

Take time out for your preschooler, family living specialist advises

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LEBANON — A mother sits on the kitchen floor facing her two-year-old daughter. Toys clutter the floor, the dirty dishes wait in the sink and a list of calls to make waits by the phone.

At first glance it would seem that very little is happening here. But a closer look will reveal that something very important to successful parenting and a happy family is occurring. The mother and child are communicating.

"Research has shown that strong families spend time together," Extension family living specialist James Van Horn told a group of parents in Lebanon this week. And, he continued, "The time that a child spends with a parent is most valuable."

"Regardless of what we do or how busy we are, we need to reserve time if we have young children," he stressed. No one, he added, is too busy to spend just five uninterrupted, undistracted minutes with their child.

Spend those five minutes — or more — doing whatever your child wants to do. "It may be just sitting on the floor and watching him make faces," Van Horn said.

Once you have made these five-minute sessions a part of your regular schedule, work at expanding them.

If you don't spend the time with your child, other good things, like communicating, aren't going to happen, he said. By offering your child your undivided attention, you are providing an opportunity for communication and letting him know he is an important person.

But communicating with a child is more than simply spending time with him. When talking with your child, Van Horn said, get yourself into a position where he can look you in the eye.

"Eye contact says an awful lot about what the person you are talking to is thinking," Van Horn

said. Remember how you felt last time you talked to someone several inches — or feet — taller than you? Chances are you felt a little uncomfortable or intimidated.

"Get down to the child's level or get him up to your level," Van Horn noted. "If you have a preschooler, your knees ought to be sore."

When talking to a child, it's just as important not to interrupt as when you're listening to an adult. "We interrupt kids a lot. We're impatient," he said. But parents must remember that kids aren't just miniature adults. "Their minds do not work like ours."

Preschoolers have a lot to learn and so they ask a lot of questions. As parents, "we ought to be willing to answer those questions," Van Horn said.

Some parents resort to yelling when their kids don't behave the way the parent thinks they should. "Yelling is a very good outlet," Van Horn says. But, to be a truly effective communicator, speak softly. "Try turning your volume down to kids and you will find generally their attention goes up," Van Horn advised. "Use a soft voice, a pastel voice."

While tone of voice and volume should be considered, what is said is equally important. "We (parents) need to say what we mean, and mean what we say," Van Horn noted. When communicating with preschool children, keep it simple, and tell them what you want them to do, don't ask them.

It is kind of silly, Van Horn said, to ask a child "Do you want to wash your hands?" Of course he doesn't. Say what you mean: "Johnny, go wash your hands for dinner."

Following through with the command is just as important as phrasing it correctly. Children need to know that we mean what we say. Too often, Van Horn said,

parents threaten children with no intention of carrying out the threat.

But, he said, "As soon as kids get to be three or four, they read us clearly and know we are just threatening."

By not enforcing the rules you've set up for your child, you are sending him the message "I don't mean what I say," Van Horn noted. And if child doesn't believe your threats, he may not believe you when you say, "I love you."

If you can't follow through on what you say, you're probably saying too much, Van Horn said.

In making up a list of rules, think each one out. Determine those things that are most important to you, then make your list of rules compatible with your values. But keep in mind, Van Horn reminded, "Rules need to be reasonable." Consider your child's age and ability to comply when setting rules.

Once you have compiled the list of rules, make sure your child knows what they are and what the punishment will be if he breaks them. "It's no fair pulling a rule out of the air!" Van Horn noted. "The younger the child the more times it needs to be repeated before it is enforced."

When a child does break a rule, don't get mad or yell — just give him the expected punishment. Chances are, Van Horn said, you won't have to punish the child for the same infraction twice.

Parents should also make a special effort to communicate positive feelings when a child behaves in an acceptable way. Too often adults are quick to point out the negative, while ignoring the positive.

Make an effort to start the day with five good comments to a child, Van Horn encouraged. It will help a child develop the self esteem so essential to success in life.



Extension family living specialist James Van Horn shares some tips on living and communicating with preschool children during an Extension-sponsored program in Lebanon Tuesday evening.

BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers



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Featuring Families Self Esteem

Recently while cleaning out the attic, I uncovered an old photo album. On the Kodak paper were captured memories of family times and college days. Fourth of July picnics, camping vacations, swimming in the creek, cookie baking and sweet corn day were pictorial reminders of fun family times together. It also was a reminder to dust off the camera and start capturing current family events.

The time we spend as a family unit has something very special about it. The family is almost always that one group of people who like us just the way we are. We can say and do things with them that we might not say or do with anyone else. It's a comfortable and comforting situation.

Families can enhance this feeling even further by using self-esteem builders. Self-esteem is what makes us feel good about being us, and it's easy to help other people feel good about themselves.

Why is self-esteem so important? I think that to a large extent, the way we feel about ourselves determines a degree of our success in life.

People who feel good about themselves will be willing to take more risks, try things from a different standpoint. They are generally more creative at problem solving. And, as a result, they have a greater opportunity to succeed at challenges taken on in life. A positive self esteem also can help to counteract negative pressures such as stress, change, losses, and limitations.

How can we help others feel good about themselves? Family activities open up a wide opportunity for developing self esteem. Opportunities for encouraging development of self esteem are

simple things like treating other family members with respect, and letting them know they are worthwhile. Give others freedom to try new things — even if they may fail. Allow family members to be involved in decision making. And, most of all, we need not accept family members unconditionally.

The wonderful thing about lifting someone else's self-esteem is that it lifts yours too! Many family events go a long way in building self esteem of family members. Below are some suggestions:

- **Family Night**—an evening once a week where the family chooses an activity to do together
- **Family Council**—a weekly or bi-monthly meeting where family makes decisions about personal and financial matters as a unit.
- **Family Song Fest**—sing around the piano or start a family band.
- **Family Vacations**—do not have to be costly or long to be fun and memorable.
- **Family parties** for all occasions, including birthdays, new jobs, promotions, passing a difficult test, or even getting a driver's license.
- **Ice Cream or Barbeque Night**—when family makes and eats the meal together.

As I looked through my photo album, I was reminded of our many family activities. I also realized that family times develop more than family unity and communication. They are a structure that also builds personal self esteem in each member and has a part in the person I've become.

So, I think I'll go buy some film so that I can record my husband's milestone birthday. Who knows, it just may be the reminder of the family strengths and support that will get him through the next 30 years!

Positive discipline encourages respect

By PETER ROWE

Copley News Service

Disciplinarian, heed thy self.

Jane Nelsen was in the beauty parlor, growing more and more disturbed by the antics of her 11-year-old daughter, when she erupted.

"You are acting like a spoiled brat!" Nelsen yelled.

A normal parental reaction, but Nelsen cringed. After all, she was preparing for a photo session. The picture — in which Nelsen looks calm, collected and neatly coiffed — adorns the back cover of her book "Positive Discipline: Teaching Children Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation and Problem-Solving Skills."

"I really was ignoring her," Nelsen confessed, "and expecting behavior beyond her level. . . . If I had been respectful to her in the first place, I would not have that problem."

So Nelsen took her daughter aside and apologized.

"If I ever tell you you're a spoiled brat," she said, "it's because I'm being one. I'm having a temper tantrum."

That is not the way Nelsen — or most of her peers — was raised. Many parents, she said, start their children off with the "my way or the highway" approach.

And most say that just doesn't work today.

"The authoritarian method was effective when society was set up that way, when Mom did what Dad said, when people got fired when they disobeyed the boss. . . ."

"The last frontier is kids," Nelsen said. "They are the only ones we expect to 'do as I say' — yet we don't give them that model."

Parents fear that the alternative is surrendering to the little barbarians: cookies for breakfast, screaming siblings, a house littered with broken toys.

Nelsen, the mother of seven, understands.

"I vacillated between being an authoritarian — spanking, yelling and threatening about the same things over and over, so you know it didn't work — to permissiveness — avoiding bedtime hassles by letting them fall asleep in their clothes before the TV."

But 16 years ago, Nelsen was introduced to the theories of Alfred Adler, a pupil of Freud's. Adler believed in giving children choices — and letting them live with the consequences.

An authoritarian parent might serve oatmeal for breakfast and tell Junior to eat it — or else. A permissive parent might cater to Junior's every culinary whim.

Adler advocated a middle path. Let Junior select his own breakfast, within reason. If he suddenly decides he wants something else, send him from the table. If he returns, remind him he can eat — at lunch.

Nelsen, who holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of San Francisco, blended her own ideas to those of Adler and Rudolph Dreikurs, an Adler associate. The result was positive discipline.

"The whole point of positive discipline is to teach self-discipline," she said. "Create an attitude, a feeling, of respect, mutual respect and mutual involvement."

Ongoing problems, Nelsen maintains, can be aired at "family meetings" in which parents and children can arrive at mutually satisfactory solutions.

Faced with a temper tantrum, Nelsen said, "I might still use isolation — 'Go to your room. But when you go to your room, do something to make yourself feel better. When you feel better, we'll talk.'"

Punishment is not the object, Nelsen said. "Where did we get this crazy idea that the way to make children behave better we have to make them feel worse?" she asked.

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