GUIDEBOOK

November 2026

HinduPACT Guide to Diwali for Parents and Families

Includes American Hindu Advocacy Manual

Celebrating Light over Darkness, and Good Over Evil



PUBLISHED BY

Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective (HinduPACT), American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) and HinduNet

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Preface

Who this guide is for

It is written for families raising children in the United States who want more than a party plan. They want to know what Diwali means, why Hindus mark it in different ways, what practices are common, and how to explain the festival simply and accurately to children, teachers, neighbors, and friends.

It begins from Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), and it respects the regional and sampradaya differences through which families actually observe the festival.

What this guide will and will not do

It will help you teach children the central stories, the values they carry, and the common observances that families may see across different parts of Bharat and the Hindu diaspora.

It will not flatten Diwali into a single story, a shopping occasion, or a stereotype about noise and excess. Nor will it turn a sacred festival into a political argument. Where families are likely to meet shallow or hostile framings, this guide corrects them plainly and moves on.

How this guide was prepared

This guide was prepared from the published positions of Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective, American Hindus Against Defamation, and HinduNet, together with the sources listed in the References for each section. It draws first on those published positions where they bear on the subject, then on the cited source material for history, practice, terminology, and public explanation.

How to use this guide

Use this guide in the way families actually need it:

- ✓ Read the opening sections first, so you have the core meaning of Diwali before planning activities.
- ✓ Use the family explanation sections to speak with children in age-appropriate language.
- ✓ Use the school and community guidance when preparing classroom visits, handouts, or conversations with non-Hindu friends.

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- ✓ Return to the practical sections as a checklist for worship, hospitality, storytelling, and family customs.
- ✓ Adapt the details to your family's sampradaya, region, language, and household tradition.

The aim is simple: to help your family celebrate Diwali with understanding, dignity, and happiness, and to pass that inheritance on well.

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Index

- Preface 1
- About the Publisher 4
- Introduction 5

1. What Diwali Means 8
2. The Diwali Days 13
3. How Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists Observe Diwali 21
4. Stories Families Tell at Diwali 28
5. Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration 35
6. Parents Guide 42
7. Workplace Guide 49
8. Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges 58
9. Responding to Diwali Criticism 65

- Frequently Asked Questions 77
- Glossary 87
- For Further Information 92
- Conclusion 94
- Appendix: Templates 96
  - A. Family Diwali Celebration Planner 97
  - B. School Diwali Information Sheet 102
  - C. Diwali Event Checklist for Families 106
  - D. Diwali Day-Off from School 111
- Appendices 115
  - A. Chopda Pujan 116
  - B. Diwali Puja 122
  - C. Rangoli or Kolam 128
  - D. Diwali Games 134
- Infographics 140
- Posters and Pamphlets 144
- References 147

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About the Publisher

Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective (HinduPACT)

The Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective (HinduPACT) is dedicated to the advocacy and policy research of issues concerning the American Hindu community. HinduPACT promotes human rights, voter education, and policies affecting American Hindus, aiming to advance peace and understanding through informed policy initiatives and grassroots advocacy. Visit https://hindupact.org[1]

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American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD)

Established in 1997 and now part of HinduPACT, AHAD stands as the pioneering Hindu movement globally dedicated to combating Hinduphobia and the denigration of Hindu scriptures, deities, icons, and cultural symbols across publications, mass media, and educational materials. AHAD leverages innovative AI methods to detect and counter Hindu hatred and ensure the sanctity of Hindu heritage. Visit https://ahadinfo.org[2]

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HinduNet

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Introduction

Why families need this guide now

You are likely meeting Diwali in two places at once: at home, where children ask what the lamps mean, why the dates change, and which story your family tells, and in American public life, where schools, workplaces, media, and local governments increasingly recognize the festival but often explain it too loosely, too narrowly, or incorrectly.[3][4][5] Parents and families need a guide that is clear enough for a child, accurate enough for a classroom, and broad enough to reflect the many communities that observe this season.[3][4]



Diwali Fireworks

For many families, the immediate problem is practical. A child comes home with a worksheet that says Diwali is only one thing, or a teacher asks for a short explanation, or a neighbor knows it as a fireworks holiday and little more. Some families also meet a second problem, the pressure to flatten a sacred festival into a generic message about "light over darkness," without the calendar, the worship, the family customs, the regional traditions, or the distinct ways Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists relate to it.[3][4][6] That leaves parents doing two jobs at once: teaching their own children and correcting the public record.

WHY IT MATTERS

When a festival is explained badly, children notice. They hear the simplified version in public, then wonder whether the fuller version at home is somehow less real.

This guide is written to help families answer those questions with confidence. It begins from Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), because Diwali or Deepavali is rooted in the dharmic civilizational world, its sacred calendar, its stories, and its household practices. At the same time, it

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takes care to distinguish communities rather than blur them together. Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists may share the season, the date, or the language of lamps and liberation, but they do not all tell the same story or perform the same observances.[3][4][6]

What this guide covers

The guide is organized so a family can use it in more than one way: to prepare for the festival at home, to explain it in school or at work, and to answer common misunderstandings in American settings. It includes these sections:

- ✓ What is Diwali or Deepavali
- ✓ Jain Diwali Stories and Traditions
- ✓ Buddhist Diwali Stories and Traditions
- ✓ Sikh Diwali Stories and Traditions
- ✓ Diwali Customs
- ✓ Recognition of Diwali
- ✓ Diwali challenges
- ✓ Parents Guide
- ✓ Workplace Guide
- ✓ Diwali Games
- ✓ What Diwali Means
- ✓ The Five Days of Diwali
- ✓ Stories Families Tell at Diwali
- ✓ How Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists Observe Diwali
- ✓ Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration

Some sections explain the foundations: what the word Deepavali means, how the lunar calendar determines the date, why many families observe five days, why for some communities this is also a new year season, and why Bhai Beej or Bhai Dooj follows. Other sections focus on the stories families tell, including the return of Shri Rama to Ayodhya, the defeat of Narakasura by Shri Krishna, the Jain remembrance of Bhagwan Mahavira's nirvana, and the Sikh observance of Bandi Chhor Divas.[3][4][6]

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KEY POINT

This guide does not force one story on every family. It helps you know which story belongs to which sampradaya, region, or household custom, and how to explain that difference simply.

The position of this guide

This is a family guide, not a debate tract. It is written from within the dharmic understanding of the festival, with respect for sacred meaning, civilizational continuity, and the lived practices that families carry across generations. It treats Diwali as more than a consumer event, more than a school diversity lesson, and more than a slogan. It is a season of worship, memory, family duty, gratitude, renewal, and joy.[3][4][5]

That matters in the United States today because recognition is growing. Public institutions now mark Diwali more openly, including state level recognition in places such as Pennsylvania and California, and White House observance has become part of national public life.[7][8][9] Yet wider recognition does not automatically produce better understanding. Families still need language that is faithful, concise, and usable.

This guide is meant to give you that language; for school life and common public misunderstandings, see Parents Guide and Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges.[3][4][7][8]

IN PRACTICE

Use this guide in three settings: before Diwali at home, when speaking with a school or teacher, and when your child wants a short answer that is still true.

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1. What Diwali Means

Begin with the meaning, not the noise

Diwali, also called Deepavali, is first of all a festival of light. The word comes from Sanskrit: dipa, lamp, and avali, a row or line, so Deepavali means a row of lamps.[5][3] That meaning matters because it tells your family what to notice first. Before gifts, sweets, decorations, or public events, Diwali begins with the act of bringing light where there was darkness.

For parents and children, this is the clearest first sentence to learn and repeat: Diwali celebrates light over darkness, dharma over adharma, gratitude for what sustains life, renewal in home and heart, and joyful gathering with family and community.[3][10][11] If your child is asked what Diwali means, start there. Do not feel pressed to reduce the festival to one region, one custom, or one story.[3][4][6]



Joyful Family Lamp Lighting

☆ KEY POINT

Teach this sentence first: Diwali means a row of lamps, and it celebrates light over darkness and dharma over adharma.

Know where Diwali falls in the year

Families should know where Diwali sits in the Hindu lunar calendar. The festival falls in the month of Kartika, around the dark fortnight and new moon period, which usually comes in October or November on the Gregorian calendar.[3][6][12] Because the Hindu calendar is lunar, the Gregorian date changes every year.[12] That is normal. It is not a sign that the festival is vague or uncertain. It reflects a different and very old way of reckoning sacred time, tied to lunar phases and traditional calendrical calculation.[12][13]

That shifting date is often the first point of confusion in American schools and workplaces. Say it simply: Diwali does not have a fixed Gregorian date because it is set by the Hindu lunar calendar.[12] If

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someone asks for the exact day in a given year, look up that year's tithi and local observance date, then answer with the full date. Save the day by day sequence for The Diwali Days.

Understand the moral center

The lamps are not decoration alone. They teach. In Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), light is a moral and spiritual image as well as a physical one. A well known Upanishadic prayer asks to be led "from darkness to light."[14] Families do not need to turn Diwali into a philosophy lesson for children, but they should know that the symbolism is deep and ancient. Light stands for clarity, truth, wisdom, and right action. Darkness stands for confusion, fear, ignorance, and disorder.[10][14]

That is why Diwali is not a festival of mere spectacle. Its center is dharma over adharma. In many family traditions, children first meet this through stories of Shri Rama's return to Ayodhya or Shri Krishna's victory over Narakasura, but the stories serve the principle, not the other way around.[3][4][6] The principle is that evil, arrogance, cruelty, and disorder do not have the last word. Righteous conduct, courage, self mastery, gratitude, and divine grace prevail.[3][10][4]

This is also why Diwali belongs in family formation. Children should come away knowing that celebration and character belong together. A lamp is lit outwardly, but it also asks for inward work: speak truthfully, act justly, control anger, show generosity, and repair what has become neglected in the home or in relationships.[10][11][14]

WHY IT MATTERS

If children learn only that Diwali is "the Indian festival with lights and sweets," they miss its heart. The festival teaches moral clarity, gratitude, and renewal.

See gratitude and renewal clearly

Diwali is a season of gratitude. Families give thanks for life, learning, food, livelihood, elders, ancestors, and the blessings that make a home possible.[3][4][6] In many traditions, the season also carries themes of prosperity and auspicious beginning, including reverence for Shri Lakshmi and, in some communities, the opening of new business accounts or a new year observance.[3][6] That does not make Diwali a festival of greed. It places prosperity under dharma. Wealth is to be sought and used rightly, with discipline, generosity, and reverence, not as an excuse for excess.[3]

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Renewal is the second family lesson. Homes are cleaned, lamps are lit, and people put on fresh clothes not merely to look festive but to mark a resetting of life toward order, beauty, and welcome.[3][6] Children should be taught that renewal includes the visible and the invisible. A clean threshold matters. So do reconciled relationships, gratitude to parents and grandparents, and a more disciplined home atmosphere.

Some public commentary treats Diwali as if it has been emptied of meaning and replaced by shopping or noise. That is a shallow reading. Commercial excess can attach itself to any major holiday, but it does not define the festival's meaning, which remains rooted in lamp lighting, prayer, gratitude, family duty, and the victory of good over evil across enduring regional traditions.[3][10][4][6]

Recognize shared celebration without flattening differences

Parents should teach one more point early: Diwali is widely shared across dharmic communities, but not always for the same reason.[3][6] Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists may all mark the season, yet each community does so through its own sacred memory and practice.[3][6] That shared observance is a sign of civilizational depth, not a reason to blur distinctions.

For this section, the key point is simple. Your family should understand that Diwali is broader than one local custom and larger than one narrow public explanation. It is part of a dharmic civilizational world in which light, liberation, gratitude, memory, and righteous conduct are honored in related but distinct ways.[3][6] For the separate meanings in each community, see How Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists Observe Diwali.

A hostile framing you may meet says Diwali is meaningful only if it is detached from Hindu civilizational memory and retold as a generic modern message. Correct that plainly: Diwali is already capacious and humane, but its depth comes from the dharmic traditions that carried it, preserved it, and gave its symbols their meaning.[3][10][6][14]

What to say, what to avoid

Use the table below as your family's quick guide for school conversations, neighbors, and children's questions.

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Topic	Say	Avoid	Use when
Meaning	Diwali, or Deepavali, means a row of lamps.[5][3]	“It just means parties and fireworks.”	First explanation to children or friends
Core idea	It celebrates light over darkness and dharma over adharma.[3][10][14]	Reducing it to one commercial custom	Classroom, family discussion
Date	It follows the Hindu lunar calendar, so the Gregorian date changes each year.[12][13]	“No one knows when it is.”	School forms, invitations, workplace questions
Scope	Many Hindus observe it, and other dharmic communities also mark the season in distinct ways.[3][6]	Flattening all observances into one story	Interfaith or public settings
Prosperity	Prosperity is honored under dharma, with gratitude and right conduct.[3]	Treating Diwali as a wealth festival only	When Lakshmi worship is mentioned

Family checklist for teaching the meaning well

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Teach children the meaning of Deepavali: a row of lamps.
- [ ] Teach one sentence on the festival’s moral center: light over darkness, dharma over adharma.
- [ ] Explain that the date changes because the Hindu calendar is lunar.
- [ ] Tell children that different dharmic communities may observe the season differently.
- [ ] Keep the first explanation simple, then add stories in Stories Families Tell at Diwali.

Step	Who	When	Purpose
Learn the one sentence	Parents and children	Before the festival season	Gives children a confident first answer
Check the year’s date	Parents	At least two weeks ahead	Prevents school and schedule confusion

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Step (cont.)	Who	When	Purpose
Choose your family wording	Parents or grandparents	Before guests or school events	Keeps the explanation accurate and consistent
Add one story only	Parents	After the core meaning is clear	Builds understanding without overload

Keep the first explanation proportionate

Children do not need every regional variation at once. They need a true first picture. Start with the word, the lamp, the calendar, and the moral center. Then add your family's own practice and story tradition. If your family observes Diwali through Shri Rama's return, say so. If your family emphasizes Naraka Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja, or a new year custom, say so. The point is not to force uniformity. The point is to hand on meaning with clarity.[3][4][6]

For American settings, this proportion matters. When Diwali is explained too loosely, it becomes a vague multicultural festival of happiness. When it is explained too narrowly, children are told there is only one correct story or one regional form. Both are mistakes. Diwali is unified by its civilizational themes, light, dharma, gratitude, renewal, and shared celebration, while remaining richly diverse in observance.[3][10][4][6]

If your family keeps that structure in view, children will be able to answer the most common question with confidence: What does Diwali mean? It means we light the lamp, honor dharma, give thanks, renew the home and the heart, and celebrate that light is stronger than darkness.[3][10][11][14]

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2. The Diwali Days

Follow your family calendar with confidence

Diwali is not one single day in one single form. It is a season in the Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) calendar, and families may count it as five days, six days, or a longer sacred stretch that begins before Dhanteras. Names also change by region, language, and sampradaya. A North Indian family may center Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya. A South Indian family may rise before dawn for Naraka Chaturdashi. A Gujarati family may treat the day after Diwali as New Year. A Sikh family may mark Bandi Chor Diwas on the Diwali Amavasya date. These are not contradictions. They are part of a living civilizational festival with shared themes of light, gratitude, renewal, protection, and the victory of dharma over adharma.[15][3][16]

For hostile framings of Diwali, see "What Diwali Means".[15][3][17]

Families do best when they decide early which calendar and custom they are following, then keep the observance steady at home. If your temple publishes a local panchang, use that. If your family elders follow a regional reckoning, use that. If you are blending traditions in an American household, say so openly to children: "Different Hindu families keep these days in different ways, and we are following our family's tradition."[15][16][18]

☆ KEY POINT

Regional variation is normal. The sequence below helps families recognize the days they may see on calendars, temple notices, and school materials, then observe their own sampradaya and regional custom with confidence.

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Day	Names you may see	What families should know	What to do at home
Ekadashi	Rama Ekadashi, Krishna Paksha Ekadashi	For many families, the season begins with inward preparation, prayer, and restraint before the more public festival days.[15][18]	Mark the date on the family calendar, simplify meals if your tradition keeps the vrata, and tell children this day prepares the mind before celebration.
Dwadashi	Govatsa Dwadashi, Vasu Baras, Vagh Baras	In many regions this day honors the cow and calf, gratitude for nourishment, and the household economy. In Maharashtra and Gujarat it is often treated as an opening Diwali observance.[15][18][19]	Offer simple reverence to gau mata in the form your family knows, support a goshala if that is your custom, and begin home cleaning and festival setup.
Day 1	Dhanvantari Trayodashi, Dhanteras	This day is linked with Dhanvantari and Ayurveda, and in many homes with auspicious purchases, lamps, and preparation for Lakshmi Puja.[20]	Clean the puja area, place the lamps you will use later, and if you buy something, keep it modest and purposeful.
Day 2	Naraka Chaturdashi, Chhoti Diwali, Kali Chaudas	Many South Indian families center the defeat of Narakasura and keep an early oil bath before dawn. Some communities also observe Kali Puja or protective rites around this date.[3][5][6]	Prepare oil, new clothes, sweets, and morning timing the night before. Explain that joy follows the removal of cruelty and fear.

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Day (cont.)	**Names you may see**	**What families should know**	**What to do at home**
Day 3	Diwali, Lakshmi Puja, Amavasya, Bandi Chor Diwas	This is the central night for lamps and Lakshmi Puja in many Hindu homes. Sikh families also mark Bandi Chor Diwas, recalling Guru Hargobind Sahib's liberation and the release of imprisoned kings.[16]	Gather the household for evening worship, light diyas safely, and greet Sikh friends with respect for Bandi Chor Diwas if they observe it.
Day 4	Govardhan Puja, Annakut, Balipratipada, Gujarati New Year	This day may honor Sri Krishna lifting Govardhan, the offering of Annakut, Bali Pratipada, or the New Year in Gujarati and related traditions.[3][21]	Offer a variety of foods if your tradition keeps Annakut, visit temple if possible, and exchange New Year greetings where customary.
Day 5	Bhai Dooj, Bhai Beej, Yama Dwitiya	This day honors the bond of brother and sister, with tilak, a meal, blessings, and gifts according to family custom.[3]	Keep the visit or video call intentional. Let children learn the words of blessing and the meaning of sibling duty.

The days before the main lamps

Rama Ekadashi and Govatsa Dwadashi are easy to miss in American life because schools and workplaces usually recognize only "Diwali." Do not let the public calendar flatten your home calendar. These earlier days set the tone. Ekadashi teaches self-command. Govatsa Dwadashi teaches gratitude, especially for nourishment, care, and the civilizational place of the cow in Hindu life.[15][18][19]

If your children are old enough to notice different names online, explain the difference simply. "A tithi is a lunar date. One festival season can include several tithis, and different communities emphasize different ones." That one sentence prevents confusion later when they see Dhanteras on one flyer, Kali Chaudas on another, and Diwali on a school poster.[15][18]

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Dhanteras and Naraka Chaturdashi

Dhanteras is widely recognized as the formal opening of the five day sequence. It is associated with Dhanvantari, revered as the divine source of Ayurveda, and many families treat it as a day to prepare the home, arrange lamps, and make an auspicious purchase.[20] Keep the purchase in proportion. A small diya set, a kitchen vessel, or a needed household item is enough. Do not teach children that the point of Dhanteras is spending. Teach them that health, order, and gratitude come first.

Naraka Chaturdashi, also called Chhoti Diwali in many places and Kali Chaudas in others, carries a different emotional tone. It remembers the destruction of Narakasura and the release of those oppressed by him, and many South Indian families keep the pre dawn oil bath as a central act of the day.[3][5][6] If your family keeps that custom, prepare the night before. Children remember sequence better than explanation: oil, bath, new clothes, prayer, sweets, then celebration.

Diwali night, Lakshmi Puja, and Bandi Chor Diwas

The Amavasya night of Diwali is the best known observance in the United States, but even here families should name the day precisely at home. For many Hindus it is Diwali and Lakshmi Puja. For Sikhs, the same date may be observed as Bandi Chor Diwas, tied to Guru Hargobind Sahib and the release of fifty two captive rulers from Gwalior Fort.[16] If your children attend interfaith events, teach them to say, “Many Hindus celebrate Diwali tonight, and many Sikhs also observe Bandi Chor Diwas.” That is accurate and respectful.

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Diwali Days

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Lakshmi Puja belongs to your home and temple tradition, so keep the details there or in the worship section of this guide. What matters here is sequence. Finish practical chores before evening. Set out lamps before sunset. Gather everyone before guests or screens pull the family apart. The order of the evening teaches that prosperity follows discipline, reverence, and family unity, not the other way around.[3][17]

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⚠ CAUTION

Do not present one regional story as the only Diwali story. Children should know that Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Mahalakshmi, Bali Pratipada, Annakut, and Bandi Chor Diwas all appear in this season, depending on community and calendar.

The day after, Govardhan, Annakut, Bali Pratipada, and New Year

The day after Diwali is one of the easiest for American families to overlook, yet in many traditions it is the day of fullest community life. Govardhan Puja recalls Sri Krishna's protection of the people of Vraja. Annakut centers gratitude through a large offering of food. Balipratipada remembers King Bali in traditions that keep that observance. Gujarati families and many others also greet this day as the New Year.[3][21]

This is a good day to take children to temple because the visual teaching is strong. They can see the food offering, hear New Year greetings, and understand that Diwali is not over when the fireworks end. If you cannot go to temple, make a home version: arrange a simple food offering, speak a New Year blessing, and call grandparents or relatives.

Bhai Dooj and the close of the sequence

Bhai Dooj, also called Bhai Beej or Yama Dwitiya, closes the common family sequence with affection and duty between siblings.[3] Keep it warm and uncluttered. The point is not the price of the gift. The point is blessing, hospitality, and the promise that brothers and sisters stand by one another.

In diaspora life, many siblings live apart. Use that reality well. A video call with tilak done on screen, a posted card, or a shared meal on the nearest weekend still teaches the bond. What children should hear is this: family affection in Hindu dharma is expressed through action, not sentiment alone.

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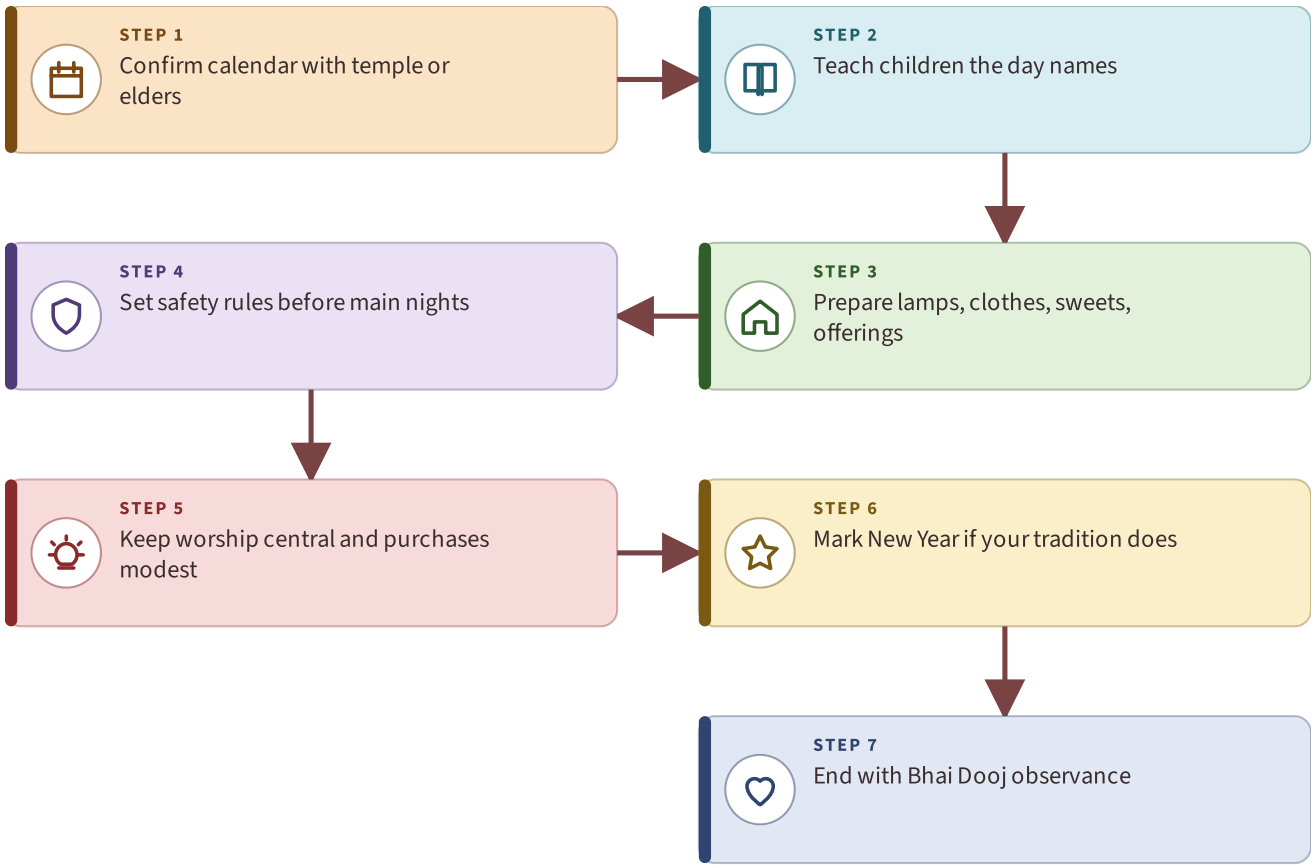
Task	Who	When	Notes
Confirm calendar	Parents or elders	2 to 3 weeks before	Use your temple panchang or family tradition, then share the dates with children.
Assign stories	Parents, grandparents, older children	1 week before	Match one short story to each day, so children learn sequence without overload.
Prepare supplies	Whole family	3 to 5 days before	Diyas, oil, wicks, matches, tray, sweets, tilak items, clean clothes, food offering items.
Set safety rules	Parents	Before Naraka Chaturdashi and Diwali night	Decide in advance about fireworks, candles, supervision, and quiet hours.
Make greetings list	Children with parent help	Before Day 3 and Day 4	Include relatives, teachers, neighbors, and Sikh friends if they observe Bandi Chor Diwas.
Keep the close	Siblings and parents	Bhai Dooj	Do tilak, blessing, meal, and a call or visit, even if brief.

IN PRACTICE

- [ ] Choose one calendar and stick to it.
- [ ] Teach children the day names they will actually hear.
- [ ] Keep purchases modest and worship central.
- [ ] Mark New Year if your tradition does.
- [ ] End with Bhai Dooj, not with cleanup alone.

If you need help with puja details, food, greeting language, school explanations, or workplace recognition, use the other sections of this guide for those subjects. Here, the main task is simpler: know the days, keep them in order, and let your family's own tradition lead with clarity and joy.

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Keep your family's Diwali days in order.

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3. How Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists Observe Diwali

Know the shared season, and the distinct meanings

This section helps families speak accurately about a shared civilizational season without flattening the traditions that honor it in different ways. For the meaning of Diwali itself, see What Diwali Means. For the festival sequence at home, see The Diwali Days.



Families explain shared season and distinct Diwali observances.

A hostile framing you may meet says that the only respectful way to speak about Diwali across communities is to strip it of Hindu civilizational memory and retell it as a generic modern message. That is false. The accurate approach is simpler and stronger: name the shared season, name each tradition's own sacred memory, and teach children that common civilizational inheritance and distinct observance can both be true at once.[10][22][23][24][25][26]

For Hindu families, the first lesson is discipline in language. Do not teach children that every community marks Diwali for the same reason. Do not teach the opposite error either, that these traditions stand in sealed compartments with no shared civilizational thread. Teach the middle truth clearly: the season is shared across dharmic communities, the meanings are not identical, and the moral thread of light over darkness, dharma over adharma, liberation over bondage, and knowledge over ignorance runs through them all.[10][22][23][24][25][26]

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☆ KEY POINT

Teach two truths together. The season is shared across dharmic communities, and each community keeps its own sacred meaning, name, and memory within it.

What to say, and what to avoid

Topic	Say this	Avoid
Shared season	“These communities honor the same festive season within a shared dharmic civilizational world, but not always for the same sacred reason.”	“They all celebrate exactly the same holiday.”
Hindu observance	“In Hindu homes, Diwali marks light over darkness through stories and practices that vary by region and sampradaya.”	“There is only one Hindu reason for Diwali.”
Jain observance	“Jains observe Diwali to remember Bhagwan Mahavira’s nirvana and the enduring light of his teaching.”	“Jain Diwali is just a smaller version of the Hindu festival.”
Sikh observance	“For Sikhs, Diwali is also important, and the day is especially remembered as Bandi Chhor Divas, linked to Guru Hargobind Sahib’s release and the liberation of imprisoned kings.”	“Sikhs have nothing to do with Diwali,” or “Bandi Chhor Divas is unrelated to the Diwali season.”
Buddhist observance	“Some Buddhist communities observe the season in regional ways, especially in Nepal and among Newar Buddhists.”	“All Buddhists celebrate Diwali.”

Begin with your own home sentence

Children handle difference well when parents give them one disciplined sentence first. In a Hindu home, that sentence should begin with your own practice, then widen outward. Say: “Our family observes Diwali in the Hindu way we have received, and other dharmic communities honor the same season through their own sacred memories.” That gives children a stable center before they speak in school, at a neighbor’s house, or in an interfaith setting.[10][22][25][26]

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Then add one sentence for each community your child is likely to meet. Keep it short. Accuracy matters more than volume. A child does not need a lecture to avoid confusion. A child needs language that is precise, respectful, and easy to remember.

Why Jains observe Diwali

For Jains, Diwali is inseparable from the nirvana of Bhagwan Mahavira. Jain sources state that Bhagwan Mahavira, the twenty fourth Tirthankara, attained nirvana at Pavapuri on this sacred night, and Jain communities continue to mark Diwali as Mahavira Nirvana Kalyanak.[27][28][29]



Jain Diwali
HinduPACT

That is the sacred center to teach first. Do not reduce Jain observance to a side note under a Hindu story. If a school handout mentions Jains, it should name Mahavira directly. If your child is speaking with Jain friends, teach your child to say “Mahavira’s nirvana” or “Mahavira’s final liberation,” not vague language about a general festival of lights.[27][28][29]

At the same time, do not speak as if Jain observance stands outside the wider festive world of Kartika. Jain communities also mark the season with lamps, prayer, reflection, and in many places the opening of a new year cycle and new account books. Shared forms do not erase distinct meaning. They show how deeply these traditions have lived alongside one another in the same civilizational rhythm.[27][28][6]

The best family sentence is this: “Jains observe Diwali to remember Bhagwan Mahavira’s nirvana and the light of his teaching.”[27][28][29]

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Why Sikhs observe Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas



Bandi Chor Diwas

HinduPACT

Families should teach this carefully, because this is where public language often becomes clumsy. It is not accurate to speak as if Sikhs merely borrowed a Hindu festival and gave it a new label. It is also not accurate to speak as if Sikh observance has no place in the Diwali season. The better statement is fuller and truer: Diwali is important in Sikh tradition, and the day carries special historical and spiritual force as Bandi Chhor Divas.[23][24][30][31]

Bandi Chhor Divas remembers Guru Hargobind Sahib's release from Gwalior Fort in 1619 and, with him, the liberation of fifty two imprisoned kings. Sikh institutions continue to mark the day in those terms, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee itself uses the combined wording "DEWALI (Bandi Chhor Diwas)" in its festival guidance.[23][24][30]

Parents should also teach the moral force of the event. The memory is not only about release from prison. It is about righteous leadership that does not accept freedom for itself alone. Sikh tradition remembers Guru Hargobind Sahib as securing the freedom of the detained rulers as well, which is why the title Bandi Chhor, the releaser of prisoners, became attached to him.[23][30][31]

Do not coach a child to say, "Sikhs do not celebrate Diwali, only Bandi Chhor Divas," because that overcorrects and creates a false separation. Teach this instead: "For Sikhs, Diwali is also important, and it is especially remembered as Bandi Chhor Divas, when Guru Hargobind Sahib was released and fifty two imprisoned kings were freed."[23][24][30][31]

That sentence preserves both truths. It respects the Sikh name for the observance. It also does not pretend that Sikh and Hindu traditions developed in isolation from the same sacred calendar, the same land, and the same long civilizational memory.[22][23][24][25][26]

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⚠ CAUTION

Do not force a false choice between shared season and Sikh meaning. Use the Sikh name, Bandi Chhor Divas, and also teach that Diwali remains an important day in Sikh tradition.

Buddhist observances, say only what is true

This is the place for restraint. Families should not make sweeping claims about a universal Buddhist Diwali. That is not accurate. What is true is more specific and more useful.

Some Buddhist communities observe this festive season in regional forms, especially in Nepal. The Nepal Tourism Board describes Tihar as a five day festival of lights in Nepal, and Newar Buddhist traditions preserve important observances connected with Dipankara Buddha within this wider seasonal setting.[32][33]

That means your child should use regional language, not blanket language. If a school asks whether Buddhists celebrate Diwali, the best answer is: “Some Buddhist communities do, especially in Nepal and among Newar Buddhists, but not all Buddhists observe it.” That is accurate, respectful, and easy for a teacher to repeat correctly.[32][33]

Family comparison, for school and community use

Community	Name used	Sacred center	Best family wording
Hindu	Diwali, Deepavali	Light over darkness, with stories and observances that vary by region and sampradaya	“Our Hindu family observes Diwali through our own home and temple tradition.”
Jain	Diwali	Mahavira’s nirvana, the light of knowledge, and in many communities a new year season	“Jains observe Diwali to remember Mahavira’s final liberation.”

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Community (cont.)	Name used	Sacred center	Best family wording
Sikh	Diwali, especially Bandi Chhor Divas	Guru Hargobind Sahib's release in 1619 and the freeing of fifty two imprisoned kings	"For Sikhs, Diwali is also important, and it is especially remembered as Bandi Chhor Divas."
Buddhist	Regional observances	Regional festival of lights observances, especially in Nepal and Newar Buddhist settings	"Some Buddhist communities observe the season in regional ways."

Checklist for parents and families

- [ ] Teach your child one accurate sentence for Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist observance before any school presentation or interfaith event.
- [ ] If Sikhs are included in a school or community program, ask that "Bandi Chhor Divas" be named directly, not buried under a generic Diwali label.
- [ ] If the same program uses only "Bandi Chhor Divas" and leaves children thinking Sikhs have no Diwali connection at all, ask for wording that reflects both truths: Diwali is important in Sikh tradition, and the day is especially remembered as Bandi Chhor Divas.[24][30][31]
- [ ] If Jains are included, ask that Mahavira's nirvana be named directly.[27][28][29]
- [ ] If Buddhists are mentioned, require regional specificity. Do not allow a claim that all Buddhists celebrate Diwali.[32][33]
- [ ] If a flyer says everyone celebrates Diwali for the same reason, ask for a correction in writing before the event.
- [ ] Keep your child's language short enough to remember and exact enough to repeat without embarrassment.

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IN PRACTICE

If a teacher asks, “Do Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists all observe Diwali the same way?” coach your child to answer: “They share the season, but each tradition keeps its own meaning. Hindus observe Diwali in different regional ways, Jains remember Mahavira’s nirvana, Sikhs mark Diwali with special importance as Bandi Chhor Divas, and some Buddhist communities observe the season regionally.”

When children meet confusion in American settings

American schools and public programs often want one sentence, one craft, and one poster. Families can cooperate without surrendering accuracy. If the school is making diyas, rangoli, or a lights display, that is fine as an entry point. But tell the teacher plainly that one visual symbol does not explain every community’s observance.

The goal is not to argue. The goal is to prevent two common errors at once: erasing Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) from Diwali, and flattening Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist traditions into a single interchangeable script. Parents who give schools exact wording early usually prevent the problem before it reaches the classroom.

When in doubt, keep the family rule simple. Name the shared season. Name the community’s own observance. Name the sacred meaning. That is how families honor both unity and truth.[10][22][23][24][25][26]

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4. Stories Families Tell at Diwali

Tell the stories as your family stories

Begin with one clear sentence at home: Diwali belongs to Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), and no single story exhausts its meaning. Different regions, sampradayas, and family lineages emphasize different episodes, yet the shared thread is the same, light over darkness, good over evil, gratitude over arrogance, and prosperity joined to dharma, right conduct.[3][34][6]

Children do not need every story at once. Give them one or two at a time, then repeat them each year. That is how memory forms. If a school handout says Diwali is only about one event, correct it simply: many Hindu families tell the return of Shri Rama to Ayodhya, many tell Shri Krishna's victory over Narakasura, and many also center Lakshmi Puja, Govardhan, Bali Pratipada, or Yama Dwitiya.[34][6][10]



Shree Rama Return to Ayodhya

Correct hostile framings simply and firmly; see Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges.[3][34]

☆ KEY POINT

Do not force your family into one "official" Diwali story. Teach the story your family actually lives, then add one more story each year so children learn both rootedness and breadth.

Start with Shri Rama's return to Ayodhya

For many families, this is the first Diwali story to tell. Shri Rama returns to Ayodhya after exile, after the defeat of Ravana, and after the long struggle to restore dharma. The people of Ayodhya welcome him with joy, public celebration, and light.[34]

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Tell children what to notice. Rama does not return as a conqueror hungry for power. He returns as the rightful king who kept his word, endured hardship, protected others, and came home with honor intact. That is why this story fits Diwali so well. The lamps are not decoration alone. They are signs of welcome, relief, and the restoration of rightful order.[34]

Keep your telling short. Young children can hold three points: Rama kept dharma, evil was defeated, and Ayodhya lit the way home. Older children can add that Diwali remembers not only victory in battle, but the joy of return after endurance.[34][10]

What to avoid: do not reduce the Ramayana to a cartoon of “good people versus bad people” with no moral depth. Children should hear that Diwali honors courage, fidelity, duty, and kingship ordered by dharma. For fuller meaning, see What Diwali Means.[3][34]

Tell Narakasura with clarity, not confusion



Krishna Satyabhama Narakasura

HinduPACT

In many parts of India, especially in the South, families mark Diwali through the story of Shri Krishna’s victory over Narakasura. Narakasura misused power, oppressed people, and held women captive. Krishna, with Satyabhama in the tradition of many tellings, defeats him and frees those under his tyranny.[6][10][5]

This story is especially useful for children because its moral line is direct. Strength is good when it protects. Power becomes evil when it turns cruel. Deliverance brings joy, which is why the day is marked with festivity.[6][10][5]

If your family keeps the early morning oil bath custom, connect it to this story in one sentence only. Say that many families link the pre dawn bath and festive beginning to Naraka Chaturdashi and Krishna’s victory. Leave ritual detail to Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration.[6][5]

What to say when children ask why one family tells Rama and another tells Krishna: both are true within Hindu tradition, and Diwali is a many layered sacred season, not a single event compressed into one slogan.[34][6][10]

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Teach Lakshmi Puja in the right order

Many American explanations of Diwali flatten Lakshmi Puja into “pray for money.” Do not let that stand. Lakshmi is honored as the goddess of fortune, abundance, and well being, but Hindu teaching does not place wealth above dharma. Prosperity is to be sought and used rightly.[3][35]

This is where parents should be plain. Tell children: we do not worship greed. We ask that our home be blessed with enough, that our work be honest, that our giving be generous, and that what comes to us comes through right conduct.[3][35]

Some business communities open new account books around this time, and many households connect Lakshmi Puja with auspicious beginnings and orderly living.[6][4] The lesson for children is not bookkeeping. It is moral sequence. First cleanliness, gratitude, self discipline, and reverence. Then prosperity has a rightful place.[3]

If a child hears that Diwali is just about becoming rich, correct it with one sentence: Lakshmi stays where there is dignity, discipline, and dharma, not where there is greed and disorder.[35]

WHY IT MATTERS

Children in the United States often hear Diwali explained as “the Indian Christmas” or “a holiday about wealth.” Teach them early that Lakshmi Puja joins prosperity to character, gratitude, and right use of what one receives.

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Add Govardhan and Annakut the next day

For the place of the day after the main Diwali night in the festival sequence, see The Diwali Days. Govardhan Puja recalls Shri Krishna lifting Govardhan Hill to shelter the people and cattle of Vraja from Indra's storm. Annakut, the "mountain of food," expresses gratitude, abundance, and the offering of nourishment back to Bhagavan.[6][36][37]



Govardhan Annakuta

HinduPACT

This is one of the best Diwali stories for teaching humility. Indra's pride is checked. Krishna protects ordinary village life, cows, land, food, and community. Children can understand this at once: do not be arrogant, do not forget where your food comes from, and do not mock the dependence of human life on nature and grace.[36][37]

At home, explain Annakut in concrete terms. Many dishes are prepared, not to show off, but to express thankfulness. The "mountain" teaches abundance with reverence, not abundance with waste.[6][36]

If your children ask why food is central after a night of lamps, answer simply: light shows the way, and food sustains life. Diwali teaches both reverence and gratitude.[3][36]

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Tell Bali Pratipada as a lesson in humility and honor



King Bali and Vamana

HinduPACT

Bali Pratipada brings in the story of King Bali and Vamana, the dwarf form of Shri Vishnu. Bali is remembered for generosity and greatness, yet also for the overreach that comes when worldly power expands beyond rightful bounds. Vamana asks for three paces of land, then reveals the cosmic form that measures earth and heaven, and Bali yields.[6][6]

Parents should tell this story carefully. Bali is not a cardboard villain. He is a powerful king whose story teaches both nobility and limit. Children should hear two things together: generosity is admirable, and even greatness must bow before the divine order.[6][6]

This is also a good story for older children who are ready for a more textured moral world. Not every Diwali story is a simple battle scene. Some are about pride, surrender, promise, and the right relation between human authority and cosmic truth.[6]

What to avoid: do not turn Bali Pratipada into a crude ethnic or regional contrast. Keep the teaching on humility, honor, and the memory of a king still regarded with affection in many traditions.[6][6]

Close with Yama Dwitiya, the bond of siblings

For the place of Yama Dwitiya in the family sequence, see The Diwali Days.[6][38]

Tell children that sacred life is not only about epic victories. It is also about how family members honor one another. A sister welcomes her brother, marks him with tilak in many traditions, and prays for his well being. The brother responds with affection, respect, and care.[6]

For families with daughters only, sons only, cousins, or siblings living far apart, keep the principle and adapt the form. The point is not rigid performance. The point is remembered kinship, gratitude, and responsibility.[6]



Bhai Dooj

HinduPACT

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This is a strong answer to the shallow idea that Diwali is only spectacle. The festival closes by strengthening family bonds. That is not an afterthought. It is part of the teaching.[6]

Use the stories in a family rhythm

Do not lecture through all six narratives in one sitting. Use a simple sequence and repeat it every year. Children learn Diwali best by hearing the stories in small, memorable units.

Story set	Tell this point	Best for	Avoid
Rama	Dharma returns home, and Ayodhya welcomes it with light	First telling, younger children	Turning it into only a battle story
Krishna and Narakasura	Power must protect, not oppress	Younger and middle grade children	Graphic details or confusion over versions
Lakshmi Puja	Prosperity belongs with right conduct	All ages	Saying Diwali is about money
Govardhan and Annakut	Gratitude, humility, food, cows, and community matter	All ages	Treating food display as mere excess
Bali Pratipada	Greatness must bow to divine order	Older children	Making Bali a flat villain
Yama Dwitiya	Family duty and affection complete the season	All ages	Treating it as optional sentiment only

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Choose the one story your family will tell first this year.
- [ ] Add one second story that complements it.
- [ ] Teach each child one sentence for Rama, Krishna, Lakshmi, Govardhan, Bali, and Yama Dwitiya.
- [ ] Correct any school or media claim that Diwali has only one meaning.
- [ ] Keep prosperity language tied to dharma, gratitude, and self discipline.

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What to say, and what not to say

Use short, accurate sentences. “In our family, Diwali remembers Shri Rama’s return to Ayodhya.” “Many Hindus also tell the story of Shri Krishna defeating Narakasura.” “Lakshmi Puja teaches that prosperity should come with right conduct.” “Govardhan teaches gratitude and humility.” “Yama Dwitiya honors the bond between siblings.”[34][6][36]

Do not say: “There is only one real Diwali story.” Do not say: “Diwali is basically about getting rich.” Do not say: “It is just an Indian cultural festival.” Those shortcuts erase the sacred meanings families are trying to pass on.[3][34]

When children are ready, let them see the pattern across the stories. Rama restores rightful rule. Krishna defeats oppression. Lakshmi blesses ordered prosperity. Govardhan humbles pride and honors sustenance. Bali teaches the limit of worldly power. Yama Dwitiya brings the teaching back into family life.[3][34][6][36][6] That is why no single story exhausts Diwali’s meaning, and why the stories belong together.

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5. Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration

Keep the home ready for worship and welcome

Diwali at home begins before the lamps are lit. A clean, orderly home is not a decorative extra. It is part of the observance. Families clean rooms, entrances, the puja space, and the threshold because Diwali is a time to receive auspiciousness with care, not casually. In many homes, this also means setting aside clutter, wiping down shelves, washing the puja area, and preparing a calm place for evening worship. New or freshly laundered clothes, a swept entrance, and a prepared altar teach children that sacred time should look and feel different from an ordinary day.[3][39]



A family prepares home Diwali worship and welcome.

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The home customs themselves show otherwise: cleaning, lamps, rangoli, puja, sweets, family visits, and greetings all place the festival inside worship, gratitude, beauty, and shared duty, not mere consumption.[3][10]

KEY POINT

At home, Diwali is not built around spending. It is built around preparation, worship, light, hospitality, and family presence.

Custom	What to do	Why it matters	When
Cleaning	Clean the entrance, main rooms, kitchen, and puja space. Remove clutter and set out fresh cloths or mats.	Order and cleanliness prepare the home for worship and welcome.[3]	1 to 3 days before, then a light reset on the day
Entrance	Sweep the doorstep, place lamps safely, and keep the path clear.	The threshold marks welcome, auspiciousness, and mindful arrival.[3]	Afternoon or early evening
Clothes	Wear new or freshly cleaned festive clothes.	Festive dress marks reverence, joy, and the dignity of the occasion.[3][39]	Before puja or visits
Puja place	Arrange murti or images, diya tray, matches or lighter, flowers, sweets, and water.	A prepared altar keeps worship orderly and teaches children the sequence.[3]	Before sunset

Light diyas with care and intention

The diya is the clearest sign of Diwali at home. A row of lamps gives the festival its very name, and the act of lighting them is simple enough for children to join. Diyas signify light, auspiciousness, and the victory of good over evil, see What Diwali Means and Stories Families Tell at Diwali.[3][39][6] Place them where they can be seen and where they are safe: at the entrance, near the puja space, on a windowsill away from curtains, or along a porch or patio if wind and local conditions allow.

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Use enough lamps to make the home visibly festive, but do not create hazards. Open flames should stay away from paper decorations, loose fabric, dry leaves, and crowded walkways. The National Fire Protection Association advises keeping candles away from anything that can burn and placing them where they cannot be knocked over by children or pets.[40][41] If very young children are helping, let them hand adults the diyas, flowers, or cotton wicks rather than manage flame themselves.

Place	Good practice	Avoid
Puja area	Use a stable tray or plate under diyas. Keep a small gap between lamps.	Crowding lamps against cloth, paper, or garlands
Entrance	Put diyas on a flat surface, clear of shoes and foot traffic.	Placing lamps where guests may kick or brush them
Windowsill	Use only wide, steady holders, away from curtains or blinds.	Narrow ledges, hanging fabric, or unstable glass
Outdoors	Shield flame from wind and keep away from dry plants.	Leaving lamps unattended in exposed areas

Make rangoli as an act of welcome and beauty

Rangoli belongs at the threshold, entry hall, or another visible family space. Its purpose is not perfection. It is welcome, beauty, and joyful attention. Children can help with simple geometric patterns, flowers, diyas, lotus forms, footprints, or colored borders. Families who prefer a cleaner setup can use flower petals, rice flour, or reusable rangoli stencils. The point is to mark the home as festive and inviting.[3]

Keep the design respectful and practical. Do not place rangoli where people must step on it to enter, unless that is your family's chosen custom and the pattern is meant for brief ritual use. If guests include elders, leave enough walking space and good lighting at the door. A rangoli that causes slips or blocks entry defeats its own purpose.

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IN PRACTICE

Give each child one job. One places flowers, one fills color, one carries unlit diyas, and one greets guests. Children remember Diwali best when they help make it.

Offer puja simply, reverently, and in the family's own sampradaya

Home puja should be sincere, orderly, and within the family's tradition. Keep it simple enough that children can follow. Bathe and dress first. Gather the family. Light the lamp. Offer flowers, water, incense if your home uses it safely, and sweets or fruit. Recite the prayers your family knows, or sing a short aarti together. If your family observes Lakshmi Puja, keep the meaning clear for children: prosperity is asked for under dharma, rightly earned and rightly used, see Stories Families Tell at Diwali.[3]

Do not turn puja into a performance for photographs. Take one family picture before or after if you wish, then put phones aside. Children should hear names, actions, and meanings in plain words. Tell them what is happening as it happens: we light, we offer, we bow, we give thanks. That is better than a long explanation they will not remember.

For families with relatives joining online, set the device before puja begins, mute notifications, and keep the screen off to the side. The worship remains in the room. The call is there to include loved ones, not to lead the moment.

- [ ] Decide in advance who leads the puja, who helps children, and who handles lamps.
- [ ] Set out all items before sunset or before guests arrive.
- [ ] Teach children one short response they can say aloud, such as a greeting or aarti refrain.
- [ ] Keep one plate ready for prasad so distribution is calm and orderly.
- [ ] Put phones on silent before the first lamp is lit.

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Visit mandirs, and gurdwaras where appropriate, with proper manners

Many families add a mandir visit to home observance, either before the evening puja or on a nearby day in the Diwali period. In either setting, prepare children before you leave: shoes off where required, modest festive dress, quiet voices during prayer, and no running near lamps or worshippers.

A visit should deepen the home observance, not replace it. Even a brief darshan or sangat can help children see that the family's home customs belong to a larger sacred community. If the mandir is crowded, keep the outing short, carry only what you need, and choose one offering the family can manage without fuss.

Visit	What families should do	What to avoid
Mandir	Check timing, bring a modest offering if customary, and prepare children for darshan and prasad.	Treating the visit like a photo stop or social drop in
Gurdwara	Cover the head, remove shoes, wash hands if directed, and follow the sangat respectfully.	
With children	Explain the basic etiquette in the car before arrival.	Correcting children sharply in the prayer hall

Share sweets, greetings, clothes, and gifts with measure

Sweets belong to Diwali because joy is meant to be shared. Offer prasad first, then serve sweets to family and guests. Homemade items, mithai from a trusted shop, fruit, or dry fruit all work well. The custom teaches generosity, sweetness in speech, and the pleasure of giving before taking.[3][39] If anyone in the household has diabetes, allergies, or dietary restrictions, prepare alternatives without embarrassment. Hospitality should include them fully.

Festive clothes also matter. They signal that the day is special and that the family has shown up with care. Children should be taught to greet elders properly, offer sweets with both hands when possible, and say a clear greeting. "Happy Diwali" is fine in American public life. At home and among family friends, "Shubh Diwali" or "Deepavali □□□□□□□□□□□" in the family's language may be natural. What matters is warmth, not performance.

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Gifts should be thoughtful, not excessive. A box of sweets, books for children, a diya set, home made snacks, fruit, or a small household gift is enough. Do not let gift exchange become a contest. The custom is about affection and remembrance, not pressure.

Use firecrackers with discipline, safety, and courtesy

Firecrackers are part of Diwali for many families, and many children will associate them with excitement, sound, and celebration.[3][39][6] Keep them in proportion. They are an optional part of the observance, not its center. If your family uses them, do so lawfully, briefly, and with adult control.

In the United States, fireworks law varies sharply by state, county, city, tribal jurisdiction, and even by season. Some places allow certain consumer fireworks, some limit dates and hours, and some ban them almost entirely. Check your state fire marshal, county government, or city public safety page before buying or lighting anything. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported an estimated 14,700 emergency department treated fireworks injuries in 2024.[42] The National Fire Protection Association advises that children should not handle fireworks, including sparklers, which burn at very high temperatures.[43] Smoke from fireworks also adds fine particle pollution, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that fine particles can worsen respiratory and cardiovascular problems.[44]

Balanced guidance is straightforward. Follow the law. Keep water nearby. Use open outdoor space. Stop early. Warn neighbors if you plan a short family display. Skip fireworks entirely if drought, wind, local restrictions, veterans with trauma, infants, elders with breathing difficulty, or pets make it unwise. Courtesy is not surrender. It is dharmic self command.

⚠ CAUTION

Firecrackers are optional. If you use them, keep them legal, brief, supervised, and considerate of neighbors, pets, elders, and anyone with breathing concerns.

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Step	Family rule	Check first	Avoid
Law	Confirm what is legal where you live	State fire marshal, county, or city rules	Assuming store sales mean home use is legal
Safety	One adult lights, one adult watches children, water and a hose or bucket stay ready	Open paved area, weather, distance from homes and cars	Handing fireworks to children, relighting duds
Courtesy	Choose a short time window and end early	Nearby infants, elders, pets, veterans, shift workers	Late night noise or repeated loud bursts
Air	Reduce quantity or skip if air is poor	AirNow and local alerts	Heavy smoke in dense neighborhoods

- [ ] Check state and local fireworks rules before purchase.
- [ ] Buy only legal consumer fireworks from licensed sellers where required.
- [ ] Keep a bucket of water, hose, and first aid supplies nearby.
- [ ] Put one adult in charge of ignition and one in charge of children.
- [ ] Use an open outdoor area, away from dry grass, vehicles, and buildings.
- [ ] End at a reasonable hour, even if others do not.
- [ ] Clean up debris after the display.
- [ ] If conditions are unsafe, choose diyas, rangoli, sweets, and songs instead.

A good Diwali at home does not need to be elaborate. It needs intention. Clean the home. Light the lamps. Make the threshold beautiful. Offer puja with attention. Visit sacred places properly where your family does so. Share sweets and greetings generously. Dress with joy. Give modestly. If you use firecrackers, do it with discipline. Children learn Diwali from what the home repeats each year. Let what they remember be light, reverence, beauty, and goodness made visible.[3][39][6]

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6. Parents Guide

Start with the school's own rules

In the United States, there is no single national rule that closes every public school for Diwali. Families must work at three levels: the school calendar, the district attendance policy, and state law. Some places now close schools for Diwali, while many others excuse the absence if the parent follows the school's procedure.[45][46][47][48]

A simple rule helps: do not wait for the week of Diwali. Check the calendar as soon as the school year opens, because Deepavali dates move each year with the lunar calendar and may fall on a school day.[3]

☆ KEY POINT

Treat Diwali planning like any other important school matter. Check the calendar early, notify the school in writing, ask how missed work will be handled, and keep a copy of every message.

How to get Diwali day off for your children



Diwali at School

HinduPACT

Use the school's existing process first. Many districts already have an attendance code for religious observance. Where state law is stronger, cite it plainly. See "Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges."[47] New York City public schools are closed for Diwali under a 2023 state law.[46]

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Step	Who	When	What to do
Check calendar	Parent	August, or at enrollment	Look at the district calendar and school handbook. Confirm whether Diwali is already a holiday, an excused religious absence, or a regular school day.[46][47][48]
Notify school	Parent	2 to 4 weeks before Diwali	Email the principal, attendance office, and teacher. State that your child will be absent for religious observance of Diwali or Deepavali. Ask that the absence be coded excused.
Confirm classwork	Parent and teacher	1 to 2 weeks before Diwali	Ask for homework, quizzes, labs, and make up dates. Request alternate testing if needed.[47][48]
Report absence	Parent	Morning of absence, if required	Follow the school's attendance reporting rule, phone, app, portal, or email.
Make up work	Student	First day back	Turn in work promptly and confirm any revised due dates in writing.
Escalate if needed	Parent	If request is denied	Ask for the written attendance policy. Then contact the district attendance office or superintendent's office. If the issue involves harassment or unequal treatment, document it and consider a civil rights complaint.[45][49]

What to say in your written request

Keep the message short, courteous, and specific. Do not over explain. You are notifying the school of a religious observance and asking the school to apply its own policy.

- [ ] Put the child's full name, grade, teacher, and date of absence in the first sentence.
- [ ] Use the words "religious observance of Diwali" or "religious observance of Deepavali."
- [ ] Ask that the absence be marked excused under district policy or applicable state law.
- [ ] Ask for make up work and alternate testing dates, if any.
- [ ] Save the email and any reply.

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A model sentence is enough: “My child, [name], grade [x], will be absent on [date] for religious observance of Diwali. Please record the absence as excused and let us know about any classwork or assessments to be completed.”

What your children should say to friends

Children do best with a short, warm explanation they can actually remember. Give them one sentence for younger grades and three sentences for older students. The aim is clarity, not a lecture.

Age	Say this	Avoid
Elementary	“Diwali is our festival of lights. We light lamps, pray, visit family, and share sweets.”	Long mythology lessons, apologizing for the holiday, or saying it is “basically Indian Christmas.”
Middle school	“Diwali is celebrated by many Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists. In our family it marks light over darkness, prayer, family time, and a new beginning.”	Reducing it to fireworks or gifts only.
High school	“Diwali follows the lunar calendar, so the date changes each year. Different communities connect it with different sacred histories, but the shared themes are light, renewal, gratitude, and dharma.”	Debating politics in class unless the teacher asks and the student is prepared.

Teach children one correction for a common hostile framing. Some classmates will hear that Diwali is only a noisy fireworks night or only a commercial event. The correction is simple: Diwali is first a sacred festival, and fireworks are optional, local, and not the meaning of the day.[3][17][5][6]

IN PRACTICE

A child does not need to defend all of Indian civilization at lunch. One clear sentence, one friendly answer, and an invitation such as “I can bring sweets tomorrow” is usually enough.

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What parents should tell teachers and administrators

Teachers usually want help getting it right. Give them accurate basics, not a packet so long that it goes unread. The school needs three things from you: what Diwali is, what your child needs, and what the class may be told.

Then tell the school what not to do. Public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, but they may not sponsor religious observance or press students to participate in devotion.[45] That means a teacher may explain Diwali in class, compare calendars, read a factual handout, or invite a parent speaker. A teacher should not lead puja, require children to recite a prayer, or turn one child into the class representative for every Indian tradition.[45]

Topic	Tell the school	Why it matters
Name	Use “Diwali” or “Deepavali.” Ask how your family spells it.	Families use different regional forms. Accuracy shows respect.
Meaning	Say it is a festival of light, renewal, gratitude, and family observance.	This gives the class a true frame, not a stereotype.
Communities	See “Responding to Diwali Criticism.”	It prevents the false claim that there is only one story or one practice.[46][6]
School practice	Ask for teaching about the holiday, not school sponsored worship.	This fits public school constitutional rules.[45]
Child’s needs	State absence date, food issues, clothing, or schedule needs.	Teachers can plan ahead and avoid confusion.

What teachers can convey to the class

Ask for a short classroom explanation, especially in elementary school where children notice absences. A good class explanation is factual, calm, and age appropriate.

- [ ] Diwali or Deepavali means a row of lights.
- [ ] The date changes because it follows a lunar calendar.
- [ ] Many families light diyas, decorate, pray, visit relatives, and share sweets.
- [ ] Different traditions connect the festival with different sacred histories.

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- [ ] Our class respects classmates who are absent for religious observance.

If the teacher wants more, direct them to the guide's sections on "What is Diwali or Deepavali," "The Five Days of Diwali," and the separate Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist sections, rather than trying to fit all stories into one classroom note.

When the school gets it wrong

The most common problems are smaller than families expect: the absence is marked unexcused, a test is scheduled with no make up option, the holiday is described as merely Indian, or a child is asked to explain a hostile political claim. Correct each one promptly and in writing.

If the problem is stereotyping or bullying, document the exact words, dates, witnesses, screenshots, and teacher response. Federal civil rights guidance explains that Title VI can cover discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including against students who are or are perceived to be Hindu or Sikh.[49]

⚠ CAUTION

Do not rely on a verbal promise alone. If a teacher says, "That should be fine," send a same day email confirming the agreement on the excused absence and make up work.

Parent checklist for the week before Diwali

- [ ] Confirm the exact school date affected by your family's observance.
- [ ] Send the written absence notice.
- [ ] Ask for homework, tests, and activity impacts.
- [ ] Tell your child the one sentence explanation they will use with friends.
- [ ] Offer the teacher a short class note or a five minute cultural explanation, if wanted.
- [ ] Pack sweets only if the school's food and allergy rules allow it.
- [ ] Save all correspondence.

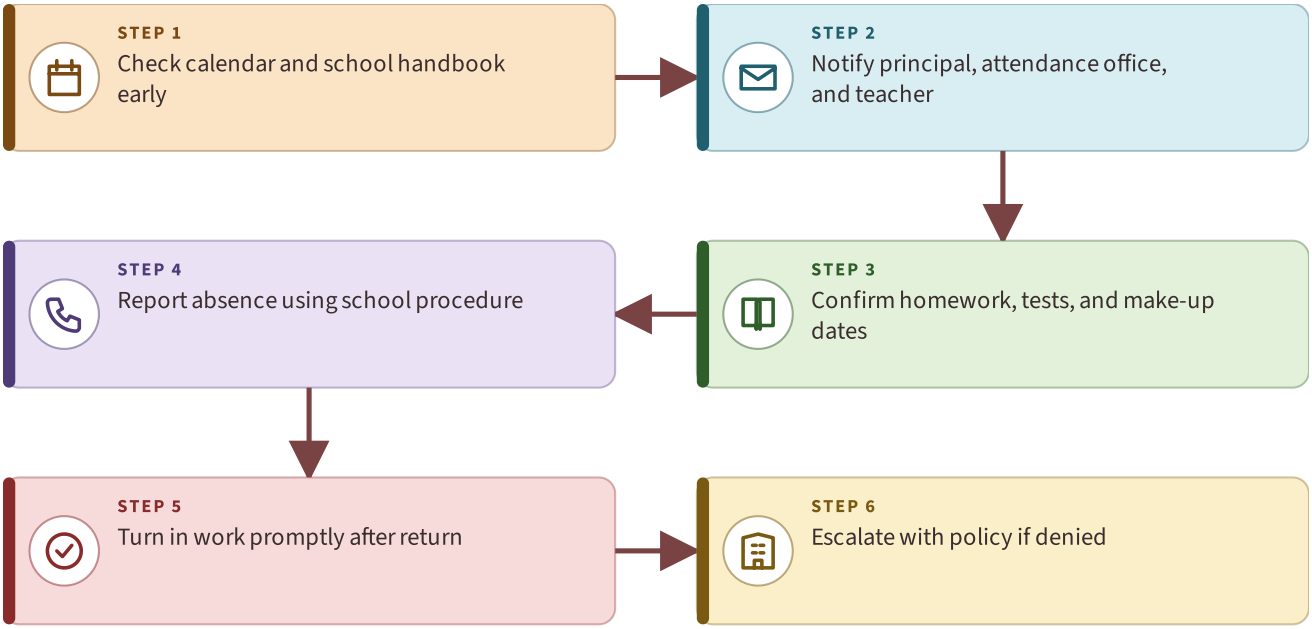
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Useful resources

Resource	What it offers	When to use it	Address
U.S. Department of Education, Prayer and Religious Expression Guidance	Rules on teaching about religion and protecting student religious expression	When a teacher or principal is unsure what a public school may do	ed.gov
U.S. Department of Education, Title VI Shared Ancestry Guidance	Civil rights information on harassment tied to ancestry or ethnic characteristics	When bullying, slurs, or stereotyping occur	ed.gov
New York State Diwali School Holiday Law	The 2023 law closing New York City public schools for Diwali	If your child is in New York City public schools	nysenate.gov
New Jersey Religious Holiday List	Annual list and rules for excused absences on religious holidays	If your child is in New Jersey public schools	nj.gov
Virginia Code, Section 22.1-254	State rule requiring local policies for religious holiday absences	If your child is in Virginia public schools	law.lis.virginia.gov

Parents set the tone. When you approach the school early, speak plainly, and give your child a confident way to explain the day, Diwali becomes what it should be in American school life: a respected religious observance, a family celebration, and an occasion for classmates to learn something true.

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Steps to secure an excused Diwali absence

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7. Workplace Guide

Know your rights before you make the ask

In the United States, Diwali at work usually begins with two practical questions: time off, and how to explain the holiday well. Start there. Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, religion includes religious observance and practice, and employers must reasonably accommodate an employee's sincerely held religious observance unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the business.[51] The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission also states that an employee does not need any special legal wording to request a religious accommodation.[52]

That matters because many American workplaces do not close for Diwali. Federal law does not require private employers to provide paid or unpaid time off for holidays, so whether Diwali is already built into the company calendar depends on employer policy, state law, local practice, or your manager's discretion.[53] In other words, do not assume the day is recognized, and do not assume the answer is no. Ask early, ask clearly, and propose a workable solution.

For the meaning of the festival, the stories families tell, and the different ways Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists observe these days, see the "Introduction."

☆ KEY POINT

At work, lead with clarity, not apology. Ask for accommodation early, explain only what is needed, and offer practical options.

What to say about Diwali to coworkers

Most coworkers do not need a lecture. They need a short, accurate explanation that avoids two common errors: reducing Diwali to "the Indian Christmas," and treating one regional story as the only meaning. "Indian Christmas" may sound friendly, but it is inaccurate and often flattens Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) into a Christian template.[54][3][5]

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Use plain American English. Say what the festival means, mention that practices vary, and stop before you over explain. If a coworker wants more, then add one or two details. For examples, see "What Diwali Means" and "How Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists Observe Diwali." Across these variations, the shared theme is the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil.[54][3][5][11]

Use case	Say this	Avoid	Why
One sentence	“Diwali is a festival of lights celebrated by many Hindu families, and for us it marks light over darkness, good over evil, and a time of prayer, gratitude, and family.”	“It’s basically Indian Christmas.”	Accurate, brief, and easy for coworkers to remember.
If asked about stories	“Different families emphasize different stories, including Sri Rama’s return to Ayodhya or Sri Krishna’s victory over Narakasura.”	“There is only one Diwali story.”	Diwali is observed in more than one way across India and the diaspora.[54][3][5]
If asked about religion	“For many of us it is a religious observance, not only a social event.”	“It’s just cultural.”	This helps coworkers and managers understand why accommodation may matter.[51][52]
If asked about practices	“People may pray, light diyas, wear festive clothes, share sweets, visit family, or attend community events.”	“Everyone celebrates the same way.”	Keeps the explanation broad and true.
If asked about politics	“At work, I’m talking about Diwali as a family and religious observance.”	Debating party politics in a holiday introduction	Keeps the conversation professional and focused.

How to request time off or flexibility

The strongest requests are early, specific, and solution oriented. Give the date, explain the conflict with work, and offer options. If your company has floating holidays, personal days, shift swaps, or

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remote work flexibility, use those first. If not, make a religious accommodation request in writing so there is a clear record.[51][52]

Step	Who	When	What to do
Check policy	Employee	6 to 8 weeks ahead	Review holiday, PTO, floating holiday, shift swap, and accommodation policies in the handbook or HR portal.
Confirm date	Employee and family	As soon as the lunar calendar date is known for your observance	Decide which day or evening matters for your household, especially if travel, puja, or children's schedules are involved.
Ask manager	Employee	4 to 6 weeks ahead	Request leave or schedule flexibility in writing. State the date and the work conflict.
Offer options	Employee	Same day as request	Suggest PTO, floating holiday, shift swap, earlier hours, remote work, or making up time if policy allows.
Escalate if needed	Employee, HR	If manager is unsure or delays	Ask HR for the company's religious accommodation process. You do not need "magic words," but naming it a religious accommodation can speed routing.[52]
Keep records	Employee	Throughout	Save emails, approvals, and any denied request with reasons given.

- [ ] Put the request in writing, even if your manager is friendly.
- [ ] Name the date and whether you need the full day, part of the day, or an early departure.
- [ ] State that the request is connected to a religious observance.
- [ ] Offer at least one practical alternative.
- [ ] If denied, ask for the reason in writing and ask HR about the next step.

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A short script for managers and HR

Use a calm, professional script. Do not over defend your tradition.

Situation	Script
First request	“I’m requesting time off on [date] for Diwali, which is a religious observance for my family. I can use PTO, a floating holiday, or adjust my schedule if that helps coverage.”
If you need partial flexibility	“I need to leave by [time] for Diwali observance with my family. I can start early, finish work remotely if permitted, or make up the time this week.”
If the manager seems unfamiliar	“Diwali is a major festival of lights observed by many Hindu families. For us it includes prayer and family observance, so I’m asking for a reasonable accommodation.”
If the request is brushed off	“I’d like this treated as a religious accommodation request. Could you connect me with HR on the process?”

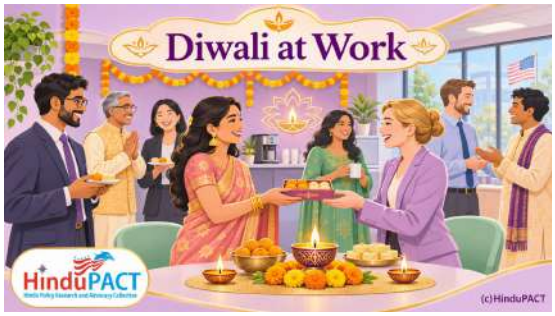
IN PRACTICE

The best workplace explanation is short, accurate, and repeatable. Give coworkers one clear sentence first. Give managers the date, the work impact, and a practical solution.

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Planning a Diwali corporate event

A workplace Diwali event can be excellent when it is voluntary, educational, family friendly, and professionally run. It goes wrong when it becomes noisy, compulsory, stereotyped, or casually religious in a way that pressures employees. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission warns that employers must balance religious expression with the rights of other employees and must avoid religious harassment or coercion.[51]



Diwali at Workplace

HinduPACT

That means a corporate Diwali event should welcome participation, not demand it. No employee should be required to pray, chant, receive tilak, or join a ritual act. If your workplace wants a religiously respectful element, such as a brief explanation of diyas or Lakshmi puja, make it clearly optional and frame it as education. If the company wants a broader inclusion event, keep the focus on the festival's meaning, food, art, music, service, and learning.

Element	Do	Avoid	Why
Invitation	Make attendance voluntary and open to all employees	Treating it as mandatory team bonding	Voluntariness reduces legal and cultural friction.[51]
Program	Include a 3 to 5 minute explanation of Diwali and its varied observances	Long speeches, political commentary, or theological debate	Keeps the event useful and professional.
Rituals	If included, label them optional and explain them respectfully	Pressuring anyone to participate in prayer, tilak, or aarti	Employees cannot be coerced into religious activity.[51][52]

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Element (cont.)	Do	Avoid	Why
Food	Label vegetarian, vegan, nut, dairy, and egg items clearly	Assuming all Indian food is spicy or all Hindus eat the same way	Good hospitality is concrete.
Decor	Use diyas, rangoli imagery, lights, and educational signage, following building fire rules	Open flames without approval, fireworks, or loud firecrackers	Safety and professionalism come first.
Messaging	Emphasize light, gratitude, family, service, and renewal	“Exotic India” themes, costumes, or caricatures	Avoids stereotyping.
Scheduling	Hold the event during lunch, late afternoon, or another clearly optional time	Scheduling it at the exact time some employees need to leave for observance	Respect the people the event is meant to include.

Suggested event format for a US office

Time	Owner	Item	Notes
0:00 to 0:05	Host or ERG lead	Welcome and purpose	One sentence on Diwali, one sentence on voluntary participation.
0:05 to 0:10	Employee speaker	What Diwali means in our families	Mention that observances vary across regions and communities.
0:10 to 0:20	Cultural lead	Diyas, rangoli, sweets, and gratitude	Educational, not performative.
0:20 to 0:40	Team	Food and conversation	Label food clearly.
0:40 to 0:50	Optional	Service activity or charity note	Good fit for “light over darkness” in workplace culture.
0:50 to 1:00	Host	Closing and thanks	Share resources for those who want to learn more.

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What to avoid in a corporate Diwali event

Some mistakes are predictable. Avoid them before they become awkward or offensive.

- [ ] Do not call Diwali “the Indian version of Christmas.”
- [ ] Do not require attendance, prayer, or ritual participation.
- [ ] Do not use fireworks, sparklers, or open flames without explicit facility approval.
- [ ] Do not mix the event with partisan politics or India focused ideological arguments.
- [ ] Do not ask one Hindu employee to represent every Indian, every South Asian, or every tradition.
- [ ] Do not turn the event into a costume party or “Bollywood day.”
- [ ] Do not assume all employees from India celebrate Diwali, or celebrate it the same way.
- [ ] Do not schedule the event so late that observant employees must choose between the office and family worship.

Useful resources

Resource	What it offers	When to use it	Address
EEOC, Section 12: Religious Discrimination	Federal guidance on religious accommodation, harassment, and employee rights	When requesting accommodation or addressing a denial	eeoc.gov
EEOC, Questions and Answers: Religious Discrimination in the Workplace	Plain language Q and A on religious rights at work	When you need a quick explanation for HR or a manager	eeoc.gov
U.S. Department of Labor, Vacation Leave	Federal baseline on holiday leave, pay, and employer discretion	When checking whether time off is legally required	dol.gov

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Resource (cont.)	What it offers	When to use it	Address
SHRM, Celebrating the Holidays and Diversity in the Workplace	Employer facing guidance on inclusive holiday programming	When planning a company event with HR or an employee resource group	shrm.org
New York State bill establishing Diwali as a New York City public school holiday	Example of growing public recognition in the United States	When coworkers ask whether Diwali is recognized in American public life	nysenate.gov

⚠ CAUTION

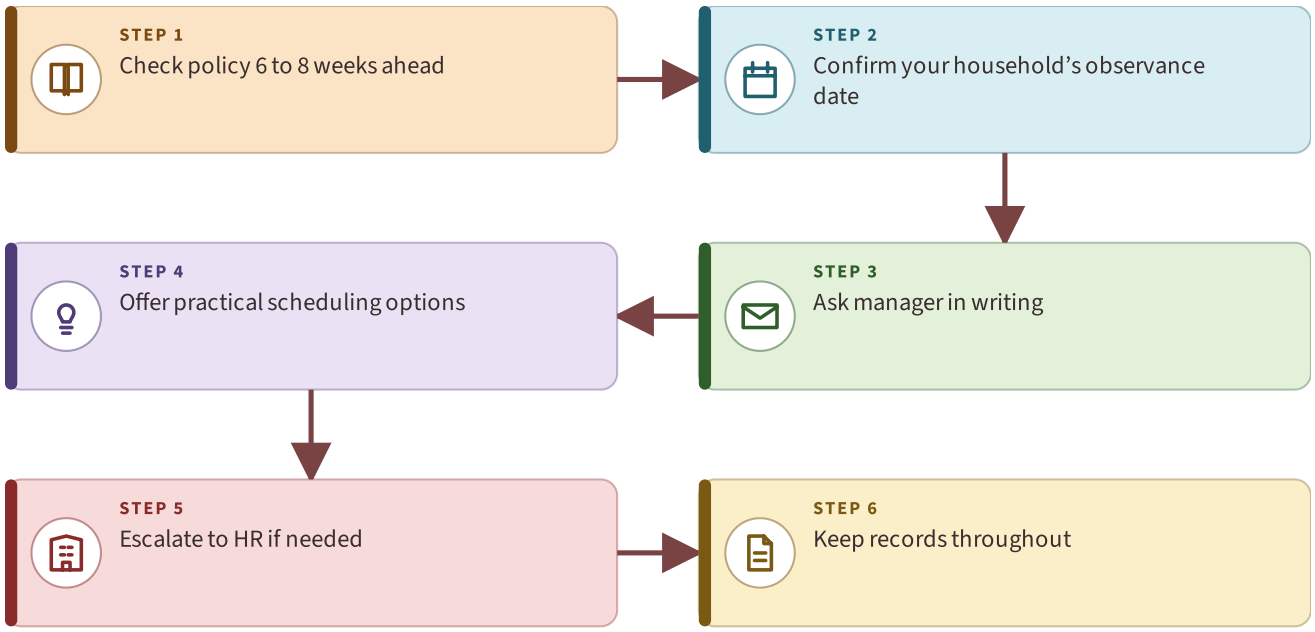
A workplace Diwali event should never force religion on anyone, and it should never erase religion either. Keep participation voluntary, explanations accurate, and the tone professional.

If a problem arises

If a manager mocks the request, stereotypes your faith, or denies accommodation without discussion, move quickly and calmly. Ask for the decision in writing. Contact HR. Use the company's accommodation or discrimination reporting channel. If you are in New York City, local law also protects religious accommodation in employment, and city guidance states that employers must accommodate religious needs, including observance of a holy day, unless an exception applies.[56] In California, the Civil Rights Department likewise explains that employers may not retaliate for requesting a religious accommodation and gives examples of schedule changes as accommodations.[57]

Parents should also think one step ahead. If your children are old enough to notice, let them see you handle the matter with dignity. Diwali at work is not only about one day off or one office event. It teaches the next generation how to speak about Hindu dharma in American public life: clearly, lawfully, and without shrinking from it.[11]

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Steps to request Diwali time off at work

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8. Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges

Recognition in American public life



Diwali Advocacy

HinduPACT

Diwali is now plainly visible in American civic life. That matters for families. Recognition does not replace observance at home, but it does make school conversations easier, gives parents firmer ground when asking for respectful treatment, and helps children see that their sacred days belong in public life too. In the United States, White House recognition goes back at least to 2009, when President Barack Obama marked Diwali at the White House and spoke of the triumph of good over evil. White House observances continued under later administrations, including a formal White House Diwali reception in 2022 and presidential Diwali messages in 2025.[58][59]

Public recognition has grown beyond Washington. New York made Diwali a public school holiday in New York City through state legislation signed in 2023. Pennsylvania made Diwali an official state holiday in 2024. New Jersey does not close all schools statewide for Diwali, but state rules require excused absence protections for listed religious holidays, including Diwali, and local boards may add more days. California law allows public schools to close for Diwali if a local governing board agrees through the required process, and the California Assembly recognized Diwali in 2024. The United States Postal Service first issued a Diwali Forever stamp in 2016, and issued a new Diwali stamp in 2026.[60][7][61][62]

A parent should read these milestones correctly. They are not favors. They are signs that American institutions are catching up to the lives of American Hindu families. Use them when a teacher or principal acts as if Diwali is too obscure to mention, too foreign to accommodate, or too vague to place on a calendar. It is none of those things.[58][60][7]

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☆ KEY POINT

Recognition helps, but it does not do the work for you. Parents still need to ask early, use the school's own process, and correct errors in plain language.

What recognition looks like on the ground

The most common American pattern is uneven recognition. One district closes. The next district excuses the absence but stays open. One teacher welcomes a short explanation. Another reduces the day to food, clothes, and a map of South Asia. Expect variation, and prepare for it.

A second pattern is flattening. Families will hear Diwali described as merely "South Asian," "Indian," or "cultural." That language is incomplete. For the needed distinctions, see "Responding to Diwali Criticism."[58][7]

A third pattern is pressure to secularize the day. Some institutions are comfortable with lights, sweets, and crafts, but uneasy with the words puja, Lakshmi, Rama, Krishna, mandir, or dharma. Parents should not accept a version of Diwali emptied of sacred meaning. Public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, so long as they do not promote observance. That means a school may accurately explain what Diwali means to Hindu families. It may not lead worship. Those are different things.[45]

Hostile framing appears in a more pointed form too. Some activists try to turn Diwali events into a platform for attacking Hindu public life, or insist that the festival must be stripped of its sacred narratives before it can be welcomed in civic spaces. That is not neutrality. It is a demand that Hindu families accept a thinner, less truthful account of their own observance. The calm response is simple: Diwali is not a partisan rally, and it does not need political purification before a school or city can acknowledge it. Schools should describe the holiday accurately, respectfully, and without forcing children to answer for political disputes they did not create.[63]

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Major American milestones families should know

Milestone	What happened	Why it matters
White House	White House Diwali observances are documented from 2009, with later receptions and presidential messages.	Shows national recognition at the highest civic level.[58][59]
USPS	USPS issued a Diwali Forever stamp in 2016 and a new Diwali stamp in 2026.	Federal cultural recognition that families can point to in school settings.[61][62]
New York City schools	New York State signed legislation in 2023 making Diwali a school holiday in New York City public schools.	A major school system now closes for Diwali.[60]
Pennsylvania	Act 112 of 2024 recognizes Diwali as an official state holiday.	State level recognition can support local school and municipal observance.[7]
New Jersey	State rules list Diwali as a religious holiday for excused student absence protections.	Even where schools stay open, students have specific protections.[47]
California	State law permits local public school closure for Diwali, and the Assembly recognized Diwali in 2024.	Families can ask local boards to use authority they already have.
Jersey City schools	Jersey City Public Schools have closed in observance of Diwali.	A concrete district example parents can cite in nearby advocacy.[64]
New York City Hall	The city has hosted Diwali receptions and public celebrations.	Municipal recognition helps normalize accurate public language.

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What to say when common problems arise

Parents do not need long speeches. They need short, repeatable sentences.

If a teacher mispronounces the holiday, correct it once, kindly. Say: “We say Diwali, or Deepavali. If helpful, I can send a phonetic spelling.” Do not turn a simple mistake into a fight, but do not let the wrong form harden into habit.

If the school calls Diwali a generic South Asian event, say: “Please describe Diwali as a sacred festival observed by our family in Hindu dharma. For the needed distinctions, see “Responding to Diwali Criticism.””

If the school wants only a secular version, say: “An accurate classroom explanation may mention lamps, family gathering, and the sacred meaning of the day. We are not asking the school to conduct worship. We are asking it to describe the holiday correctly.” That position fits public school guidance, which allows teaching about religion while forbidding school sponsored devotion.[45]

If your child is asked to answer for Indian politics, say: “My child is here to learn, not to serve as a spokesperson for current political disputes. Please keep the classroom focus on the holiday itself.” This matters because schools must address harassment and stereotyping tied to shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, and Hindu students are expressly included in federal guidance on that point.[49][65]

If someone says Diwali has become only commercial, noisy, or meaningless, correct the frame without apology. Say: “Like many major holidays, Diwali can be commercialized in public culture, but the observance itself remains sacred in our home and community. Please do not confuse market behavior around a holiday with the meaning of the holiday.” That keeps the focus where it belongs, on practice and meaning rather than caricature.

⚠ CAUTION

Do not let a school solve discomfort by deleting the sacred content. “Inclusive” language that hides Hindu meaning is not accurate language.

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Practical steps for parents

Situation	What to request	Who to ask	When
Mispronunciation or wrong description	Correct name, correct one sentence description	Teacher first	As soon as you see or hear it
Absence marked wrong	Excused religious absence, make up work, alternate test date	Attendance office, teacher, principal	Same day, then in writing
Classroom mention of Diwali	Short accurate explanation, no devotional activity	Teacher, grade lead	One to two weeks before
School calendar advocacy	Add Diwali closure or no major tests that day	Principal, superintendent, school board	Months before next school year
Bullying or stereotyping	Written response, investigation, anti harassment action	Principal, district office, civil rights office	Immediately
Pressure to discuss politics	Keep focus on holiday, excuse child from political debate	Teacher, principal	Immediately
Districtwide recognition	Review policy on religious holidays and excused absences	Superintendent, board secretary	Before calendar adoption

- [ ] Keep one short family description of Diwali ready for school use.
- [ ] Save the district calendar, absence policy, and student handbook.
- [ ] Send corrections in writing, even after a friendly phone call.
- [ ] Screenshot class slides, emails, or event flyers that get Diwali wrong.
- [ ] If bullying occurs, record exact words, date, class, witnesses, and staff response.
- [ ] Ask for a remedy, not only an apology: corrected language, excused absence, make up work, or staff follow up.

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- [ ] If the school resists, move one level up, teacher to principal, principal to district office, district office to board or civil rights process.

When a dispute becomes a rights issue

Not every slight is a legal claim. Some are best fixed with one courteous email. But parents should know the line. If the issue is only absence for a religious holiday, start with district policy and state rules. In New Jersey, for example, students absent for a religious holiday must receive an excused absence, alternate testing, and protection from losing awards or opportunities because of that absence.[47]

If the issue becomes stereotyping, slurs, repeated harassment, or a hostile environment tied to ancestry or ethnic characteristics, federal civil rights protections may apply. The U.S. Department of Education says Title VI can cover students, including Hindu students, who face discrimination based on actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics. Schools that tolerate a hostile environment can violate that duty.[49][65]

That is why parents should stay factual. Name the conduct. Name the date. Name the requested fix. Avoid overheated language. Calm precision carries farther than outrage.

IN PRACTICE

A good school response is specific: the absence is corrected, the teacher uses accurate language, the child is not put on the spot, and staff address any teasing quickly.

What to avoid

Do not volunteer your child as the class expert on every issue touching India, caste, elections, or geopolitics.

Do not accept “South Asian holiday” as the final description.

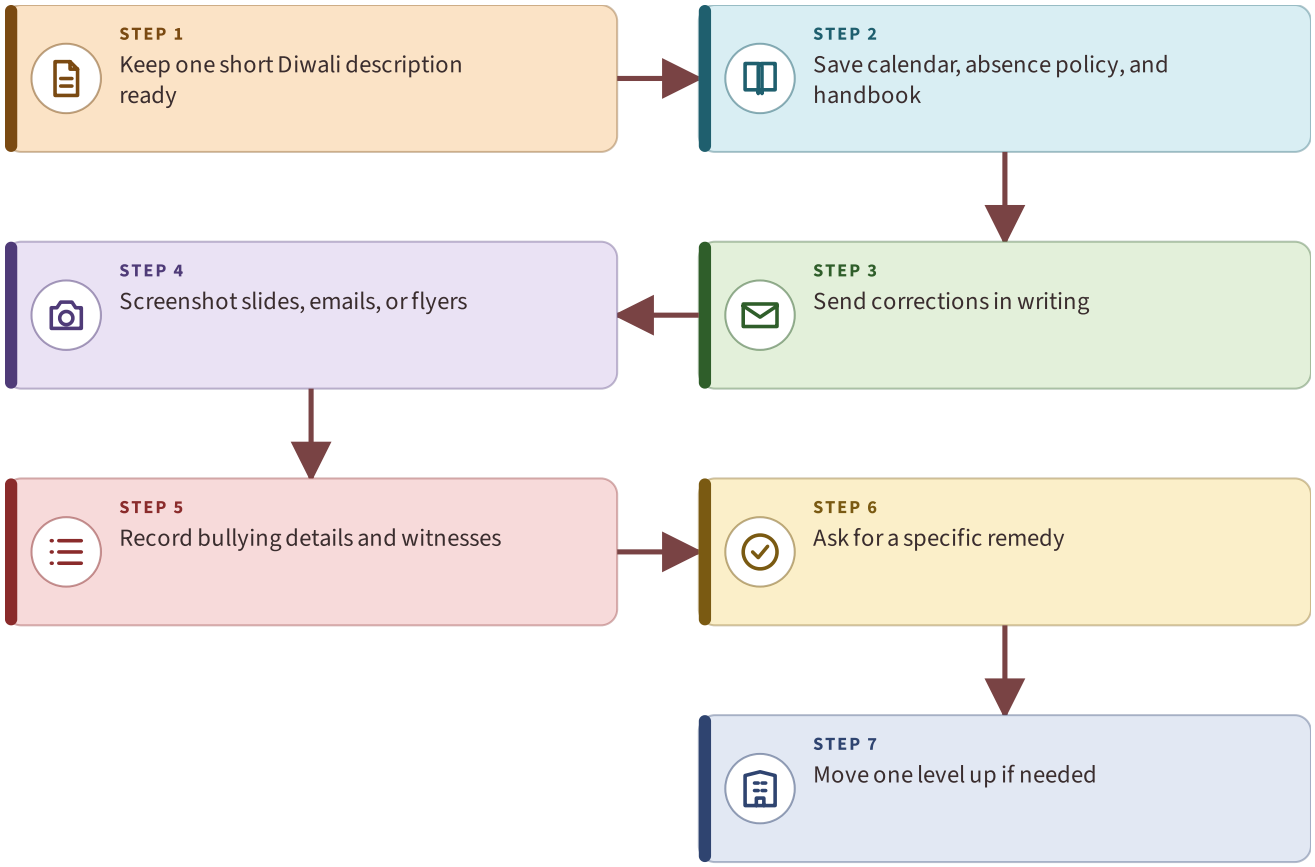
Do not demand school sponsored ritual. Public schools may teach about Diwali, but they should not conduct puja.[45]

Do not answer a hostile claim with another slogan. Give one correction, one request, and one next step.

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Do not wait until the week of Diwali to raise calendar or classroom issues, see “Parents Guide.”

American recognition of Diwali is real, growing, and useful. Use it well. Ask for accuracy, not flattery. Ask for accommodation, not exception. Ask for respect, and put it in writing.



Practical school steps for Diwali recognition and problems

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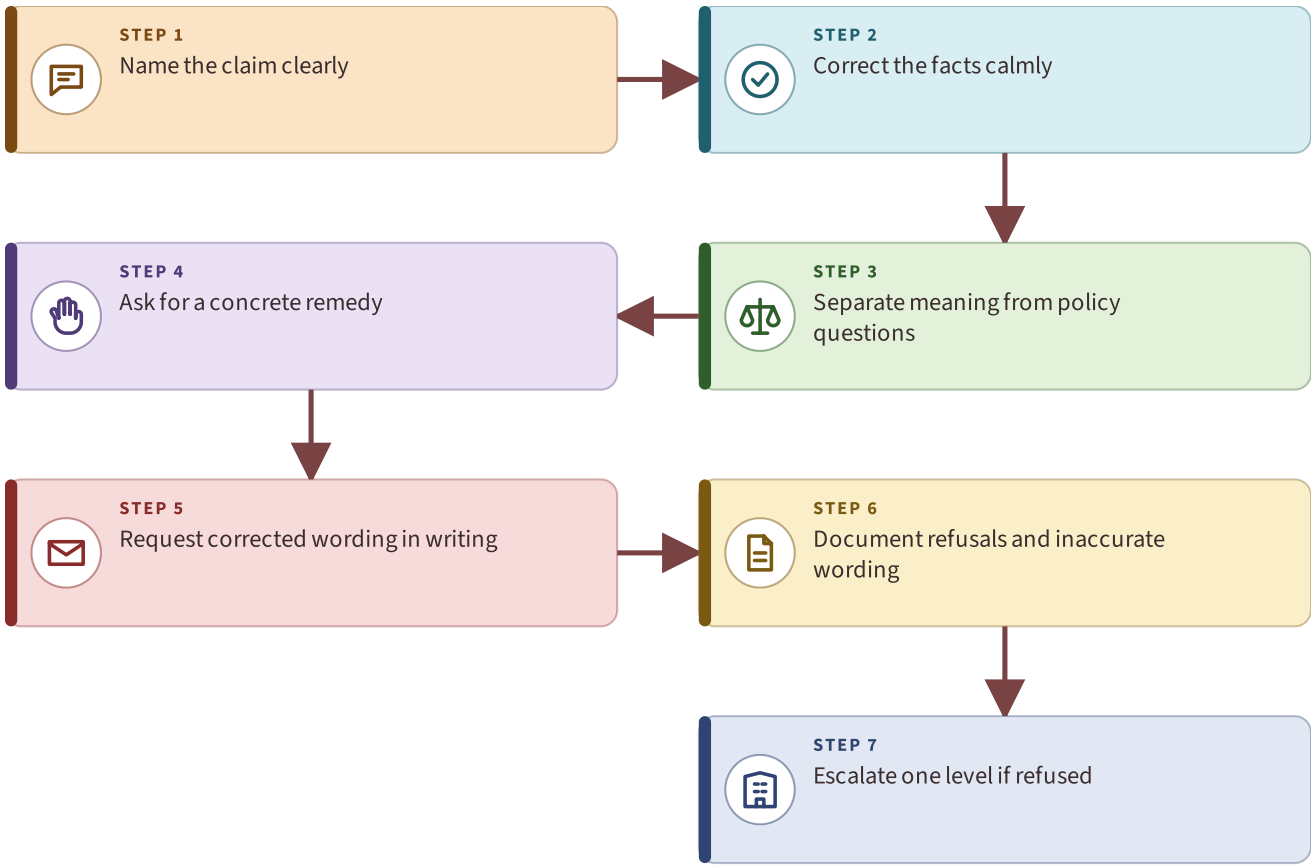
9. Responding to Diwali Criticism

Diwali criticism usually comes in a few predictable forms. Some complaints are about excess, some are about public policy, and some are direct attempts to detach a Hindu festival from Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), or to make Hindus defend their own observance on terms no other community is asked to accept. Parents and families should answer each one calmly, specifically, and in writing when the setting calls for it. Do not take the bait of defending every custom at once. Name the claim. Correct the facts. Ask for the concrete remedy.[66][67][68]

☆ KEY POINT

A criticism of noise, smoke, scheduling, or safety can be answered on the merits. A demand that Diwali be stripped of its Hindu meaning, renamed to hide its roots, or treated as suspect because it is Hindu is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia.

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How to answer Diwali criticism clearly and effectively

“Diwali has become crass, loud, commercial, and meaningless”

The claim: A newspaper columnist says Diwali has degenerated into shopping frenzy, traffic, noise, and pollution, and no longer resembles a meaningful sacred festival.[17]

What is true: Some families do celebrate with heavy shopping, loud fireworks, or late night noise. That part is real. It is not the festival’s meaning. Diwali is a sacred observance with worship, lamps, family gathering, offerings, and regional practices rooted in Hindu tradition, and the older record of the festival plainly includes both illumination and fireworks as festive signs, alongside prayer and moral meaning.[3][4][5][6] Indian courts have regulated firecrackers by time, place, and product, not abolished Diwali itself. The Supreme Court of India has continued time limits and public awareness directions, while allowing regulated use, including green crackers and designated community arrangements in some orders.[69][70][71] A complaint about excess becomes anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia, when it treats excess as the essence of a Hindu holy day, or speaks as if the sacred core is disposable while the caricature is the truth.[66][67][68]

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Situation	Say this	Avoid
Neighbor, teacher, or coworker says Diwali is just noise and shopping	Diwali is not defined by the noisiest people in a city. In our family it is a sacred festival of light, prayer, and the victory of good over evil, and public rules on noise or fireworks can be followed without erasing the festival itself.	“Everyone does it, so stop complaining.”
Someone says the festival is meaningless now	Commercial excess can happen around any major holiday. That does not cancel the religious meaning of Diwali, and treating a Hindu holy day as empty because some celebrate badly is unfair and anti-Hindu.	“You hate Hindus.”
School or newsroom uses only pollution imagery to explain Diwali	Please describe the festival accurately first, then discuss civic rules separately. Reducing Diwali to smog or shopping is a stereotype, not education.	Defending every firecracker custom at once

What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask the school, employer, or newsroom to separate the festival’s meaning from policy questions about noise, fire safety, or air quality.
- [ ] Ask that any guidance mention lawful limits and family choice, not blanket moral condemnation of Diwali.
- [ ] If a handout or article reduces Diwali to pollution or consumerism, request corrected language in writing.
- [ ] If refused, escalate one level and attach the inaccurate wording, your correction, and the requested replacement sentence.

“Diwali is a generic South Asian or Indian festival, not a Hindu one”

The claim: Activists, media features, and institutions sometimes present Diwali as a broad South Asian or Indian cultural event, with Hindu meaning treated as only one optional layer among many.[3][72][73][74]

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What is true: See “What Diwali Means.” That wider observance does not make Diwali generic or religionless.[3][4][5][6] Even a Christian critic who opposes participation admits the obvious point that Diwali specifically celebrates Hindu deities and is not merely “Indian culture.”[75] Calling Diwali simply “South Asian” or “Indian” in a school, workplace, or civic setting has the effect of disassociating it from Hindu roots. When done after correction, that is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia, because it asks Hindus to surrender the religious center of their own observance.[66][67][68][75]

Situation	Say this	Avoid
School flyer says “South Asian festival of lights”	Please identify Diwali accurately as a sacred festival observed by Hindus, with related observances among other dharmic communities. “South Asian” is too vague and erases the festival’s Hindu roots.	“South Asian is offensive in every context.”
Employer says it wants a cultural, not religious, Diwali	You can host an educational event without requiring ritual participation, but accuracy still matters. Diwali is not a generic ethnic party.	“Then cancel the event.”
Newsroom calls Diwali an Indian holiday	Please use precise language. India has many holidays, but Diwali is a Hindu festival, not a catchall national costume label.	Arguing that only Hindus may ever mention Diwali

What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask for corrected wording: “Diwali is a sacred festival observed by Hindus, and also marked in distinct ways by some Jains and Sikhs.”
- [ ] Ask that “South Asian” be used only for audience or geography, not as a substitute for the festival’s religious identity.
- [ ] If the institution wants a secular explanation, ask that it keep the sacred meaning in one sentence rather than deleting it.
- [ ] If refused, send a short written correction to the principal, HR, editor, or communications office.

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WHY IT MATTERS

When Diwali is relabelled as merely "South Asian," the public is taught that Hindu festivals may be borrowed, flattened, and renamed, while their religious center is treated as negotiable. That is not neutrality. It is erasure.

"Deepavali versus Diwali" used as a wedge

The claim: Commentators frame Deepavali and Diwali as opposed names, or imply that one is authentic and the other suspect, often to stir a political or regional quarrel.[74]

What is true: Both names are in use. "Deepavali" reflects the Sanskrit form meaning a row of lamps, and "Diwali" is a widely used North Indian form in English and many modern languages.[3][4][5][6] Families, mandirs, and communities may prefer one or the other. That preference should be respected. The false choice appears when a "versus" frame is used to divide Hindus or to suggest that one term can replace the other in order to score a political point. Its effect is disassociation and fragmentation, not accuracy.[74]

Situation	Say this	Avoid
Someone says only Deepavali is correct	Both names are established. Our family uses [Diwali or Deepavali], and institutions should respect community usage rather than create a false conflict.	"Your term is fake."
Official greeting uses the other form	Either form can be acceptable if used respectfully and consistently. The issue is not a weaponized spelling debate, but whether the festival is identified accurately and without erasing Hindu roots.	Turning a style choice into a personal insult
Debate is used to sidestep the festival itself	This is a naming preference, not a reason to flatten the festival into something generic. Please keep the focus on accurate recognition.	Defending regional pride by attacking another region

What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask the institution which form local families use most.

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- [ ] Ask for one respectful form, or “Diwali (Deepavali)” on first reference if needed.
- [ ] Ask that staff avoid presenting the names as rival identities.
- [ ] If refused, propose exact replacement text and ask for written confirmation.

“Reclaim Diwali” from Hindu dharma, caste, or “Hindutva”

The claim: Activists and self described progressive Hindu groups call for Diwali to be reimagined, reclaimed, or separated from Hindu narratives, on the ground that the festival or its stories are implicated in caste, patriarchy, or modern politics.[72][73][63]

What is true: Families may discuss difficult questions about texts, society, or politics. That is not new. What is false is the claim that Diwali must be detached from Hindu dharma in order to be moral or inclusive. Diwali’s stories and observances are multiple, regional, and longstanding, and the festival is already capacious without being emptied of its sacred center.[3][4][5][6] A demand to “reclaim” Diwali from Hindu dharma or from Hindus themselves is not reform. It is an attempt to take a Hindu festival out of Hindu hands. When the festival is singled out as needing liberation from its own religious tradition, that is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia.[66][67][72][73][63]

Situation	Say this	Avoid
Campus or civic speaker says Diwali must be reclaimed from Hindu dharma or Hindutva	Diwali does not need to be rescued from Hindu dharma. You may criticize politics, but detaching a Hindu festival from its own religious roots is anti-Hindu and unacceptable.	Debating every claim about Indian politics on the spot
Someone says the stories are too problematic to celebrate	Hindu families have many ways of observing Diwali, and no outsider gets to declare our sacred calendar illegitimate. Critique is one thing, dispossession is another.	“You are anti-India, full stop.”
Event uses Diwali only as a platform for unrelated geopolitical causes	Please do not instrumentalize a Hindu holy day. If you want a political rally, call it that, but do not rename it Diwali.	Shouting down the speaker

What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask organizers to stop using Diwali branding for events whose purpose is to oppose Hindu observance or detach it from Hindu meaning.

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- [ ] Ask schools and public institutions not to platform one faction as the voice of Diwali if its message is to reclaim the festival from Hindu dharma.
- [ ] If an official event includes such framing, ask for equal correction on the record.
- [ ] If refused, document the program, speakers, and wording, then escalate to the institution head or governing board.

"Christians should not attend," "Diwali de-Christianizes the nation," or "Diwali is demon worship"

The claim: Christian pastors and advocacy writers warn Christians not to attend Diwali, describe Hindu deities as false or demonic, and argue that public Diwali observance threatens Christian culture or national identity.[75][76]

What is true: Christians are free to decide their own religious participation. No Hindu family needs to force attendance or ritual involvement. But public attacks that call Hindu worship demonic, describe Diwali as occult, or cast Hindu presence in civic life as national decline are not neutral theology. They are anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia.[75][76] In the United States, employers covered by Title VII must reasonably accommodate religious observance unless doing so causes undue hardship, and retaliation for seeking accommodation is prohibited.[77][51][78] In the workplace or school, the issue is equal treatment, not theological approval.[77][51][78]

Situation	Say this	Avoid
Christian friend declines politely	Thank you for being clear. You do not need to join worship to be respectful, and I appreciate your honesty.	Pressuring them to participate in puja
Pastor or parent says Diwali is demonic or occult	You may follow your own faith, but calling Hindu worship demonic is anti-Hindu bigotry. In a school or civic setting, the standard is respectful accuracy and equal treatment.	Arguing Christian theology verse by verse
Public official treats Diwali recognition as religious threat	Recognizing a Hindu festival does not establish a religion. It means Hindu families receive the same civic respect others already expect.	"So Christians should be excluded too."

What to request, and how to respond:

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- [ ] Ask schools and employers to keep personal theology out of official communications.
- [ ] Ask for neutral accommodation: excused absence, schedule flexibility, corrected language, and noncoercive participation.
- [ ] If a staff member labels Diwali demonic or occult in an official role, report it in writing as religious bias.
- [ ] If the workplace denies accommodation without discussion, ask HR for the reason in writing and the next step under policy.[77][51][78]

"Muslims should not greet or join Diwali," and the "animal cruelty" charge

The claim: Some Islamic jurisprudence sites and preachers tell Muslims not to greet, congratulate, or join Diwali because it is a non Islamic religious festival. Separately, some critics use an "animal cruelty" line, often tied to food or ritual stereotypes, to stigmatize Hindu observance.[79]

What is true: Muslims, like Christians, may decide their own religious boundaries. A Muslim who declines a Diwali invitation politely is exercising conscience, not attacking you. The problem begins when a refusal becomes a public campaign against Hindu observance, or when Hindus are singled out as morally suspect for ordinary festival food, lamps, or customs while other communities are not scrutinized the same way.[79] The supplied criticism pages do not establish a factual case that Diwali itself is an animal cruelty festival. In many families the observance is vegetarian, and where communities differ in food custom, that is not a license to smear the festival.[72][73] Turning a Hindu festival into a moral contamination story is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia.[66][67][68]

Situation	Say this	Avoid
Muslim friend declines greeting or attendance politely	I respect your decision. Mutual respect means you do not have to join, and our family does not have to hide Diwali either.	Demanding they greet you anyway
Refusal is framed as a public denunciation of Hindus	Personal conscience is one thing. Publicly stigmatizing Hindu observance is another, and that crosses into anti-Hindu bias.	Attacking Islam as a whole
Someone repeats "animal cruelty" as a Diwali label	That is a smear, not an explanation of Diwali. If you have a specific welfare concern, name the practice and the rule, but do not defame a Hindu holy day.	Defending unrelated customs you do not practice

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What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask schools and employers to respect voluntary nonparticipation without allowing disparagement of Hindu observance.
- [ ] Ask moderators or managers to stop employees or students from using festival discussions to spread religious hostility.
- [ ] If a public body repeats a cruelty smear without evidence, request correction and source support.
- [ ] If refused, document the statement and escalate through the bias, HR, or civil rights channel.

"I refuse to celebrate because of Hindus"

The claim: A columnist says she once treated Diwali as culture, but now refuses to celebrate because of Islamophobia and because Hindus, or Hindu society, have made the festival feel exclusionary to her.[79]

What is true: No one must celebrate a festival that no longer feels right to them. Personal refusal is their choice. But blaming Diwali itself, or "Hindus" as a class, for political grievance is collective guilt by religion. That is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia, when it turns a Hindu holy day into a test imposed on Hindus for the conduct of others.[79] Your family does not owe a stranger a political confession before observing Diwali. See "Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges" for how to handle demands that children answer for politics.

Situation	Say this	Avoid
Friend says they are sitting out Diwali this year	That is your choice. Please do not turn your decision into a judgment on Hindu families observing a sacred festival.	"Then leave us alone forever."
Someone says celebrating Diwali proves allegiance to oppression	Diwali is a religious observance, not a loyalty test. Holding ordinary Hindu families responsible for broad political grievances is unfair and anti-Hindu.	Trying to solve every communal dispute in one conversation
Child is asked to answer for anti Muslim prejudice because of Diwali	My child is here to learn, not to answer for politics. Please keep the discussion on the festival itself and stop assigning collective blame.	Letting the child debate adults alone

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What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Ask teachers and facilitators to stop using Diwali discussions to assign collective blame to Hindu students or families.
- [ ] Ask for a corrected classroom frame focused on the festival, not on forcing children into political defense.
- [ ] If a child is targeted, document exact words, date, witnesses, and staff response.
- [ ] If refused, move from teacher to principal to district office.

⚠ CAUTION

A polite decline is not the problem. Collective blame is the problem. No child should be made to answer for geopolitics because his or her family observes Diwali.

Mispronunciation, relabelling, and accommodation disputes

The claim: Institutions mispronounce Diwali, rename it to avoid saying it is Hindu, or resist excused absences and workplace accommodation unless the family accepts a flattened, secularized version.[68]

What is true: Mispronunciation can be a simple mistake. Persistent refusal to correct it, especially after a parent or employee has provided the right form, is disrespect. Relabelling Diwali to avoid its Hindu identity is erasure. In the United States, Title VII requires reasonable religious accommodation in covered workplaces unless undue hardship is shown.[77][51][78] Repeated stereotyping, ancestry based hostility, or a hostile environment in school may also implicate civil rights protections.[68][77][78]

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Situation	Say this	Avoid
Teacher or manager mispronounces Diwali	It is pronounced [give your family's pronunciation]. Thank you for correcting that.	Mocking their accent
School insists on a secularized label	Accuracy is not sectarian. Please name Diwali as a Hindu religious observance and then explain the activity in age appropriate terms.	Accepting "South Asian holiday" as final
Employer denies time off without discussion	This is a religious observance. I am requesting a reasonable accommodation and would like the reason for any denial in writing.	Threatening legal action as your first sentence

What to request, and how to respond:

- [ ] Give the correct pronunciation once, in writing if needed.
- [ ] Ask for corrected slides, flyers, calendars, and announcements.
- [ ] For work, request accommodation early and propose at least one practical alternative. See "Workplace Guide."[77][51][78]
- [ ] For school absence, use the school's own process and ask that the absence be marked excused for religious observance. See "Parents Guide."
- [ ] If denied, ask for the reason in writing and move one level up.

Claim and the short answer

Claim	The short answer
Diwali is crass, loud, and meaningless	Excess exists, but it is not the essence of the festival. Diwali remains a sacred observance, and lawful limits on noise or fireworks do not erase its meaning.
Diwali is just South Asian or Indian, not Hindu	False. Diwali is a Hindu festival, also marked in distinct ways by some other dharmic communities. Generic relabelling erases Hindu roots.
Deepavali versus Diwali proves one side is wrong	False. Both names are established. Respect community usage and reject attempts to turn naming into a wedge.

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Claim (cont.)	**The short answer**
Diwali must be reclaimed from Hindu dharma, caste, or Hindutva	Critique is one thing. Detaching a Hindu festival from Hindu hands is another. That is anti-Hindu bigotry, Hinduphobia.
Christians should not attend, and public Diwali is de-Christianization	Christians may decline participation, but calling Hindu worship demonic or treating Hindu civic recognition as a threat is anti-Hindu bigotry. Equal accommodation still applies.
Muslims should not greet or join Diwali, and Diwali is tied to animal cruelty	Personal conscience may guide attendance, but public stigmatizing of Hindu observance is bias. “Animal cruelty” is a smear unless a specific practice and rule are actually at issue.
I refuse to celebrate because of Hindus	Personal refusal is a choice. Blaming Hindu families as a class, or turning Diwali into a political loyalty test, is collective guilt and anti-Hindu bias.
Mispronunciation, relabelling, and accommodation fights are minor	They are often the first signs of erasure. Correct them early, in writing, and ask for the practical remedy.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q1

What is Diwali or Deepavali, and what does the word mean?

Diwali, more fully Deepavali, is one of the great festivals of Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism). The word comes from Sanskrit: deepa, lamp, and avali, a row or line. In plain English, it means a row of lamps. That is why homes, temples, streets, and riverbanks are lit with diyas, candles, and now electric lights as well. The lights are not decorative only. They signify the triumph of dharma over adharma, clarity over confusion, and hope over fear.

A common Western shorthand calls it simply the “festival of lights.” That is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Deepavali is not a generic light show or a South Asian version of Christmas. It is a civilizational festival with layered meanings across regions and sampradayas. In many Hindu traditions it marks Sri Krishna’s destruction of Narakasura, in others Sri Rama’s return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, and in many communities it also marks renewal, prosperity, family worship, and the opening of a new business year. The festival’s breadth is part of its strength, not a contradiction. A living dharmic civilization often remembers truth through more than one sacred story.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf · Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk

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Q2 When is Diwali each year, and why does the date change on the Western calendar?

Diwali falls in October or November, but its exact date changes each year on the Western, or Gregorian, calendar because it is set by the Hindu lunar calendar, not by a fixed solar date. The core observance is tied to the dark fortnight of the month of Ashwayuja or Ashvin and extends into Kartika. One widely used description places the festival period from Krishna Chaturdashi, the 14th day of the dark half, to Kartika Shukla Dwitiya, the 2nd day of the bright half. The central night most people identify as Diwali is Amavasya, the new moon night.

So the date “moves” only if one assumes the Gregorian calendar is the norm. For Hindu communities, the lunar tithi is the real anchor. That is why Diwali may fall on different civil dates from one year to the next, and why local panchangs can matter for exact observance. This is normal for many dharmic festivals. The same principle governs Holi, Navaratri, and Janmashtami. Diwali is therefore best understood as a lunar festival season, not a holiday pinned to one Western calendar square.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf · Hindu Heritage - Parthasarthy.pdf

Q3 What are the five days of Diwali, and what does each day mark?

In the widely observed North Indian sequence, the five days are: Dhanteras, Naraka Chaturdashi or Choti Diwali, Lakshmi Puja on Amavasya, Govardhan Puja or Annakut, and Bhai Dooj. Regional practice differs, and some communities count the sequence slightly differently, but this five-day pattern is the one most readers will encounter.

The operator-supplied festival material gives the core middle and closing days clearly. Naraka Chaturdashi marks Sri Krishna’s destruction of Narakasura and is linked to the pre-dawn oil bath. Amavasya is the principal night for Lakshmi worship, remembrance of ancestors in some traditions, illumination, and the opening of new account books by many business families. The next day, Kartika Pratipada, is Balipratipada, connected with Vamana and King Bali; in many places it is also Govardhan Puja and Annakut, celebrating Sri Krishna’s lifting of Govardhan and abundance offered to Bhagavan. The final day, Yama Dwitiya or Bhai Dooj, honors the brother-sister bond. Dhanteras, observed before Naraka Chaturdashi, is associated with auspicious purchases, prosperity, and in many homes Dhanvantari and Lakshmi worship.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf · Hindu Heritage - Parthasarthy.pdf

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Q4 Is Diwali a single holiday, a season of observance, or a New Year festival?

The right answer is yes to all three, depending on the community and the context. Diwali is not confined to a single evening, even though the Amavasya night of Lakshmi Puja is the best known focal point. In practice it is a season of observance that stretches across several lunar days, with cleaning, shopping, rangoli, temple visits, family gatherings, business rituals, and regional customs that begin before the main night and continue after it.

It is also a New Year festival for many Hindu and Jain communities, especially in mercantile traditions. The Hindu Council of Kenya notes that business communities open their New Year accounts with Lakshmi worship on Amavasya. Vijay Prashad likewise notes that Diwali is seen in some traditions “as the start of the new year.” That does not mean every Hindu community uses the same New Year date, because India’s calendrical traditions are plural and old. The mistake is to force Diwali into a narrow Western category, as if it must be either a one-day holiday or a New Year’s Day. It is a festival complex, civilizational in scale, with one luminous center and several concentric meanings.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf · Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk

Q5 What are the main Hindu dharma stories families tell at Diwali?

There is no single Diwali story, and that is a feature of Hindu dharma, not a flaw. Families tell different sacred narratives depending on region, sampradaya, and family lineage. Three are especially prominent. First is Sri Krishna’s destruction of Narakasura, remembered on Naraka Chaturdashi, with its themes of liberation from tyranny and the restoration of dignity. Second is Sri Rama’s return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, when the city is said to have been illuminated in welcome. Third is the story of Vamana and King Bali, remembered on Balipratipada, with its meditation on power, humility, and divine order.

Many families also connect the season to Lakshmi Puja on Amavasya and to Govardhan Puja, recalling Sri Krishna’s protection of the people of Vraja. A hostile framing sometimes treats these multiple stories as proof that Diwali is confused or invented late. That misses how dharmic memory works. A civilization this old does not need one authorized tale to validate a festival. Deepavali gathers several truths into one season: the defeat of arrogance, the return of rightful order, the honoring of prosperity under dharma, and the renewal of family and community life.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf · Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk

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Q6 Why do Jains celebrate Diwali, and what does the festival remember in the Jain sampradaya?

Jains celebrate Diwali because, in the Jain sampradaya, it commemorates the nirvana of Bhagwan Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara. This is not a borrowed afterthought or a modern accommodation. It is a central Jain remembrance attached to the same calendrical season. The Hindu Council of Kenya states that for Jains, Deepavali carries “the great event of Mahaaveera attaining the Eternal Bliss of Nirvaana.” That gives Diwali a distinct Jain theological meaning even when outward customs, such as lamps and family gatherings, may overlap with broader Indian practice.

This matters because outsiders often flatten Diwali into a single-story “Hindu-only” event and then treat Jain observance as derivative. That is historically careless. India’s dharmic traditions developed in conversation with one another across shared sacred time, while preserving their own doctrines and lineages. For Jains, the festival is linked to liberation, spiritual victory, and reverence for Mahavira’s final attainment. In many Jain communities, the period also marks the New Year and a time for prayer, reflection, and ethical renewal. Shared civilizational space does not erase distinct identity, it helps explain it.

Sources: Our Festivals - Hindu Council of Kenya.pdf

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Q7 Why do Sikhs celebrate Diwali, and how is Bandi Chhor Divas related to it?

Sikhs widely mark the Diwali season because it coincides with Bandi Chhor Divas, the day Guru Hargobind Sahib was released from imprisonment at Gwalior Fort along with fifty-two detained rulers. Sikh tradition remembers not only his release but his insistence that others be freed with him. That is why the day is called Bandi Chhor, the Liberator of Prisoners. Gurdwaras are illuminated, especially Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, and the visual overlap with Diwali is obvious, but the Sikh meaning is specific and rooted in Sikh history.

This is best understood as convergence in sacred time, not confusion. In the Indian civilizational world, communities often share a festive season while remembering different events through it. Some older Hindu sources also note that Diwali has long been celebrated across Hindu, Sikh, and Jain communities as a common festival season. That does not collapse Sikh distinctiveness. It shows how deeply interwoven Punjab and the wider dharmic landscape have been. So when Sikhs celebrate during Diwali, they are not simply participating in someone else's holiday. They are observing their own historic day of freedom, dignity, and righteous leadership, during the same luminous season.

Sources: 2_12_12_04_essentials_of_hindutva.v001.pdf_1

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Q8 Do Buddhists celebrate Diwali, and if so, which Buddhist communities observe it and why?

Some Buddhists do observe Diwali, but it is not a universal Buddhist festival in the way Vesak is. The communities most often associated with Diwali observance are Newar Buddhists of Nepal, who participate in the wider Tihar or Deepavali season, and some Buddhist communities in India that share regional customs with their Hindu and Jain neighbors. In such settings, lamps, household worship, exchange of gifts, and New Year or harvest-linked observances can overlap with local Buddhist practice.

The reason is civilizational proximity, not doctrinal sameness. Dharmic traditions in South Asia have long shared calendars, sacred geographies, and public festival rhythms while retaining distinct teachings. Some modern writers try to force a hard civilizational separation between Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh communities, as if every shared practice must be denied to protect identity. That is not how Indian history actually developed. At the same time, one should not overstate the case. There is no single pan-Buddhist theological reason for Diwali comparable to Mahavira's nirvana in Jain tradition or Bandi Chhor Divas in Sikh tradition. Where Buddhists celebrate it, they usually do so through regional inheritance and shared dharmic culture.

Sources: Awaken Bharata, Bloomsbury Publishing

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Q9 Is Diwali only a Hindu festival, or is it being inaccurately broadened to include everyone?

Diwali is first and foremost a Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) festival. That should be stated plainly. Its calendar, stories, rituals, deities, home observances, temple worship, and sacred meanings come from Hindu civilizational life. Broad public participation is welcome, but participation is not the same as ownership. When schools, media outlets, or civic bodies present Diwali as a generic "South Asian" or "everyone's" festival without naming its Hindu roots, they do not become inclusive, they become inaccurate.

There is a difference between respectful sharing and erasure. Some Jain and Sikh communities also mark the season for their own reasons, and that should be acknowledged accurately, not used to blur the festival into a vague multicultural event. Older public efforts to create a secularized Diwali, including "Diwali against Communalism" in Britain, show that this broadening has been attempted before, often by stripping away the religious center of the festival rather than explaining it honestly. A public institution can welcome all and still say clearly that Diwali arises from Hindu sacred tradition, with related observances among some other Indic communities.

Sources: Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk · Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya

Q10 Why are there so many different Diwali stories, does that mean no one really knows what Diwali is about?

Multiple Diwali narratives do not signal confusion. They show the breadth of Hindu civilizational memory. A tradition spread across regions, languages, sampradayas, and centuries will naturally preserve more than one sacred account. Deepavali is linked in many homes to Sri Krishna's defeat of Narakasura, in much of North India to Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, and on other days of the festival cycle to Lakshmi Puja, Govardhan Puja, Balipratipada, and Yama Dwitiya. The Hindu Council of Kenya's festival guide lays out this sequence clearly, from Naraka Chaturdashi through Bhai Beej.

The common thread is not hard to see: renewal, dharma, gratitude, prosperity rightly sought, family bonds, and the victory of divine order over arrogance and oppression. Vijay Prashad observed that "there is no single story" explaining Diwali, but that does not empty the festival of meaning. It confirms that Hindu dharma carries unity without uniformity. A civilization this old does not need a single slogan or one authorized tale to know what it is celebrating.

Sources: Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya · Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk

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Q11 Is Diwali just the 'festival of lights,' or does that label flatten its religious meaning and sacred practices?

“Festival of lights” is a useful shorthand, but only as a starting point. If that phrase becomes the whole explanation, it flattens a sacred observance into decoration. Deepavali literally refers to rows of lamps, and lamps matter, but the lighting is not merely aesthetic. It signifies the triumph of divine forces over wickedness, spiritual radiance spreading outward, remembrance of sacred events, and the ordering of home and society around dharma.

The festival also includes practices that the label leaves out: early morning oil bath on Naraka Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja on Amavasya, opening new account books in some business communities, Govardhan Puja, Balipratipada, and Bhai Dooj or Yama Dwitiya. The Hindu Council of Kenya describes temple illuminations and riverbank lamps as symbols of “spiritual radiance,” not seasonal ambience. That is the point many public descriptions miss. Diwali is not the Hindu equivalent of a generic lantern festival. Light is the visible sign of a deeper sacred order, one tied to worship, memory, prosperity, kinship, and civilizational continuity.

Sources: Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya · Hindu Heritage, Parthasarthy

Q12 Why do families light diyas, make rangoli, share sweets, and visit relatives during Diwali?

These customs are not random add-ons. They express the inner logic of the festival. Diyas mark the victory of light over darkness, but also welcome auspiciousness into the home and honor the sacred memory attached to the season. In many traditions, homes are cleaned, thresholds decorated, and lamps placed carefully because the household is being reordered toward beauty, gratitude, and reverence. Rangoli does that visually, turning the entrance into a sign of welcome, blessing, and joy.

Sweets and visits matter for the same reason. Diwali is not only private worship, it is social renewal. Families repair ties, honor elders, include neighbors, and strengthen kinship. The festival cycle itself contains family-centered observances, especially Yama Dwitiya or Bhai Dooj, when brothers and sisters meet, exchange gifts, and reaffirm affection. The Hindu Council of Kenya notes that even distant brothers travel to their sisters on that day. New clothes, shared food, and hospitality all communicate that prosperity is meaningful when it is righteous, grateful, and shared. The home becomes a small sacred center, not just a party venue.

Sources: Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya · Hindu Heritage, Parthasarthy

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Q13 What should parents tell children about firecrackers, including safety, noise, pollution, and community concerns?

Children should hear two things at once: firecrackers are part of many families' Diwali joy, and they must be handled with discipline and consideration. The tradition is longstanding. Festival guides describe fireworks as part of the jubilation surrounding Naraka Chaturdashi and Deepavali. But tradition never requires recklessness. Parents can set clear rules: use only legal fireworks where permitted, follow local fire codes, keep water nearby, maintain adult supervision, wear shoes, protect eyes, and never relight a dud.

Community concerns should be addressed honestly, not weaponized against Hindu families. Noise affects infants, elders, veterans, pets, and people with sensory sensitivities. Smoke can worsen air quality. Those are real concerns, and families can respond by choosing lower-noise options, limiting duration, using community displays where available, and observing local hours. The answer is balance, not stigma. Children should not be taught that Diwali celebration is inherently irresponsible or uniquely harmful. They should be taught that joy and self-restraint belong together, and that honoring neighbors is itself part of dharmic conduct.

Sources: Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya · Hindu Heritage, Parthasarthy

Q14 How is Diwali recognized in the United States, including schools, workplaces, and public institutions?

Recognition in the United States has grown sharply over the last two decades. The White House has marked Diwali under multiple presidents. Congress members, governors, mayors, and school districts now issue proclamations, host lamp-lighting events, and acknowledge the festival publicly. In New York, Diwali became an official public school holiday in 2023 after legislation adding it to the city school calendar. That was a major milestone because it moved Diwali from symbolic recognition to calendar recognition in the nation's largest school system.

Even so, recognition remains uneven. Some schools celebrate Diwali in assemblies or classroom lessons but still explain it poorly, reducing it to food, clothes, and candles. Some workplaces host employee events yet fail to accommodate leave requests consistently. Families may also notice unequal treatment compared with other faith communities. A research briefing by the Henry Jackson Society recorded complaints from Hindu families about lack of school provision around Diwali and selective teaching that fueled bullying. The practical goal is not token celebration. It is accurate recognition: naming the festival correctly, accommodating observance, and teaching its sacred meaning without caricature.

Sources: New York State Senate legislation establishing Diwali school holiday, nysenate.gov · Henry Jackson Society, Anti Hindu Hate in School Briefing, https://millercenter.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/

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Q15 What can parents and families do when Diwali is misunderstood, stereotyped, or challenged in schools and public life?

Start with calm, specific correction. Ask for the exact lesson, handout, assembly script, or policy, then respond in writing. Vague complaints are easy to dismiss. Precise ones are harder to ignore. If a school reduces Diwali to exotic costumes, treats it as merely “Indian,” or links Hindu children to unrelated political controversies, ask for a factual correction and offer a short, accurate description of the festival, its dates, and its practices. Request equal treatment in calendars, announcements, and excused absences.

Keep records. Escalate when needed, from teacher to principal to district office or school board. If bullying is involved, use the school’s anti-harassment process and document dates, names, and impact on the child. The Henry Jackson Society briefing includes examples of children being blamed for social evils inaccurately taught as part of Hindu tradition, and of unequal holiday provision. That pattern is familiar. Parents should not accept it as normal. A respectful but firm approach works best: insist on accuracy, reject stereotyping, and remind institutions that inclusion does not mean erasing Hindu identity, it means understanding it correctly.

Sources: Henry Jackson Society, Anti Hindu Hate in School Briefing, https://millercenter.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
adharma	Conduct that departs from moral order, duty, and truth. In this guide, it is the opposite of dharma and helps explain why Diwali stories speak about the defeat of cruelty, disorder, and injustice.
AHAD	American Hindus Against Defamation. In this guide, it is the publisher organization that works against the denigration of Hindu scriptures, deities, icons, and cultural symbols.
ahimsa	The discipline of non harm. In the Jain section, it explains why many Jain families may avoid or limit fireworks and keep Diwali centered on restraint, prayer, and compassion.
akshata	Unbroken rice used in worship. In this guide, it appears as a simple offering placed with prayers during home puja or Chopda Pujan.
Amavasya	The new moon day in the lunar calendar. In this guide, the central Diwali observance falls on Kartika Amavasya, though regional calendar wording may differ.
amanta reckoning	A regional way of counting lunar months in which the month ends with the new moon. In this guide, it explains why some families will hear Diwali described as Ashwin Amavasya while referring to the same festival period.
Annakut	A food offering associated with the day after the main Diwali night in some communities. In this guide, it is linked with gratitude, abundance, and the sharing of food after offering it first to the Divine.
aarti	A concluding act of worship, usually with light, performed before the deity. In this guide, families may close home puja with aarti and then distribute prasad.
aparigraha	Non possession or restraint in attachment to possessions. In the Jain section, it helps explain why charity, self control, and simplicity belong at the heart of Diwali observance.

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Term	Meaning
Bandi Chhor Divas	The Sikh observance during the Diwali season that remembers Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji's release from Gwalior Fort and the freeing of fifty two other prisoners. In this guide, it is the main Sikh story families should teach, not a secondary label for someone else's festival.
Bhai Beej	A regional name for the day that honors the bond between brother and sister after the main Diwali observances. In this guide, it is treated as part of the Diwali cycle, not an afterthought.
Bhai Dooj	Another common name for the brother sister observance that follows Diwali. In this guide, sisters bless brothers, families reconnect, and kinship is renewed through visit, tilak, sweets, or a call if relatives live far apart.
Chopda Pujan	The worship of account books and, by extension, the tools of livelihood and study. In this guide, it teaches that prosperity should be sought under dharma, with honesty, gratitude, and self restraint.
Deepavali	The fuller Sanskrit form of the festival's name. In this guide, it means a row of lamps and is used alongside the shorter form Diwali.
dharma	Moral order, right conduct, duty, and truth lived in action. In this guide, it is the key idea that ties together worship, family duty, prosperity, and the stories told during Diwali.
diya	A small lamp, often of clay, lit during Diwali. In this guide, the diya is not mere decoration but a sign of sacred light, welcome, reverence, and the presence of the Divine in the home.
Ekadashi	The eleventh lunar day. In this guide, Rama Ekadashi marks an early point of preparation for families who observe the Diwali season as a longer sacred arc.
Gautama Swami	The chief disciple of Bhagwan Mahavira in Jain tradition. In this guide, Jain families remember that he attained kevala jnana on the same night as Mahavira's nirvana.
ghee	Clarified butter used in cooking and worship. In this guide, some families use it to light a diya as part of home observance.

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Term	Meaning
gurdwara	A Sikh place of worship and community gathering. In this guide, Sikh families may go there for prayer, kirtan, langar, and remembrance during Bandi Chhor Divas.
Hindu dharma	Preferred term for Hindu dharma in this guide. It refers to the sacred, civilizational, and lived framework within which Diwali is primarily explained here.
HinduPACT	Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective. In this guide, it is the publisher organization focused on policy research and advocacy for the American Hindu community.
Kartika	The lunar month in which the main Diwali observance falls. In this guide, Kartika Amavasya names the new moon night most closely associated with Diwali.
kevala jnana	Perfect knowledge in Jain teaching. In this guide, it is associated with Gautama Swami's attainment on the night of Mahavira's nirvana.
kirtan	Devotional singing in Sikh practice. In this guide, families attend kirtan at the gurdwara as part of Bandi Chhor Divas observance.
langar	The shared community meal in Sikh tradition, offered in a spirit of equality and service. In this guide, helping with langar is one way families practice seva together.
Lakshmi Puja	The main Diwali night worship in many Hindu homes, centered on Mahalakshmi and often joined with worship of Shri Ganesha. In this guide, it joins prayers for prosperity with the expectation of right conduct.
Mahalakshmi	The Divine form associated with prosperity, auspiciousness, and well being. In this guide, families worship Mahalakshmi during Diwali with the understanding that wealth must remain guided by dharma.
Mha Puja	A Newar Buddhist ritual observed during Tihar in Nepal. In this guide, it is explained as a rite of self renewal, blessing, and inner purification, not vanity or ego worship.
mithai	Festive sweets shared during Diwali. In this guide, mithai belongs to hospitality, offering, and generosity, not indulgence alone.
murti	A sacred image used in worship. In this guide, a home altar may include a murti or image for simple family puja.

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Term	Meaning
Nepal Sambat	The Newar New Year observed during the Tihar season in Nepal. In this guide, it appears alongside Mha Puja as part of the Buddhist connection to the wider Diwali season.
nirvana	Final liberation from the cycle of birth and death. In the Jain section, Diwali marks Bhagwan Mahavira's nirvana at Pavapuri.
prasad	Food first offered in worship and then shared as blessed food. In this guide, families distribute prasad after aarti or home puja.
pratikraman	A Jain practice of reflection, repentance, and spiritual review. In this guide, it is one of the quieter devotional observances some Jain families may keep during Diwali.
purnimanta reckoning	A regional way of counting lunar months in which the month ends with the full moon. In this guide, it helps explain why some sources place Diwali in Kartika while others describe the same observance as Ashwin Amavasya.
puja	Worship offered at home or in a temple through prayer, light, offerings, and reverence. In this guide, Diwali puja may be simple, but it should be clean, intentional, and specific.
rangoli	Decorative floor art made with powders, petals, rice flour, or similar materials. In this guide, rangoli marks welcome, beauty, and readiness for a sacred festival.
sampradaya	A religious lineage, tradition, or inherited stream of teaching and practice. In this guide, it helps families explain why Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists may share a season without sharing one single story.
seva	Selfless service. In this guide, it appears especially in Sikh observance, where families may serve in the gurdwara or give help to others as part of the day's meaning.
sangat	The Sikh congregation or gathered community. In this guide, joining the sangat at the gurdwara is part of observing Bandi Chhor Divas properly.
tithi	A lunar day in the Hindu calendar. In this guide, it explains why Diwali dates shift on the Gregorian calendar and why families should think in terms of the moon, not only fixed civil dates.

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Term (cont.)	**Meaning**
tilak	A mark applied on the forehead as part of blessing or welcome. In this guide, it is especially associated with Bhai Dooj or Bhai Beej, when sisters bless brothers.
Tihar	The five day festival season in Nepal that overlaps with Deepawali. In this guide, it is the main setting in which many American readers will encounter Buddhist observances connected with the Diwali season.
Trayodashi	The thirteenth lunar day. In this guide, Dhanteras falls on Trayodashi and is associated with auspicious beginnings and household preparation.

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For Further Information

Learn the festival and its calendar

Start with sources that explain Deepavali across traditions, then use a calendar source when you need the tithi and festival sequence for a given year.

- Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya: a concise overview of Deepavali, its place in the lunar calendar, the five day sequence from Naraka Chaturdashi to Yama Dwitiya, and major stories linked to Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Bali, and Mahavira.[3]
- Hindu Heritage, K. Parthasarathy: a family friendly explanation of Deepavali customs, Narakasura vadha, Lakshmi worship, business new year observances, and Bhai Dooj.[4]
- South Indian Festivals, P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar: a useful guide for families who want the South Indian observance, especially the early oil bath, Deepavali Amavasya, and ancestral offerings.[5]
- Jain University, Jain Story Book: a simple primary teaching resource on Lord Mahavira, including the Jain understanding that his nirvana is remembered on Diwali.[80]

KEY POINT

For families, the first question is not which single Diwali story is "the" story. It is which sampradaya, region, and family tradition you are teaching, because Deepavali carries more than one sacred memory.

Teach children the stories and symbols

Use story sources that match the tradition you are explaining at home, then connect each story to a visible custom such as lamps, sweets, rangoli, prayer, or visiting family.

- Our Festivals, Hindu Council of Kenya: especially helpful for explaining why lamps are lit, why joy and new clothes mark the festival, and how different days carry different meanings.[3]

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- Scan Oct 30, 2026 at 1.31 PM.pdf: a compact reference on Dipavali as observed by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists, with notes on Lakshmi puja, Bali Pratipada, Bhai Duj, Narakasura vadha, Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya, and Bandi Chhor Divas related observance in the wider festival season.[6]
- Celebrating Ayurveda Day October 25, 2019, American Institute of Vedic Studies: useful for families teaching Dhanteras and the association of the day with Dhanvantari and Ayurveda.[20]

DID YOU KNOW

Many Hindu families keep more than one Diwali story alive at once. A home may remember Sri Rama's return, Narakasura vadha, Lakshmi puja, and the new year, without treating these as competing accounts.

Find U.S. recognition and public observance

When you need school, civic, or public recognition material, use official or documentary sources that show how Diwali is observed in public life.

- Essentials of Hindutva.v001.pdf: a historical text that treats Diwali as a widely shared civilizational festival across Hindu, Sikh, and Jain communities.[22]
- RSS 360 Demystifying Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Ratan Sharda: useful for understanding the wider Hindu calendar context, especially how regional new year observances and shared festival customs vary across Bharat.[10]

IN PRACTICE

For a school handout or family presentation, pair one calendar source, one story source, and one custom source. That gives children a date, a meaning, and something they can recognize at home.

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Conclusion

Keep the center of the festival clear

You now have what a family needs most: a steady way to keep Diwali rooted in meaning, not drift. Diwali is not just a date on the calendar, a school event, or an evening of sweets and lights. See What Diwali Means and Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration.[3][5]

What to carry forward each year

Keep four things firm.

- ✓ Name Diwali accurately and simply in your home and in public, without letting others flatten it into a generic cultural festival, see Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges.[3]
- ✓ Teach your children your family's observance with confidence, including the story, the days you mark, the puja or prayer you do, and the habits that make the festival reverent and joyful, see The Diwali Days, Stories Families Tell at Diwali, and Parents Guide.[3][5]
- ✓ Welcome shared civic goodwill without surrendering clarity. Others may join, greet, or learn, but your family should not feel pressure to secularize, relabel, or apologize for a Hindu festival in order to make it acceptable.[3]
- ✓ Answer criticism briefly, then return to practice. A complaint about noise, shopping, or public misunderstanding does not define the festival. Your task is to celebrate well, speak clearly, and avoid letting someone else set the terms, see Responding to Diwali Criticism.[3][5]

What parents should do next

Make Diwali easy for your children to inherit. Decide what your family will repeat every year, the words you use, the story you tell, the prayer space you prepare, the relatives you call, the food you share, and the school explanation you keep ready.[3][5] Children remember what is done calmly and consistently. They also notice whether parents speak about their tradition with embarrassment or with ease. Choose ease, precision, and warmth.[3]

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If school or workplace confusion comes, do not overreact and do not retreat. Correct the record once, in plain language, and ask for the practical remedy your family needs, whether that is accurate wording, excused absence, make up work, or respectful recognition, see Workplace Guide and Diwali in America: Recognition, School Life, and Common Challenges.[3]

A good Diwali at home does more than create a pleasant evening. It gives children a pattern for memory, belonging, and self respect. Years from now, they may not remember every explanation, but they will remember that their home lit the lamps, spoke the names rightly, honored elders, welcomed guests, and marked the victory of the good without confusion or apology.[3][5] That is how a family keeps the light.

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Appendix: Templates

The documents this guide asks the reader to create, ready to copy and fill in. Each starts on its own page. A fillable PDF form of these templates, with fields and check boxes, is published with the guide.

Template A.

Family Diwali Celebration Planner

A simple worksheet for planning the observance for each day (not just five, but all seven days), stories to share, foods to prepare, guests to invite, and puja items to gather.

Template B.

School Diwali Information Sheet

A one-page handout parents can give teachers or schools explaining what Diwali is, when it falls, how children may observe it, and respectful ways to acknowledge it.

Template C.

Diwali Event Checklist for Families

A practical checklist covering home preparation, safety, worship materials, food, clothing, guest hospitality, and cleanup.

Template D.

Diwali Day-Off from School

A template letter parents can use to seek a Diwali day off from schools

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Family Diwali Celebration Planner

Use this planner at least two weeks before Deepavali. One parent or guardian should complete it with the children, then review it with the family member leading puja, so the home observance is orderly, age-appropriate, and true to your family's sampradaya. If you plan candles, diyas, or fireworks, the adult signing below should also confirm the home safety rules and any local fire restrictions before the festival begins.

Family Diwali Celebration Planner

Family name:

City and state:

Year of observance:

Primary sampradaya or family tradition:

Festival dates this year, by lunar calendar and local calendar:

Parent or guardian coordinating the week:

Puja lead for the main Diwali day:

> **KEY POINT**
> *Plan all five days together, even if your family keeps some days simply. Children learn the rhythm of Deepavali best when they can see the full sequence, not only the main night.*

Our five day observance plan

Day	Tithi or name	Main observance at	Time	Who leads

Day	Story, teaching, or memory to	Children's role	Guests or relatives joining

> **IN PRACTICE**
> *Include the days your family observes as Dhanteras, Naraka Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja or main Diwali night, Govardhan Puja or Bali Pratipada, and Bhai Dooj or Bhai Beej, as your tradition keeps them.*

Stories we will tell

- [ ] Shri Rama's return to Ayodhya
- [ ] Shri Krishna and Satyabhama defeating Narakasura
- [ ] Mahalakshmi worship and the meaning of light over darkness
- [ ] Vamana and King Bali

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- [ ] Mahavira's nirvana, for Jain family learning
- [ ] Bandi Chhor Divas and Guru Hargobind's release, for Sikh family learning
- [ ] A Buddhist story or teaching our family wants to include
- [ ] Our own family migration, temple, or Diwali memory

Story reader for children:

Short lesson we want every child to remember:

Puja and home preparation checklist

- [ ] Diyas or lamps
- [ ] Oil, ghee, and wicks
- [ ] Matchbox or lighter, stored safely
- [ ] Murti, image, or altar cloth prepared
- [ ] Flowers and garlands
- [ ] Rangoli colors, rice flour, or flower petals
- [ ] Incense
- [ ] Prasad ingredients
- [ ] Sweets for offering and sharing
- [ ] New clothes or cleaned festive clothes
- [ ] Gift envelopes or small presents
- [ ] Cleanup supplies for wax, oil, and ash
- [ ] Fire safety plan for children

CHECKLIST

If your family uses fireworks, assign one adult to supervise, one adult to manage younger children, and one safe place for lighting and disposal.

Food and sweets plan

Item to prepare or buy	Day needed	Who will make or bring it	Notes on dietary needs

Guest and family invitation roster

Name	Household or relation	Invited for which day	RSVP	Food or seating notes

Children's participation plan

Child name:

Role:

Child name:

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Role:

Child name:

Role:

Possible roles:

- Arrange diyas
- Help make rangoli
- Read a short story
- Offer flowers
- Hand out sweets
- Call grandparents or relatives
- Help clean after puja

What we will say yes to, and what we will avoid

- [ ] We will keep the focus on prayer, gratitude, family, and seva.
- [ ] We will explain that Deepavali is observed in more than one way across Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Buddhist traditions.
- [ ] We will avoid reducing Diwali to shopping only.
- [ ] We will avoid unsafe fireworks use.
- [ ] We will avoid leaving children alone with flames, sparklers, or hot lamps.
- [ ] We will make space for elders to share memories and blessings.

Parent or guardian sign-off:

Puja lead sign-off:

Date:

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School Diwali Information Sheet

Use this handout as a one page note to your child's teacher, front office, or principal before Diwali. A parent or guardian should complete it, and an older student may add a short personal note if helpful. Keep the tone practical and warm. The school may already have duties under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and district policies on religious accommodation and nondiscrimination, so this sheet should clearly state what your child observes, what support is requested, and what respectful acknowledgment looks like.

> **KEY POINT**
> *Give this sheet to the school at least one to two weeks before Diwali. Ask that it be shared with the classroom teacher, attendance office, and any after school program your child attends.*

School Diwali Information Sheet

School name:

Teacher name:

Grade / classroom:

Student name:

Parent or guardian name:

Parent or guardian email:

Parent or guardian phone:

Date submitted:

What Diwali is

Diwali, also called Deepavali, is a festival of lights observed in Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), and also by many Jain, Sikh, and some Buddhist families. The word Deepavali means "row of lamps." It is a sacred and family centered festival that marks light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and the victory of dharma over adharma.

Our family observes Diwali as:

The tradition or community we follow is:

A story especially meaningful in our home is:

- [ ] Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya
- [ ] Sri Krishna's victory over Narakasura
- [ ] Mahavira's nirvana, for Jain families
- [ ] Bandi Chhor Divas, for Sikh families

- [ ] Another story or observance:

> **DID YOU KNOW**
> *Diwali is not a single uniform observance. Families may share the same festival date but follow different stories, prayers, and customs.*

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When it falls

Diwali follows a lunar calendar, so the date changes each year.

This year, our family will observe Diwali on:

The main day most important for our family is:

We may also observe these related days:

Day	Date	What our family does
Dhanteras / first day	__	__
Main Diwali day	__	__
New Year / Bhai Dooj / other	__	__

How my child may observe

My child may:

- [ ] Wear traditional clothing
- [ ] Attend evening prayers or family gathering
- [ ] Be absent for part or all of the day
- [ ] Avoid scheduling conflicts that evening
- [ ] Bring sweets, if school policy allows
- [ ] Share a book, picture, or short explanation with the class

- [ ] Another observance:

Possible effect on schoolwork, homework, or activities:

Requested accommodation, if needed:

> **IN PRACTICE**
> *A simple accommodation may be enough: flexibility for an absence, no major test the next morning where possible, or permission for a brief classroom acknowledgment.*

Respectful ways to acknowledge Diwali at school

Helpful school acknowledgment may include:

- Saying "Happy Diwali" or "Shubh Deepavali"
- Noting that the date follows a lunar calendar and changes each year
- Recognizing that Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs may mark the season differently
- Inviting the student or family to share only if they wish
- Using diyas, rangoli, books, or art respectfully and not as costume play

Please avoid:

- Treating Diwali as only fireworks or candy
- Asking one child to speak for all Indian or all South Asian families

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- Mixing sacred symbols into games or caricatures
- Assuming every family celebrates in the same way

Teacher notes

Topic	School response	Follow up needed
Attendance / absence	__	__
Classroom acknowledgment	__	__
Food / sharing policy	__	__

Family note to the school

We appreciate respectful acknowledgment of Diwali and are glad to answer practical questions about our child's observance.

Parent or guardian signature:

Date:

Student signature, optional:

Date:

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Diwali Event Checklist for Families

Use this checklist two to three weeks before Diwali and update it again on the morning of each observance day. One adult household lead should complete it, and a second adult should review fire safety, food allergies, guest access, and any local fireworks rules before sign off. If your city, county, homeowners association, or apartment building restricts open flames, fireworks, noise hours, or common area use, write those rules into this form before you begin.

> **KEY POINT**
> *A good Diwali plan is simple: prepare the home, gather worship materials, feed people well, welcome guests warmly, and leave the space cleaner than you found it.*

Family event details

Household name __

Primary adult lead __

Second adult reviewer __

Main Diwali date observed __

Other days observed, Dhanteras, Naraka Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Puja, New Year, Bhai Dooj __

Home address or event location __

Expected number of adults __

Expected number of children __

Traditions observed in our home, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, regional, family specific __

Family schedule

Time	Activity	Lead person

Home preparation

- [ ] Clean entryway, puja space, kitchen, dining area, and guest bathroom.
- [ ] Set aside a safe, stable place for diyas, away from curtains, paper, and children.
- [ ] Sweep porch, steps, and walkway for rangoli and lamp placement.
- [ ] Check outdoor lighting, doorbell, and house numbers for evening guests.
- [ ] Prepare a shoe area near the entrance.
- [ ] Place a table or tray for sweets, gifts, and prasad.
- [ ] Keep a metal tray or plate ready for used matches, incense ash, and burnt wicks.

> **CAUTION**
> *Do not place diyas on carpet edges, windowsills with drapes, or crowded stairways. If children will help light lamps, assign one adult to supervise only that task.*

Worship materials

- [ ] Diyas or lamps counted and placed.

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- [ ] Oil or ghee, cotton wicks, lighter or matches ready.
- [ ] Murti, image, or symbol for the observance arranged respectfully.
- [ ] Puja thali prepared.
- [ ] Flowers, kumkum, haldi, akshata, incense, and bell ready.
- [ ] Sweets, fruits, and prasad items prepared.
- [ ] Clean cloth, napkins, and small bowls set out.
- [ ] Family members know who will lead the prayer, aarti, reading, or remembrance.

Food and hospitality

- [ ] Menu chosen for family meal, prasad, and guest serving.
- [ ] Allergies and dietary needs checked, nut free, dairy free, vegan, gluten free, Jain food, no onion or garlic, other __.
- [ ] Water, tea, and child friendly drinks stocked.
- [ ] Serving dishes, cups, plates, and spoons ready.
- [ ] Take home boxes or bags ready for sweets and leftovers.
- [ ] Guest greeting plan set, who opens the door, who guides shoes, who serves elders, who watches children.

Clothing and personal preparation

- [ ] Festive clothes selected and tried on.
- [ ] Weather checked for shawls, jackets, or footwear.
- [ ] Jewelry, bindis, turbans, dupattas, or other family items laid out.
- [ ] Children briefed on respectful behavior in the puja area.
- [ ] Family photo time scheduled.

Safety

- [ ] Smoke alarms checked.
- [ ] Fire extinguisher easy to reach.
- [ ] First aid kit stocked.
- [ ] Candles, diyas, and incense never left unattended.
- [ ] Sparklers or fireworks, if legal where we live, used only outdoors with water or sand nearby.
- [ ] Pets secured in a quiet room if needed.
- [ ] Emergency contacts posted.

Guest and volunteer roster

Name	Role	Arrival time

Cleanup and next day tasks

- [ ] Extinguish all diyas and incense safely.
- [ ] Store oil, matches, and puja items properly.
- [ ] Pack prasad, sweets, and leftovers.
- [ ] Collect decorations, gift wrap, and disposable items.
- [ ] Sweep rangoli area only after family is finished enjoying it.
- [ ] Note what to buy, cook, or improve for next year.

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> **IN PRACTICE**
> *Keep this sheet on the refrigerator or near the puja area. Check items as you go, then save it with your festival supplies for next year.*

Adult lead signature __

Second adult reviewer signature __

Date __

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Diwali Day-Off from School

Use this note as a simple parent request for a Diwali absence. Fill it in, send it to the principal, attendance office, classroom teacher, and any counselor or grade dean, and keep a copy for your records. Submit it early, ideally at least two weeks ahead, and ask how missed work will be handled. This template reflects the common school practice of excused absences for sincerely held religious observance, and families should also check district policy, the student handbook, and any state rule that applies to religious holidays. If your child is old enough, attach the student acknowledgment and have a parent or guardian sign the request.

> **KEY POINT**
> *Ask early, ask in writing, and ask for the absence to be marked as a religious observance. A clear written request helps the school plan attendance, classwork, and make up assignments.*

Parent Request for Diwali Day Off from School

Date:

To:

School:

School Address or Email:

Re: Request for excused absence for Diwali observance

Dear:

I am the parent or guardian of __, who is in grade __ and homeroom or advisory __. Our family observes Diwali as a sacred festival in Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), marking the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. We respectfully request that my child be excused from school on __ so our family may observe Diwali together through prayer, family worship, and related religious observances.

We ask that this absence be recorded as an excused religious absence. Please let us know what classwork, quizzes, tests, homework, projects, or attendance procedures will apply before and after the absence so our child can stay current and complete all required work on time.

My child will make up missed assignments promptly and will check with teachers in advance where possible. If there are forms, deadlines, or teacher notifications required for a religious holiday absence, please send them to us at the contact information below.

Thank you for respecting our family's observance of Diwali and for helping our child participate fully in both school and religious life.

Parent or Guardian Name:

Student Name:

Grade:

Teacher or Homeroom:

Requested Date of Absence:

Parent or Guardian Phone:

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Parent or Guardian Email:

Home Address:

Teacher Notification Log

Teacher or Staff Name	Class or Role	Date Sent	Reply Received

CHECKLIST

- *[ ] Send to the principal or attendance office*
- *[ ] Send to each classroom teacher*
- *[ ] Ask about tests, labs, and deadlines*
- *[ ] Keep a copy of the request and replies*

Missed Work and School Activities

Item Missed	Teacher	Make Up Plan	Due Date

Family Checklist Before Sending

- [ ] I confirmed the school's absence reporting process.
- [ ] I listed the exact date requested.
- [ ] I asked for the absence to be marked as religious observance.
- [ ] I requested make up work instructions.
- [ ] I saved a copy for family records.

IN PRACTICE

If the school calendar already closes for Diwali, you do not need this letter. If the school stays open, send the request before teachers set tests or attendance based activities for that day.

Student Acknowledgment

I understand that I am responsible for checking with my teachers, completing missed work, and following any make up deadlines.

Student Name:

Student Signature:

Date:

Parent or Guardian Signature:

Date:

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Chopda Pujan — What is Chopda Pujan and how to do it

Appendix B.

Diwali Puja — How to perform Diwali Puja at home

Appendix C.

Rangoli or Kolam — What is rangoli, what is Kolam. How do to do it. Include images and how-to

Appendix D.

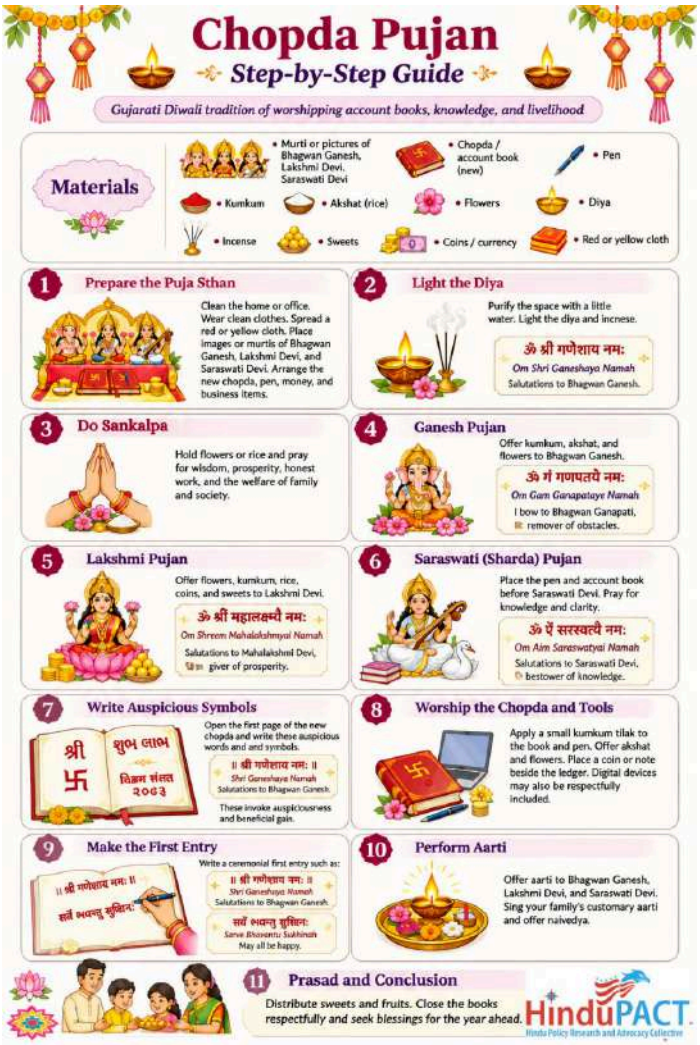
Diwali Games — Diwali jeopardy Diwali Colorbook Diwali Bingo provide game instructions, game artifacts etc.

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Appendix A: Chopda Pujan

What Chopda Pujan is

Chopda Pujan is the Diwali custom of worshipping the books and tools by which a family earns, saves, studies, plans, and serves. The word chopda refers to account books or ledgers. In many Gujarati and related business traditions, families place new ledgers before Bhagavan and seek the blessings of Lakshmi for prosperity and Saraswati, also called Sharda, for right understanding and good judgment. [82]



Chopda Puja

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For parents and families, this is not only for a shop, office, or formal business. The same principle applies at home. A family may place a checkbook, household budget notebook, school planner, laptop, tablet, or work bag before the altar and pray that wealth be earned honestly, used wisely, and directed by dharma.[3][4]

The wider Diwali season already teaches the victory of good over evil. Chopda Pujan adds a practical lesson: money, learning, and work are not separate from dharma. They must be purified, disciplined, and offered back in gratitude.[3][83]

☆ KEY POINT

Chopda Pujan is not mere bookkeeping. It teaches children that income, study, and success belong under dharma, not greed.

When families do it

This pujan is commonly done on the evening of Diwali, on the new moon night associated with Lakshmi Puja. In many Gujarati communities, it marks the close of the old business year and the preparation for the new one.[3][4][84]

If your family follows a local mandir schedule, use that. If you follow a panchang, use one set to your own city, because the muhurat depends on local sunrise and sunset, not on a time printed for India.[84]

⚠ CAUTION

Do not copy a muhurat from India for use in the United States. Use your local mandir's time or a panchang set to your own city.

What to place for pujan

Set out only what is meaningful to your family. Keep it simple and reverent.

- ✓ New ledger, notebook, or family budget book
- ✓ Checkbook or business register
- ✓ Pens used for work or study

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- ✓ Laptop, tablet, or phone used for school, work, or family finances
- ✓ Small cash box, if your family uses one
- ✓ Images or murtis of Lakshmi and Ganesh, and if your family keeps this custom, Saraswati or Sharda
- ✓ Diya, incense, flowers, kumkum, haldi, rice, and sweets or fruit for naivedya

Some mandirs in North America now explicitly invite families to bring both paper account books and electronic devices for this pujan, which reflects how work is actually done today.[82]

IN PRACTICE

For children, include one school item, such as a notebook, pencil case, or instrument book. This helps them see that learning is also sacred work.

A simple home procedure

Families do not need an elaborate ritual to do this well. What matters is cleanliness, sincerity, and the right intention.

- ☐ Clean the puja space and the items you will place before Bhagavan.
- ☐ Light a diya and, if you use it, incense.
- ☐ Place the ledgers, notebook, or devices neatly before the altar.
- ☐ Invoke Ganesh first, asking that obstacles be removed.
- ☐ Offer prayers to Lakshmi for prosperity joined to right conduct.
- ☐ If your family keeps the custom, invoke Saraswati or Sharda for wisdom, clarity, and disciplined learning.[82]
- ☐ Apply a small tilak of kumkum and rice to the ledger or first page.
- ☐ Write auspicious words such as Shri, Shubh, and Labh, according to family custom.
- ☐ Sit together for a short prayer. Parents may say aloud what the family is asking for: honest earnings, freedom from waste, generosity, and good use of knowledge.
- ☐ Close by offering sweets or fruit, then do arti.

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A common family practice is to begin the first page with sacred symbols and auspicious words. Another is to enter the first line only after prayer, so that the year begins with remembrance, not anxiety.[84][85]

What to say to children

Children understand Chopda Pujan best when parents make the meaning plain.

- ✓ We do not worship money.
- ✓ We worship the right use of what comes to us.
- ✓ Wealth without dharma harms.
- ✓ Learning without humility harms.
- ✓ Work done honestly becomes seva.

This is a good moment to explain Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) in family terms. Dharma means we earn in the right way, keep our word, avoid cheating, pay what we owe, help others, and remember that prosperity is a trust, not a license.[3][83]

Family customs that fit the spirit of the day

Different regions and sampradayas observe Diwali differently, but the core idea is steady: see What Diwali Means.[3][4] Families may add one or two of these customs after the pujan.

- ✓ Start a family giving plan for the year
- ✓ Set aside the first amount for dana, charity
- ✓ Review one financial habit to improve, such as saving, debt reduction, or avoiding waste
- ✓ Ask each child to name one skill they will use for good in the coming year
- ✓ Call grandparents or elders and take their blessings

These practices keep the pujan from becoming symbolic only. They carry it into the year ahead.

♡ WHY IT MATTERS

Chopda Pujan turns Diwali's message into family discipline: earn cleanly, learn seriously, spend carefully, and give gratefully.

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What to avoid

- ✓ Do not treat the pujan as a superstition that guarantees profit.
- ✓ Do not reduce it to display, shopping, or social pressure.
- ✓ Do not place devices there and then return to careless habits online or in money matters.
- ✓ Do not separate prosperity from ethics.

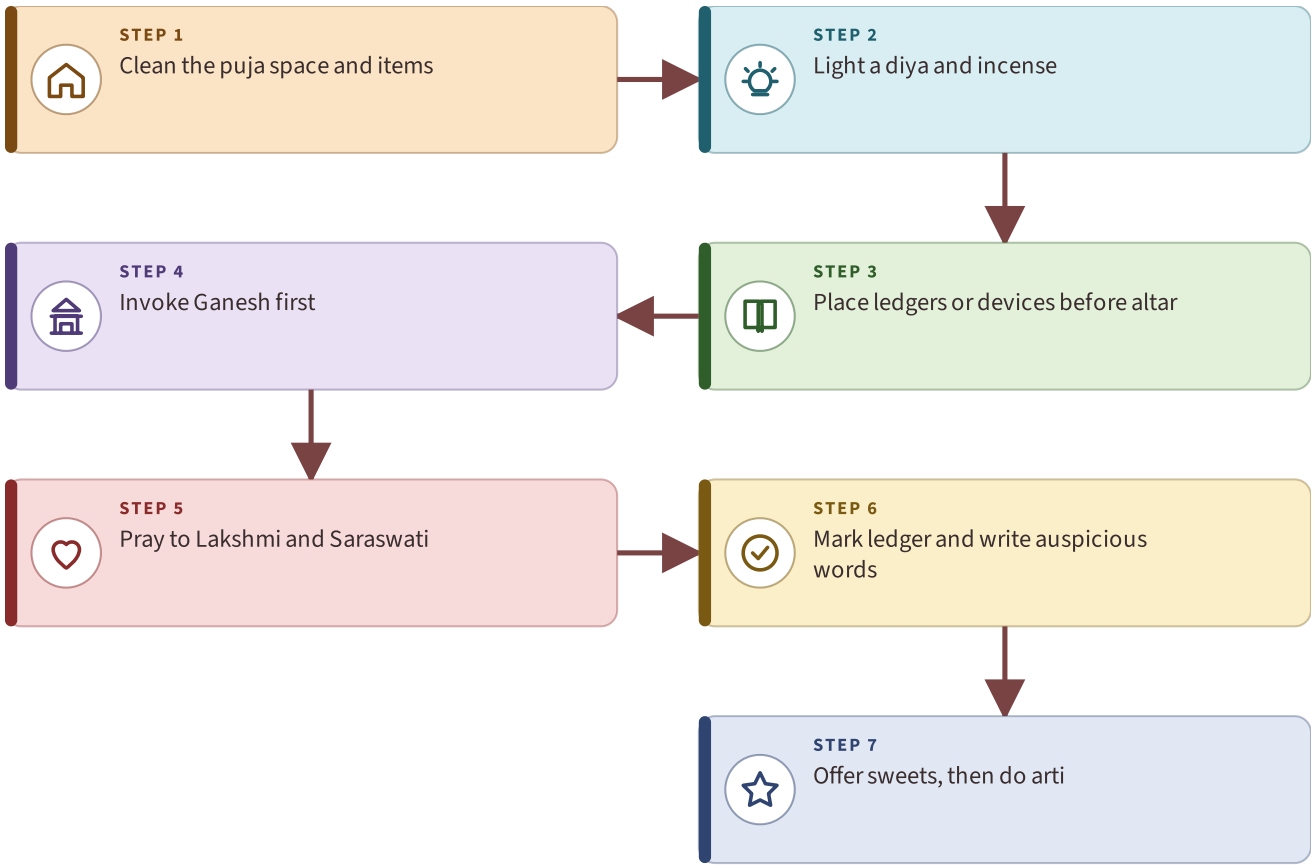
The old teaching behind this observance is simple and strong: wealth and fulfillment should follow right conduct, not replace it.[3]

Quick family guide

If your family has...	You can place...	Main teaching
A business	Ledger, invoice book, checkbook, laptop	Earn honestly and serve well
Salaried work	Work bag, planner, laptop, ID holder	Work is also sacred duty
School age children	Notebook, pencils, instrument book	Learning needs discipline and grace
A home budget	Budget notebook, bill file, savings jar	Prosperity grows through order and restraint
Digital finances	Phone or tablet used for banking and records	Modern tools also belong under dharma

Chopda Pujan is one of the most practical observances of Diwali. It teaches that the light we celebrate must enter the books we keep, the tools we use, and the choices we make every day.[82][4]

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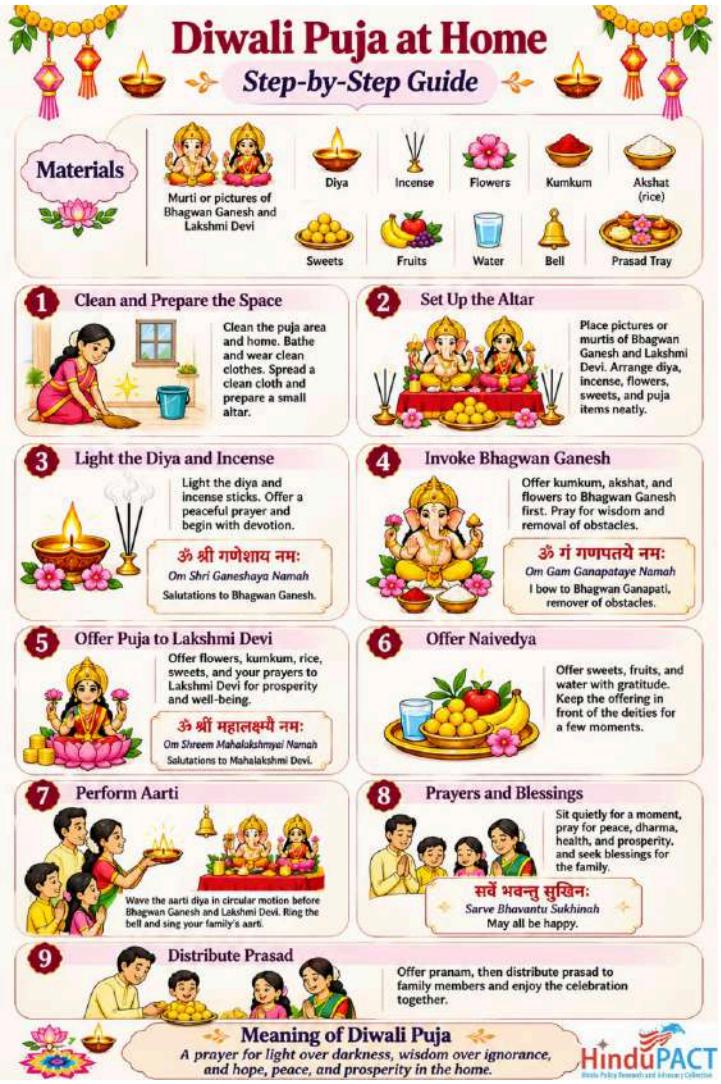
Simple home steps for Chopda Pujan

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Appendix B: Diwali Puja

What Diwali Puja is for

Diwali Puja at home is a family act of reverence, gratitude, and inner discipline. For the basic guidance on home puja, including Lakshmi puja, honoring Ganesha, and keeping the observance reverent and manageable, see "Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration".[86][87]



Diwali Puja

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Different regions keep Diwali in different ways. Many South Indian families mark Naraka Chaturdashi, often with an early oil bath, in remembrance of Sri Krishna's victory over Narakasura. Across these traditions, the shared meaning is steady: light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance.[3][5][4]

☆ KEY POINT

A home Diwali Puja does not have to be elaborate. A clean space, lighted diyas, sincere prayer, and family participation are enough to make it meaningful.

What to prepare

Use what you have. Keep the setup clean, safe, and orderly.

Item	What it is for	Simple home option
Murti or picture of Lakshmi and Ganesha	Main focus of worship	Framed images placed on a clean cloth
Diyas	Light, welcome, and auspiciousness	Clay lamps with oil or ghee
Matchbox or lighter	Lighting diyas and incense	Keep away from children
Flowers	Offering of beauty and reverence	Any fresh flowers
Incense	Fragrance during puja	Optional if anyone has asthma or sensitivity
Water in a small cup	Purification and offering	Plain clean water
Kumkum and turmeric	Tilak and simple offerings	Use only if available
Akshata, uncooked rice	Offering and blessing	Plain rice is fine
Fruit and sweets	Naivedya, food offering	One fruit and one sweet are enough

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Item (cont.)	What it is for	Simple home option
Bell, if available	Marks moments of worship	Optional
Aarti lamp or one diya	For concluding aarti	A single diya works

If your family keeps account books, business ledgers, tools of work, or school materials as part of Diwali observance, place them neatly near the puja area for blessing. Diwali observances commonly include prayers for prosperity, right livelihood, and success in the year ahead.[87][3]

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Clean the puja space and entryway
- [ ] Set Lakshmi and Ganesha on a clean cloth
- [ ] Arrange diyas, flowers, water, fruit, and sweets
- [ ] Keep children's clothing away from open flame
- [ ] Silence phones before the puja begins

When to do the puja

For many families, the main home puja is done on Diwali evening, around twilight on Amavasya. Temple calendars often describe this as the central Diwali Mahalakshmi Puja time, when families invite Lakshmi and Ganesha into illuminated homes.[87] If your family follows a regional or sampradaya calendar, use that timing. If not, perform the puja after sunset, when the household can gather calmly and without rushing.[87][3]

A South Indian family may also keep the early morning oil bath of Naraka Chaturdashi as part of the Diwali observance, then perform evening lamp lighting and prayer according to family custom.[5][4]

Step by step, a simple home Diwali Puja

1. Bathe and wear clean clothes.
2. Clean the puja space and the front entrance.
3. Spread a clean cloth and place images or murtis of Lakshmi and Ganesha.
4. Light the main diya first. Then light the other diyas for the puja area and entryway.

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1. Sit together. Take a quiet moment and make a simple sankalpa, a clear intention, such as: “We perform this Diwali Puja with gratitude and pray for wisdom, harmony, and right prosperity.”
2. Offer a brief prayer to Lord Ganesha first, since he is worshipped at the beginning so that obstacles are removed and the puja proceeds well.[86][87]
3. Offer flowers, akshata, and a little water to Ganesha and Lakshmi.
4. If your family knows Lakshmi mantras, recite them together. A simple repetition of “Om Shri Mahalakshmyai Namah” is widely used in home worship.[86]
5. Offer fruit, sweets, or homemade food as naivedya.
6. Sit quietly for a minute. Parents may read or say aloud the meaning of Diwali: moving from darkness to light.[11]
7. Perform aarti with one lamp, moving it reverently before the deities.
8. Bow, then distribute prasad to everyone.

Families who know a fuller puja may include dhyana, avahana, offering of seat, water, fragrance, flowers, food, and aarti. A published Diwali Puja guide from Chinmaya Mission presents this fuller sequence in Sanskrit and transliteration for home use.[86]

IN PRACTICE

Young children can each offer one flower, one grain offering, or one diya. Older children can read the prayer, ring the bell, or help place lamps at the doorway. Shared participation teaches reverence better than a long ceremony they do not understand.

What to say to children

Keep the teaching plain and memorable.

- ✓ We light lamps because light stands for truth, wisdom, and hope.
- ✓ We pray to Ganesha first so the family begins well.
- ✓ We pray to Lakshmi for prosperity joined to dharma, not greed.
- ✓ We offer food because gratitude comes before enjoyment.
- ✓ We share prasad because blessings are received together.

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If you want one short line to repeat as a family, use the well known prayer, “Lead us from darkness to light,” which expresses the spiritual heart of Deepavali.[11]

Safety and good judgment

Open flame requires discipline. For basic diya safety guidance, see "Diwali at Home: Customs, Worship, and Celebration". Keep a metal tray under indoor lamps if needed. Never leave children alone with lit lamps or fireworks. If anyone in the home is sensitive to smoke, skip incense and keep the observance centered on diyas, prayer, and prasad.

Many families enjoy fireworks, but they are not the heart of Diwali Puja. The heart of the observance is worship, light, family, and gratitude.[3][5]

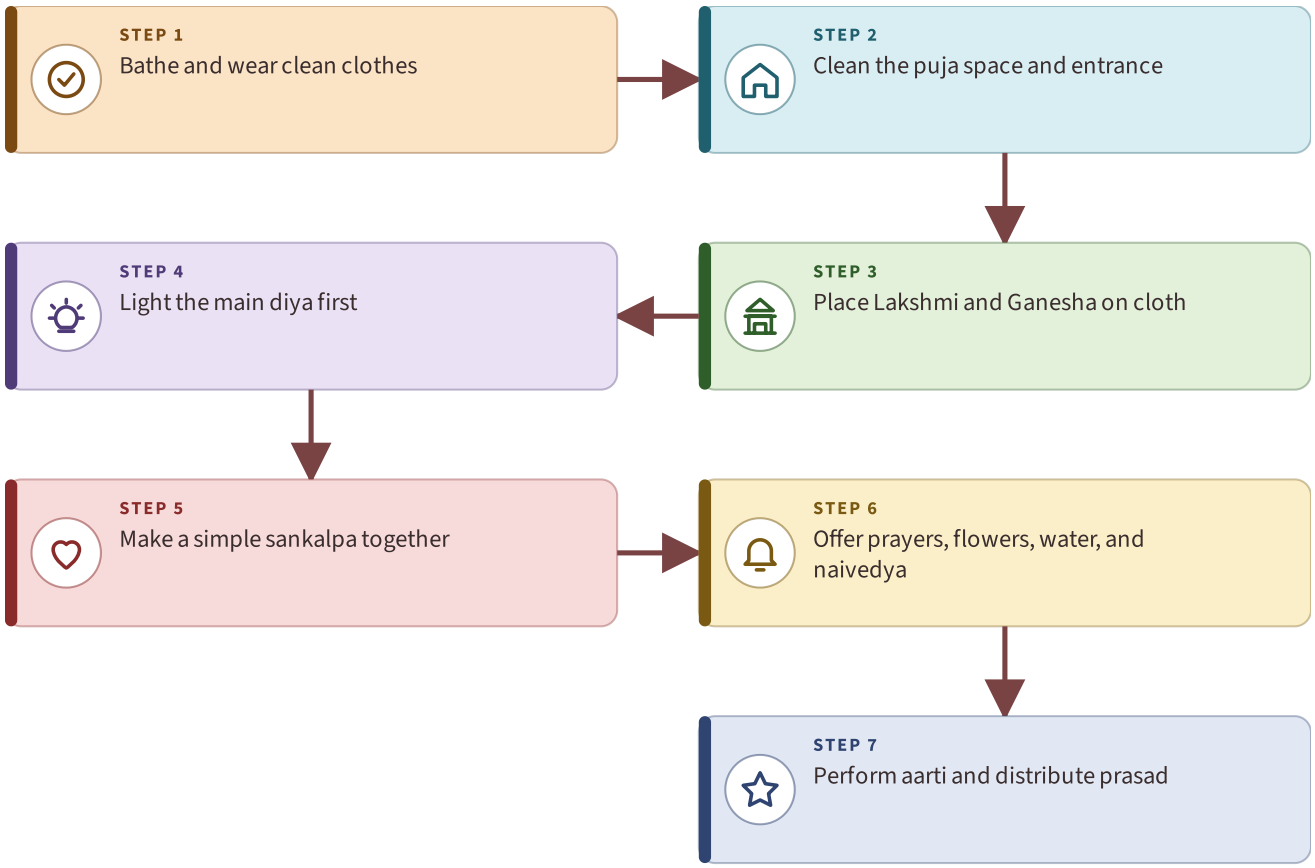
⚠ CAUTION

Do not let noise replace worship. Lighted diyas, prayer, and prasad are central. Fireworks are optional, and in many homes they are omitted altogether.

A simple closing for the family

After aarti, offer pranam and share prasad. Then light the remaining diyas at the doorway and around the home. If your family keeps the broader five day observance, the days that follow may include Govardhan Puja, Balipratipada, or Bhai Dooj according to regional custom.[3] What matters most is that children see Diwali not as a shopping event or a noise contest, but as a sacred family observance in which the home itself becomes a place of light.

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Simple steps for a home Diwali Puja

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Appendix C: Rangoli or Kolam

What families should know

Rangoli and kolam are floor designs made at the entrance of a home, near a prayer space, or in a courtyard. They welcome auspiciousness, mark a sacred occasion, and turn an ordinary threshold into a place of beauty and attention. During Diwali, they fit the festival naturally: light, order, hospitality, and the victory of good over evil.[89][90][10]



Diwali Rangoli Celebrations
HinduPACT



Family making rangoli and kolam for Diwali

In many parts of India, families use the word rangoli for colorful festive designs. In Tamil Nadu, the everyday threshold design is commonly called kolam. Other regions use other names as well, which shows how widespread this practice is across Bharat.[90]

For parents and children, the simplest way to explain the difference is this:

Term	Common use	Typical look	Usual material
Rangoli	Festive design, often for Diwali and special occasions	Bright colors, flowers, lamps, geometric or floral motifs	Colored powder, sand, flower petals, chalk
Kolam	Daily or festival threshold design, especially in Tamil homes	Dot grids, looping lines, symmetry	Rice flour, chalk powder, stone powder

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KEY POINT

Rangoli and kolam are not just decoration. They are threshold arts that bring beauty, discipline, welcome, and sacred attention into the home.

How rangoli and kolam relate to Diwali

Diwali is celebrated in different regional ways, but the common thread is the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil.[89][10][3] A rangoli or kolam at the doorway makes that meaning visible. It says: this home is awake, clean, welcoming, and ready to receive guests, blessings, and joy.

Many families place diyas around the design or include lotus, lamp, conch, peacock, or simple geometric forms. Children do not need a perfect design to take part. The act of making it together matters.



Finished rangoli and kolam at the doorway

WHY IT MATTERS

See Stories Families Tell at Diwali.

A family friendly way to do it

You do not need special training. Start small. A clean, simple design done with care is better than a large design that leaves everyone frustrated.

- [ ] Choose the place: front doorstep, porch, entry hall, patio, or near the home altar.
- [ ] Clean and dry the surface.
- [ ] Pick a simple design: a flower, a lamp, a lotus, a circle, or a dot grid.
- [ ] Gather materials: chalk, rice flour, colored powder, flower petals, or colored sand.
- [ ] Sketch the outline lightly with chalk first.
- [ ] Fill from the center outward.

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- [ ] Add diyas only after the design is finished and an adult has chosen safe spots for them.
- [ ] Take a family photo, then leave the design in place for the celebration.

If you are making a kolam style design, begin with dots in straight rows. Then connect the dots with curved lines or loops. If you are making a rangoli style design, begin with a central shape and build outward in balanced layers.

Easy starter designs for families

1. Diya design

- ✓ Draw one lamp shape in the center.
- ✓ Add a flame above it.
- ✓ Make a border of dots or petals around it.

1. Lotus design

- ✓ Draw a small circle.
- ✓ Add four large petals.
- ✓ Add four more petals between them.
- ✓ Color each petal in alternating shades.

1. Dot grid kolam

- ✓ Make a grid of 4 by 4 or 5 by 5 dots.
- ✓ Draw loops around the dots in a repeating pattern.
- ✓ Keep the lines even and unbroken as far as possible.

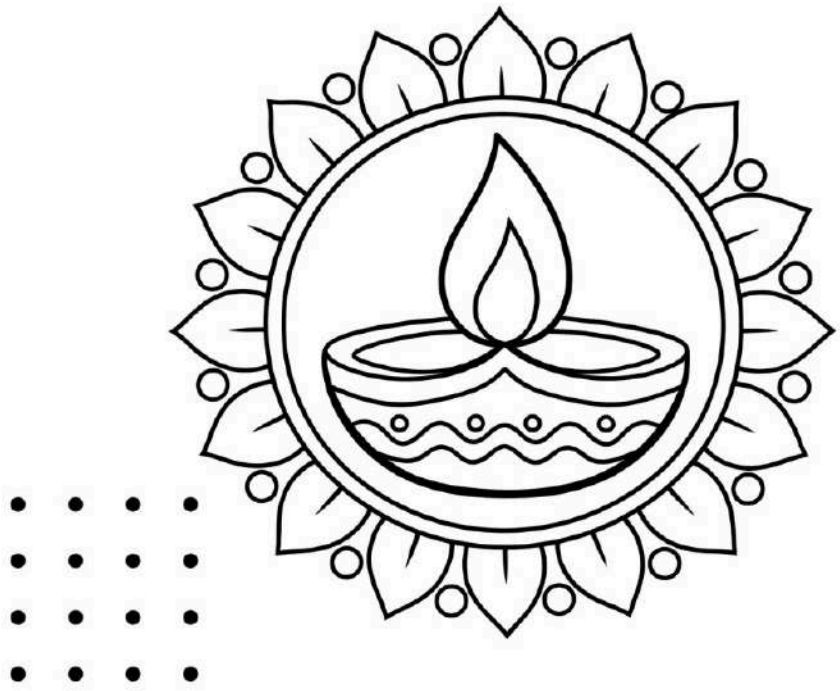
1. Flower petal rangoli

- ✓ Draw a circle with chalk.
- ✓ Fill sections with marigold petals, leaves, and rice.
- ✓ Place one diya in the middle if the surface is stable and safe.

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Materials that work well in American homes

Material	Best use	Good for children	Notes
Sidewalk chalk	First outline, apartment entry, driveway	Yes	Easy to erase and low mess
Rice flour	Kolam lines	Yes, with help	Traditional and simple to pour by hand[90]
Colored sand or rangoli powder	Filling shapes	Yes, with supervision	Use trays or mats indoors
Flower petals	Festive rangoli	Yes	Clean, bright, and easy to place
Sticker dots or paper templates	Toddler version	Yes	Good for very young children



Coloring page with diya and kolam patterns

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The Asian Art Museum's education guide recommends rice flour for threshold art and gives a practical method for coloring it with food dye and water for family or classroom use.[90]

Safety and cleanup

Choose materials that suit your space. In an apartment hallway, use a removable mat, poster board, or tray. Outdoors, avoid blocking a shared walkway. Keep powders away from windy areas and from heating vents indoors.

Use battery tea lights for very young children, for apartment buildings with restrictions, or for homes with pets. If you use diyas, place them on a stable surface with adult supervision and keep loose clothing away from the flame.

⚠ CAUTION

Do not place a rangoli or kolam where someone could slip, trip, or step into an open flame. For toddlers, pets, and busy entryways, use chalk, petals, or battery lights instead of loose powder and oil lamps.

Images and how to learn by seeing

Families often learn fastest by looking at a few examples before starting. These sources are useful because they show real designs and practical teaching steps.

- ✓ National Geographic Kids, "Diwali," includes a photo of rangoli and a short explanation for children.[89]
- ✓ Asian Art Museum, "Making Rangoli: A Celebration of Color," gives a visual, step by step classroom method that families can easily adapt at home.[90]
- ✓ The Asian Art Museum packet "A Labyrinth for Lakshmi: The Ritual Tradition of Threshold Art" shows how these designs appear across regions of India and names several regional forms, including kolam.[91]
- ✓ The National Museum of Asian Art has featured Diwali programs and rangoli activities, which can help families see how museums present the practice visually for the public.

A good family rule is simple: look at two or three examples, then make your own. Do not worry about copying a perfect image. The point is reverence, joy, and participation.

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What to say to children

- ✓ “This is a design we make to welcome light and goodness into our home.”
- ✓ “Different parts of India make these designs in different ways.”
- ✓ “Rangoli is often colorful and festive. Kolam often uses dots and flowing lines.”
- ✓ “We make it carefully because Diwali teaches us to choose light over darkness.”

That is enough. Children remember what they help create.

Keep the tradition living

A family that makes one small rangoli or kolam every Diwali is doing something important. You are passing on Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism) through practice, not abstraction. A child who pinches rice flour into a line, places petals one by one, or lights a safe lamp beside a handmade design learns Diwali in the right order: first with the hands, then with the heart, then with words.

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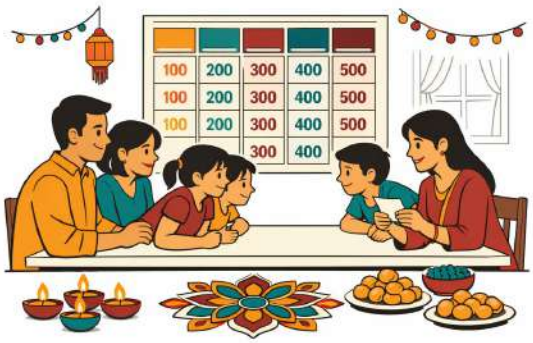
Appendix D: Diwali Games

How to use this appendix

Use these pages for a family Diwali night, a classroom celebration, a temple youth activity, or a neighborhood gathering. The games below keep the focus where it belongs: Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), light over darkness, good over evil, gratitude, family bonds, and the many regional ways Diwali is observed.[92][3][89]

☆ KEY POINT

Choose games that teach, not just entertain. A good Diwali activity helps children remember names, stories, symbols, and values they will meet again in puja, family conversation, and community life.



Diwali games and coloring pages for families and classrooms

Keep the tone joyful and clear. Do not turn the games into a test. Younger children should be able to join with pictures, matching, coloring, and simple clues. Older children can handle story questions, regional traditions, and short discussion prompts.[92][3]

Diwali Jeopardy

Set up a simple board with five categories and five point values under each one: 100, 200, 300, 400, 500. Divide players into two or three teams. A team chooses a category and point value. Read the clue aloud. The team has 20 seconds to answer. If they miss, another team may answer. Highest score wins.

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IN PRACTICE

For younger children, let them answer in ordinary sentence form. For older children, require the Jeopardy style response, beginning with "What is" or "Who is."

Suggested categories:

Category	What it covers
Lights and Symbols	diyas, rangoli, Lakshmi puja, sweets
Stories of Diwali	Rama, Sita, Krishna, Narakasura, Bali
Family and Festival Days	Dhanteras, main Diwali night, Govardhan Puja, Bhai Dooj
Across Bharat and the world	North, South, West, Bengal, Nepal, diaspora
Values	courage, gratitude, self-control, generosity, truth

Use these ready clues:

- 100, Lights and Symbols: Small oil lamps lit during Diwali.
- Answer: What are diyas?
- 200, Lights and Symbols: The Sanskrit meaning of Deepavali.
- Answer: What is "row of lights"?
- 300, Lights and Symbols: The Devi widely worshipped on the main Diwali night for prosperity and well-being.
- Answer: Who is Lakshmi?
- 400, Lights and Symbols: Floor art made with colored powders, flowers, or rice.
- Answer: What is rangoli?
- 500, Lights and Symbols: This symbol teaches that light also means knowledge over ignorance.
- Answer: What is the diya, or lamp?[92][3][89]
- 100, Stories of Diwali: In much of North India, Diwali marks his return to Ayodhya.

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- Answer: Who is Sri Rama?
- 200, Stories of Diwali: In many South Indian traditions, Diwali recalls the defeat of this asura.
- Answer: Who is Narakasura?
- 400, Stories of Diwali: This king is remembered on Balipratipada.
- Answer: Who is Bali, or Mahabali?
- 500, Stories of Diwali: The central moral theme shared across Diwali traditions.
- Answer: What is the victory of good over evil?[92][3][89]
- 100, Family and Festival Days: The day associated with Dhanvantari and often observed before Diwali.
- Answer: What is Dhanteras?
- 200, Family and Festival Days: The day when many families worship Lakshmi and light lamps.
- Answer: What is the main Diwali night, or Lakshmi Puja night?
- 300, Family and Festival Days: The day after Diwali in many North Indian traditions that honors the bond between brother and sister.
- Answer: What is Bhai Dooj?
- 400, Family and Festival Days: The observance linked with Govardhan and Annakut.
- Answer: What is Govardhan Puja?
- 500, Family and Festival Days: In some business communities, Diwali marks this fresh beginning.
- Answer: What is the new business year, or opening new account books?[3][89][20]
- 100, Across Bharat and the world: In Bengal, this form of worship is often observed around Diwali.
- Answer: What is Kali Puja?
- 200, Across Bharat and the world: In Nepal, the festival season is widely known by this name.
- Answer: What is Tihar?
- 300, Across Bharat and the world: Diwali is observed for one day, three days, or five days depending on this.
- Answer: What are regional and family traditions?
- 400, Across Bharat and the world: This Sikh observance often falls on the same day as Diwali, but it is a separate tradition.

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- ✓ Answer: What is Bandi Chhor Divas?
- ✓ 500, Across Bharat and the world: One reason families in the diaspora should teach more than one Diwali story.
- ✓ Answer: What is that Diwali has regional diversity across Hindu communities?[92][3][89][93]
- ✓ 100, Values: The darkness Diwali asks us to overcome.
- ✓ Answer: What are ignorance, fear, and wrongdoing?
- ✓ 200, Values: A family practice that reflects gratitude during Diwali.
- ✓ Answer: What is prayer, sharing sweets, giving, or remembering ancestors?
- ✓ 300, Values: A virtue shown when Rama returns after exile and struggle.
- ✓ Answer: What is steadfastness, or dharma?
- ✓ 400, Values: A virtue shown when children wait their turn and include younger players.
- ✓ Answer: What is self-control, patience, or kindness?
- ✓ 500, Values: The deepest lesson of Diwali for family life.
- ✓ Answer: What is bringing light into conduct, speech, and home life?

Diwali Colorbook

Make a simple stapled booklet of 6 to 10 pages. Put one large image on each page, with a short caption children can read aloud or trace. Leave wide spaces for coloring. For preschool children, use thick outlines. For older children, add one sentence to complete on each page.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Print single-sided pages
- ☐ Use thick black outlines
- ☐ Add one short caption per page
- ☐ Include at least one page from North Indian and one from South Indian tradition
- ☐ End with a family reflection page

Suggested pages and captions:

- ✓ A diya. Caption: “A diya reminds us to bring light into the world.”

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- ✓ Lakshmi Puja at home. Caption: “Families pray for prosperity used with dharma.”
- ✓ Rama, Sita, and Ayodhya. Caption: “Many families remember Rama’s return to Ayodhya.”
- ✓ Krishna and Narakasura. Caption: “Many South Indian families remember Krishna’s victory over Narakasura.”
- ✓ Rangoli at the doorway. Caption: “Rangoli welcomes joy, beauty, and sacred celebration.”
- ✓ Sweets to share. Caption: “Diwali is a time to give and receive with affection.”
- ✓ Brother and sister on Bhai Dooj. Caption: “Family bonds are part of the festival season.”
- ✓ Govardhan or Annakut offering. Caption: “Gratitude for food and abundance is part of Diwali.”
- ✓ A page of diyas around the world. Caption: “Hindu families celebrate Diwali across the world.”[92][3][89][20]

Add one final page titled “My Diwali Light.” Ask the child to draw one action that brings light into family life. Examples: telling the truth, helping grandparents, sharing sweets, cleaning the puja space, or welcoming a guest.

Diwali Bingo

Prepare 5 by 5 bingo cards. Put “FREE” in the center. Use words or pictures, depending on the age group. Call out clues, not the answer itself. Players cover the matching square. First player to complete a row, column, or full card calls “Diwali.”



Children play Diwali Bingo with picture cards

⚠ CAUTION

Avoid reducing Diwali to noise, shopping, or fireworks. Keep the card centered on sacred stories, family observances, symbols, and values.

Suggested bingo word bank:

- ✓ Diya

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- Rangoli
- Lakshmi
- Ganesha
- Rama
- Sita
- Krishna
- Narakasura
- Ayodhya
- Sweets
- Puja
- Dhanteras
- Govardhan
- Bhai Dooj
- New moon
- Oil bath
- Family
- Prosperity
- Dharma
- Light
- Good
- Evil
- Knowledge
- Gratitude
- Victory

Sample calling clues:

- “This lamp is small, but its meaning is great.”
- “This Devi is worshipped for prosperity on the main night.”

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- ✓ “This city is linked with Rama’s return.”
- ✓ “This asura is defeated in a major South Indian Diwali story.”
- ✓ “This art decorates the floor near the entrance.”
- ✓ “This festival day comes before the main Diwali night and is linked with Dhanvantari.”
- ✓ “This word names right conduct.”
- ✓ “This family observance honors the bond between brother and sister.”[92][3][89][20]

For very young children, use picture bingo with only nine squares. For mixed ages, pair older and younger children together. That keeps the pace moving and turns the game into family teaching, not competition.

Quick host checklist

- ☐ Begin with one minute on what Diwali celebrates: light over darkness, good over evil.
- ☐ Use both story and symbol, not trivia alone.
- ☐ Include more than one regional tradition.
- ☐ Keep prizes simple: books, diyas, stickers, or sweets.
- ☐ End with one family question: “How will we bring more light into our home this year?”

These games work best when they leave children with memory, affection, and clarity. That is the real win. They should walk away knowing that Diwali is not merely a party. It is a civilizational festival of light, gratitude, courage, and dharmic living, carried by families from one generation to the next.[92][3][89]

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INFOGRAPHIC 1

Family Diwali Prep

A simple plan for the season

- Choose your family's Diwali story
- Mark five days on calendar
- Set aside diyas and matches
- Prepare a clean worship space
- Choose one New Year practice
- Plan Bhai Dooj observance

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INFOGRAPHIC 2

Explain Diwali Simply

Short points children can remember

1. Say Diwali means row of lamps
2. Explain the date follows the moon
3. Teach one family story well
4. Light diyas with reverence
5. Connect prosperity with right conduct
6. Keep Bhai Dooj in the cycle

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INFOGRAPHIC 3

Say This, Not That

Helpful language for school and neighbors

Do	Avoid
Festival of lights on lunar calendar	Only about fireworks
Different families tell different stories	One story is the only one
A sacred festival with worship	Only cultural
A major festival in its own framework	India's Christmas

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Diwali, Explained for Families

Teach the meaning first, then follow your family's calendar and customs with confidence.

- Deepavali means a row of lamps: teach light over darkness first.
- Many families observe five days, from Dhanteras through Bhai Dooj.
- Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists share the season differently.
- Diwali follows the Hindu lunar calendar, so the Gregorian date changes yearly.
- Keep purchases modest, and place worship, gratitude, and renewal at the center.

Read the family guide

HinduPACT Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective

American Hindus Against Defamation AHAD

Learn more: https://hindupact.org | https://ahadinfo.org | https://hindunet.org

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Diwali at a Glance

Use these quick facts to explain Diwali simply, accurately, and confidently at home, in school, and in public.

MEANING
Deepavali means a row of lamps.

CORE IDEA
Light over darkness, dharma over adharma.

WHEN IT FALLS
Kartika, usually in October or November.

WHY DATE CHANGES
It follows the Hindu lunar calendar.

COMMON LENGTH
Many families observe five days.

SHARED SEASON
Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists observe it differently.

Why This Matters

Families need language that is clear enough for children, accurate enough for classrooms, and faithful to the sacred meaning of Diwali. HinduPACT advances understanding of issues affecting American Hindus through policy research and advocacy, while AHAD works against Hinduphobia and denigration of Hindu traditions. HinduNet is a long-standing Hindu content partner helping share reliable public information. Together, they support families celebrating Diwali with understanding, dignity, and joy.

Keep this for Diwali season.

- https://hindupact.org
- https://hindupact.org/ahad/
- https://ahadinfo.org
- https://hindunet.org



Celebrate with understanding, dignity, and happiness.

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HINDUPACT

Diwali for Families

What Diwali means, how families observe it, and how to explain it well.

HinduPACT
Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective

From the guide *HinduPACT Guide to Diwali for Parents and Families*

What Diwali Means



Diwali begins with meaning, not noise, shopping, or spectacle. In Hindu dharma (preferred term for Hinduism), it is a sacred season of lamps, gratitude, renewal, worship, and the victory of dharma over adharma, taught through family stories and household practice.

- Teach children first that Deepavali means a row of lamps in Sanskrit.
- Explain that Diwali celebrates light over darkness and dharma over adharma.
- Tell children the lamps stand for truth, clarity, wisdom, and right action.
- Diwali also teaches gratitude for family, food, livelihood, elders, and blessings.
- Prosperity belongs under dharma, so Lakshmi reverence is not a lesson in greed.

SAY THIS

Diwali means a row of lamps. We light them to honor dharma, give thanks, renew our home and heart, and remember that light is stronger than darkness.

Know the Diwali Days



Many families observe Diwali as a five day sequence, though names and emphasis vary by region and sampradaya. The best family practice is to choose your calendar early, follow your temple or elders, and teach children the order they will actually see.

- Dhanteras opens the main sequence with preparation, lamps, and modest auspicious purchases.
- Naraka Chaturdashi remembers Shri Krishna's defeat of Narakasura and often begins before dawn.
- Diwali Amavasya is the central night for lamps and Lakshmi Puja in many homes.
- The next day may be Govardhan Puja, Annakut, Balipratipada, or Gujarati New Year.
- Bhai Dooj or Bhai Beej closes the sequence with sibling blessing and duty.

REMEMBER

The Gregorian date changes every year because Diwali follows the Hindu lunar calendar. That does not make it uncertain; it reflects an ancient sacred calendar tied to lunar phases.

Explain It Well



Families today often need language for teachers, neighbors, classmates, and coworkers who know only part of the festival. The goal is not argument but accuracy: explain your family's observance clearly, respect other dharmic communities, and correct shallow descriptions without losing the sacred center.

- Do not present one regional story as the only Diwali story for everyone.
- Say that Hindu families observe Diwali in different ways across regions and traditions.
- Jains observe Diwali to remember Bhagwan Mahavira's nirvana and enduring teaching.
- Sikhs mark the season with special importance as Bandi Chhor Divas.
- Some Buddhist communities observe the season regionally, especially in Nepal and Newar settings.

DID YOU KNOW

A school worksheet may reduce Diwali to fireworks or one story. A better explanation names the lamps, the lunar date, your family's tradition, and the distinct observances of other communities.

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