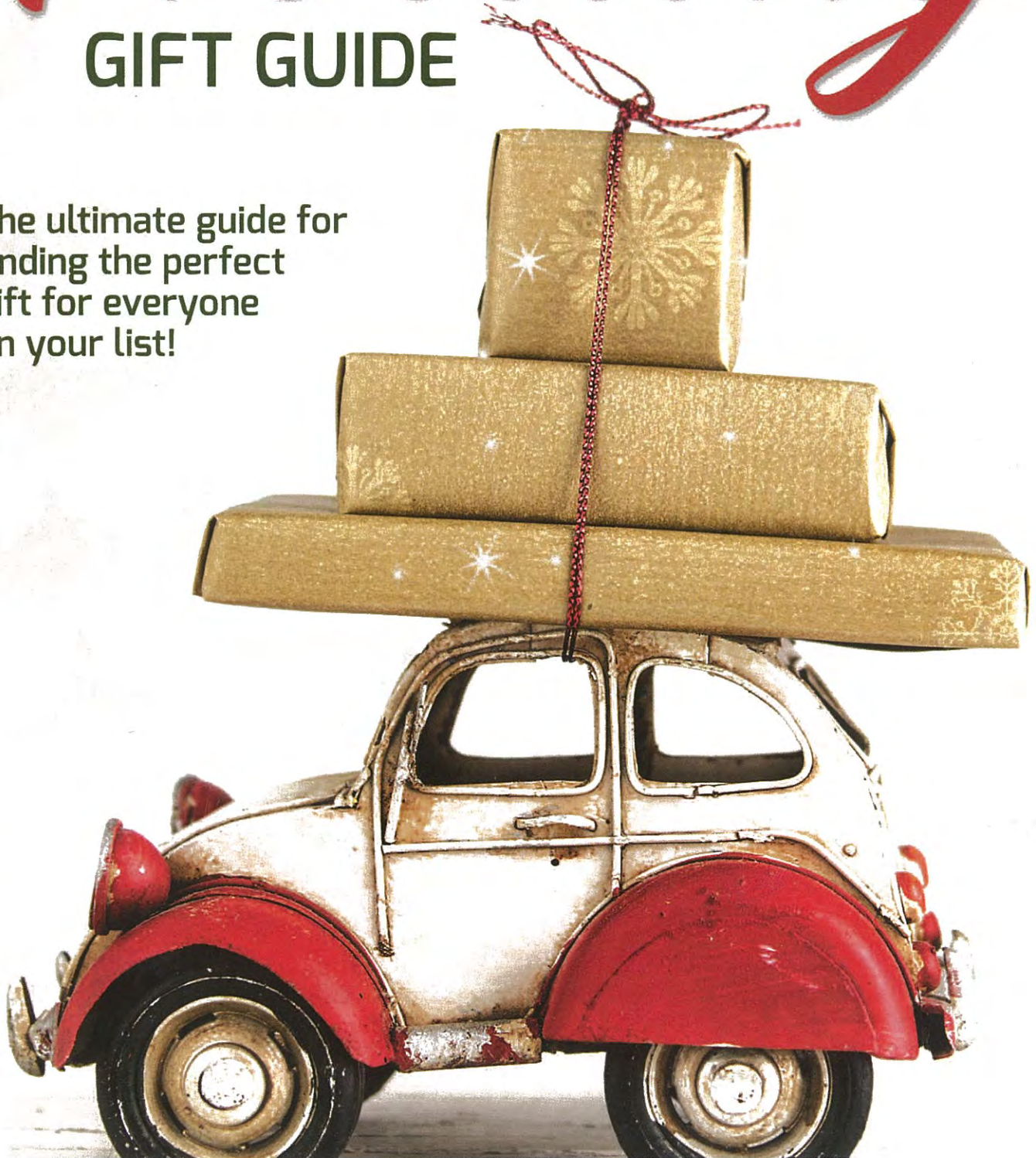


Holiday

2017

GIFT GUIDE

The ultimate guide for finding the perfect gift for everyone on your list!



The Elf is Waiting...

By Debbie Gardner
debbieg@thereminder.com

He's cute. He's perky. And he's Santa – and parents – best holiday helper.

The Elf on the Shelf – from the 2005 book by Carol Aeber-sold and her daughter, Chandra Bell – has exploded from a holi-day-inspired tale to a cultural phenomenon in just a little over a decade. Pinterest is full of inspiration on where to place your elf, how to announce his arrival, and how to use his presence to encourage good behavior in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

“We used to have Santa watching you, now we have an actual Elf that pops up in homes and watches you,” said Allison Genovese, vice president of Early Childhood Programs at Realizing Children’s Strengths and Mini Miracles Early Education and Child Care Center in Natick, MA. “Every evening the elf pops off to the North Pole and reports and comes back every morning.

“[The elf] sort-of answers the question of how does Santa know if you are being good, or bad,” Genovese continued.

Though there has been some criticism – including a story by columnist Kate Tuttle in the December 2012 issue of *The Atlantic* – that questions the idea of promoting surveillance as a threat to encourage good behavior, Genovese, who is a licensed behavior analyst, said that used with thought and care, the Elf on the Shelf can help parents encourage and reinforce positive behaviors.

“I’ve seen it work really well and I’ve seen it go awry if you aren’t using it correctly or positively,” she said.

GETTING THE MOST FROM THE ELF

Genovese – who is the mother of a active four and six-year olds in addition to specializing in child development and

behavior management – offered the following tips for parents when it comes to the Elf and managing holiday expectations.

“One thing I always suggest is picking specific behaviors that the Elf is trying to increase or decrease” during the holiday season, Genovese said. It’s also important to make sure the behaviors the elf is watching are age-appropriate, and not just parental aspirations.

“I always say the Elf is full of magic, but your child is not,” she said. “Choose things you know that [your children] are capable of so they can be reinforced by the Elf.”

Though the cardinal rule is that the child can’t touch the Elf, the Elf, Genovese said, is free to communicate with the child. Leaving little notes or lists – Pinterest is full of creative ideas and templates – are, she said, a common technique parents use to encourage or discourage behaviors.

“These notes can be something that challenges the child to do something good – ‘can you be a cleaning helper and clean up around the house or environment,’” Genovese said. They can also be a way to put a positive spin on behaviors parents are trying to avoid, imploring tantrum-prone toddlers to “go to bed quietly with a calm body,” she added.

If you have multiple children, the Elf can present the brood with a challenge for the holidays, such as practicing acts of kindness, she said.

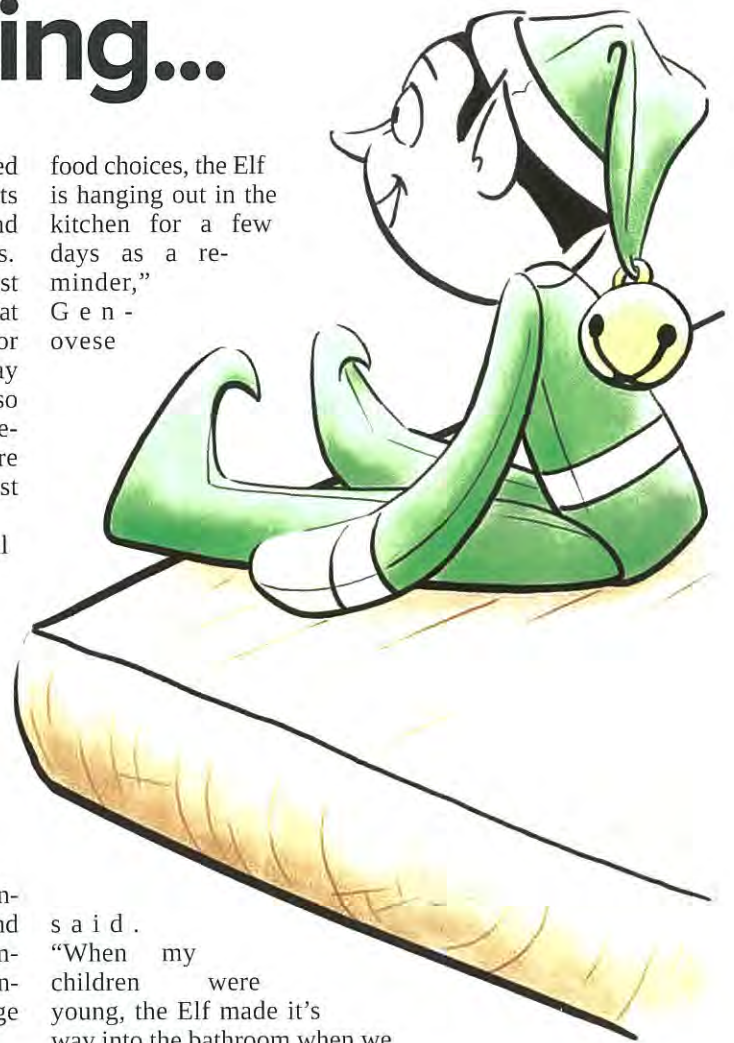
“Maybe with your two-year-old it’s about sharing their toys and your eight year old it’s about being kind to a kid in school who is having a hard time,” she suggested.

Another technique is to have the Elf hang out in areas of the home where behavior problems seem to crop up.

“If you’re struggling at dinnertime, or with making healthy

food choices, the Elf is hanging out in the kitchen for a few days as a reminder,”

Genovese



said.

“When my children were young, the Elf made it’s way into the bathroom when we were potty training.”

If parents do feel the need to address negative behaviors, Genovese said Pinterest also has great templates for Elf-issued warnings designed to let the child know “the Elf did see you doing something that wasn’t necessarily a good choice.

“This can really be a fun, positive thing if done right,” she added.

And though there’s no physical contact allowed between child and Elf, Genovese said there’s no reason your kids can’t self-report behaviors to the Elf.

“This removes the idea that the elf is watching,” she said. “At the end of the day [your child can] share things that [they] did that [they] are proud of – it’s more like [their] direct line to Santa Claus.”

If it was a bad day, Genovese said the child “can also talk to the Elf about something they regret doing – how it was not a good choice – and how they are

going to make it better the next day.”

BEYOND THE ELF

Genovese said though the Elf on the Shelf is the hot new way to encourage good behavior during the holiday season, Santa’s observer doesn’t have to be an Elf.

“You can use a stuffed animal – a snowman or even a reindeer – and adapt the story. Parent’s don’t really need to invest in the Elf on the Shelf,” she said. “It’s just some magical messenger of Santa.”

And she reminded parents that their behavior strategy has to extend beyond the Elf on the Shelf concept.

“It’s only here for a month, so it can’t be your only behavior management strategy because it’s very short-lived,” she said.