Open or swap

One simple house-rule version. Share it before anyone buys a gift.

1 Set up the round

Use at least 2 players and exactly 1 wrapped gift per player. Count people and gifts before starting. Draw unique turn numbers from 1 through the player count. Keep all wrapped gifts together.

2 Take numbered turns

Player 1 opens a gift. On each later numbered turn, the active player either opens a wrapped gift or steals an eligible opened gift from someone else. You may end up with the gift you brought.

3 Follow the giftless player

If your gift is stolen, you become active immediately. Open a wrapped gift or steal an eligible gift. You cannot immediately take back the gift just taken from you. The chain ends when someone opens a wrapped gift. Then call the next unused turn number.

4 Lock after the second steal

Opening is not a steal. A gift can be stolen twice total during the whole game. After its second steal, it stays with its new holder and cannot be stolen again. The host tracks each gift, not each player. Any unlocked held gift is eligible except your immediate steal-back.

5 Finish without a bonus round

If no steal is eligible, open a wrapped gift. There will be one available during an unfinished turn. After the last numbered turn and its chain end, everyone keeps their current gift. There is no final extra steal for Player 1.

Invite without pressure

Copy and adapt this invitation. Fill every detail before sending it yourself.

We're having an optional holiday gift swap. If you'd like to play, bring one wrapped gift within our agreed limit. Spending less is welcome. You're also welcome to come and watch without bringing a gift or explaining why.

We'll use the attached Open or swap rules: gifts lock after two steals, no immediate steal-back, and no bonus round. Please tell the host whether you plan to play before the reply date. We'll confirm the group and gift count before we start.

Date and gathering time

Location

Swap starts at / reply by

Agreed spending limit and currency

Gift theme / new, handmade or secondhand guidelines

How to reply to the host

Participation reply: [ ] I plan to play [ ] I will just enjoy the gathering

Late arrivals: join before the first turn starts or watch this round. No new players or gifts enter a round already underway.

Turn and gift record

One row per player and gift. Copy this page for larger groups and continue the numbers.

Draw numbers randomly, then write each player beside their drawn number. Label gifts A, B, C and so on before play. Record a gift label in the Gift label column; rows do not imply who owns that gift. Check a box each time that gift is stolen. Both checked = LOCKED.

Turn	Player	Gift label	Steal 1	Steal 2
1			☐	☐
2			☐	☐
3			☐	☐
4			☐	☐
5			☐	☐
6			☐	☐
7			☐	☐
8			☐	☐
9			☐	☐
10			☐	☐
11			☐	☐
12			☐	☐

Playing: _____ Wrapped gifts: _____ Counts match: [ ]

Extra sheet: for turns beyond 12, cross out printed turn numbers and continue 13, 14, 15... Give every gift its own unique label across all sheets. Keep one record for the entire round.

Host checklist

Keep the round friendly, clear and easy to finish.

Before anyone shops

[ ] Agree on a spending limit and gift guidelines with the group. Less than the limit is fine; joining is optional.

[ ] Send the chosen rules with the invitation. Decide who will help younger players read numbers and follow the game.

Before the first turn

[ ] Confirm the players who are present and ready. Match exactly one wrapped gift to each player. Resolve any mismatch before starting.

[ ] Keep nonplayers and their gifts out of this round. Anyone arriving after play starts watches this round.

[ ] Label every gift, prepare unique numbered slips, and draw turn numbers. Assign a host to track steals on page 3.

[ ] Read aloud: two total steals lock a gift; no immediate steal-back; no final bonus round.

During the round

[ ] Call the next unused number only after the current chain ends with an opened gift.

[ ] After every steal, mark that gift's next box and hand the choice to the displaced player. Announce when a gift locks.

[ ] If no eligible steal exists, direct the active player to open a wrapped gift. Do not add a new rule mid-round.

At the end

[ ] After the final chain ends, check that every player has one gift. No extra turn follows.

[ ] Thank everyone, including people who chose not to play. Put away the record and reusable rule sheet.