

Notes To Dad

by

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Making The Home A

Safe Place: A Father's Role

Recently, I read an article written by Roland C. Warren, president of the National Fatherhood Initiative that offered wonderful insight into ways that fathers can help to "secure the home front" during a time when many families may be feeling terribly vulnerable. The article starts with the following excerpt:

"Two 7-year-old boys who live down the road from me have built a secret hiding place under a large bush. They've stocked it with toy guns, shovels for digging, and old clothes in case they ever need to be in their hideout for days on end. These two boys are getting ready just in case the bad guys who crashed planes into the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon attack their neighborhood."

No doubt, families of America have been profoundly effected by the event of Sept. 11. And children now, more than ever, need fathers to help provide them with a sense of security at home.

In fact, Warren writes, "...America needs its fathers to provide security for their children as surely as America needs its government and military to provide security for the nation."

Research and experience tells us that children most often turn to fathers when they feel threatened.

I think of my own 5-year-old son who has recently been experiencing some very real bedtime fears of monsters and other imaginary creatures. It isn't me he comes to at 2 a.m. but his father. It seems that dad has what it takes to make the monsters go away at least for the night!

Children today face fears far greater than imaginary monsters, including the very frightening reality that terrorists can invade their homeland.

What can dads do to help make their home feel like a safe place for their children? According to Warren, there are at least four things that fathers can do to secure the home front.

- Fathers must take great care to respect and support the mother of their children. A secure marriage or parental relationship creates a secure environment for children. This is especially important in a non-custodial environment, where children's sense of security is linked to mother's sense of security. When children have parents who model respect and support for each other, they are left with a feeling of safety and security that goes a long way in helping them to deal with the many frightening events that can occur outside of the family environment.

- Fathers need to make an extra effort to spend time with their children. Fathers need to make sure that they are available for their children, especially when children need to talk about their fears and insecurities. Warren writes, "Children don't schedule time to discuss their fears and anxieties." It's crucial that fathers are available to listen to their children and to discuss their concerns with them. Quality communication between father and child comes best when fathers have established a consistent presence in their home and "put in the time" needed for children to feel comfortable with them.

- Fathers need to model an appropriate response to frightening events such as the Sept. 11 tragedy. Research shows that fathers play an important role in helping their children, especially sons, to regulate their emotions and properly manage their anger. Dads need to be proactive and use events such as Sept. 11 as an opportunity to talk to their child

Penn State Research Explores Food Safety Practices Of Seniors

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — When it comes to avoiding foodborne illness through safe food preparation and storage, senior citizens often are their own worst enemies, says a registered dietitian in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Because they have weakened immune systems and reduced stomach acid, the elderly are especially susceptible to foodborne illnesses," says Mary Alice Gettings, Penn State Cooperative Extension nutrition and health agent in Beaver County. "But the methods they use to thaw, cook, handle and store foods often increase their risk of becoming sick."

Foodborne pathogens such as listeria, Salmonella and E. coli can cause flu-like symptoms, and even death, among susceptible

populations. According to the Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 76 million cases of foodborne illness kill about 5,000 people and hospitalize 325,000 more in the U.S. each year. Many more cases likely go unreported, mistaken for other bacterial or viral infections.

To develop educational strategies for reducing the chances of foodborne illness among the elderly, Gettings and Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Penn State Cooperative Extension program evaluation specialist, studied the food safety practices of seniors in three urban and three rural counties in the western Pennsylvania. The research was published recently in the Journal of Nutrition Education.

Participants were 60- to 85-years old and prepared at least five meals a week. Conducting focus groups in senior citizen centers, the researchers asked seniors how they cook, cool and thaw meat, poultry and seafood and where they got the idea to do it that way. "We chose to study seniors because of their vulnerability, and because there was very little information in the literature about food safety practices among the elderly," Gettings explains.

The study found that, although participants used both appropriate and inappropriate food safety practices, many of their methods increase their risk of foodborne illness.

For instance, many seniors failed to use a meat thermometer, which is the most scientifically sound method of ensuring that food is cooked thoroughly enough to reduce harmful levels of pathogens. Instead, common practices included relying on a specific amount of cooking time and using utensils to cut food open and checking doneness by sight.

"We heard comments such as, 'If you take chicken out and see blood, then you know you have to leave it in longer,' and, 'I wiggle the turkey leg, and if it's loose, I guess it's done,'" says Gettings. "Barriers to adopting the proper

method included resistance to change, the perceived inconvenience of using a thermometer and a lack of resources they say they don't own and can't afford a thermometer."

Seniors also commonly used inappropriate practices for thawing and cooling foods. Risky thawing methods included placing frozen food in water that was never replaced with fresh water. Among inappropriate cooling methods was placing large quantities of hot food into one large container to refrigerate, rather than portioning it into smaller containers so it could cool faster.

When asked how they learned these practices, many seniors cited experience ('I've done this for years and it hasn't hurt me yet') and relatives. "Some said they learned these methods from their mothers or grandmothers," says Gettings. "That means an 85-year-old may be using knowledge that was accepted 100 years ago but today has been proven incorrect."

The study also looked at ways to educate and motivate seniors to change their food safety methods. "Many told us that they need information from credible sources such as educators — about the scientific facts and health risks associated with unsafe practices," Gettings says.

"They also expressed a preference for educational programs and materials that are geared specifically for them," she says. "For example, programs held in libraries, health centers, churches and other locations frequented by seniors provide an excellent opportunity to overcome their strong resistance to using a thermometer. Brochures and fact sheets with illustrations — perhaps timed to coincide with holidays or other seasonal events — can reach large numbers of seniors at health fairs, in church bulletins or in doctors' waiting rooms.

"Such educational efforts will support safe food handling and promote the continued independence of seniors in their homes," notes Gettings.

about difficult issues. This might include a discussion about issues such as discrimination or the appropriate use of military force.

- Fathers need to continue to show affection to their children. Children need the security that comes from knowing that they are wanted, accepted and loved unconditionally by their father. Affection comes in many forms, including verbal encouragement, participation in your child's events, listening without judgment, and of course in the form of pats on the back, hugs and kisses. In my family, it happens when my husband ends a living room wrestling match with a big squeeze for our son, or when he tells our 7-year-old daughter what a beautiful young lady she is becoming.

In times such as these, fathers owe it to their children to "secure the home front," to be there for them, and to help create a safe haven at home in a world that often isn't. Have a happy New Year and may your family time together be the best ever.

For more information about the National Fatherhood Initiative, call or write: National Fatherhood Initiative, 101 Lake Forest Boulevard, Suite 360, Gaithersburg, MD 20877.

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Postcard Club To Meet

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Lancaster County Postcard Club will meet Monday evening, January 21 at 7 p.m. Meetings are held at the Farm and Home Center, located on Arcadia Road, off the Manheim Pike (Rt. 72) in back of Jones Pontiac/Honda in Lancaster.

This month's program will be members displaying a postcard having a connection to the number two, in honor of the

New Year, 2002. The public is invited to the 7 p.m. meetings as well as to visit with members who have brought postcards to sell and trade from 5:30 p.m.

The club was founded 11 years ago and has about a 400-person membership. About 70 local members attend the monthly meetings where they share a common interest in the history and enjoyment of collecting and researching postcards.

Local, national and foreign views, holiday greetings, and thematic topics on almost every subject under the sun can be found on postcards. Members will be happy to answer any questions you might have about your own postcards — new or old.

For more information, contact Tom Beck, 11 Cinder Hill Road, Lititz, PA 17543-8509; phone (717) 627-7732.

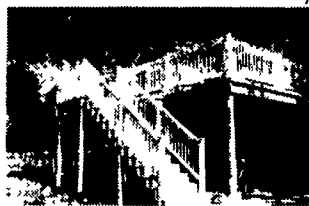
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