

Kids Korner

Children's Opportunities — Our Responsibilities



Children learn about the world by experimenting. Learning how to use simple hand tools such as a measuring tape not only entertains children but helps them feel good about what they are doing and teaches many skills. Children enjoy using the same things adults use: pots and pans, dress-up clothes, and other items found around the home. For numerous ideas, visit the Better Kid Care Web site, www.betterkidcare.psu.edu or ask for "Toddler Topics," a free series of six newsletters addressing child development as well as practical ideas. Better Kid Care telephone help line: 1-800-859-8340.

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — This is the theme selected by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for this year's "Week of the Young Child." This year it will be celebrated during the week of April 7. This week was first set aside 32 years ago to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

Penn State Cooperative Extension's Better Kid Care also recognized the needs of young children and their families. Better Kid Care works closely with childcare providers and parents to provide childcare training, educational materials and resources.

Sue Giachero, Penn State Cooperative Extension family living

agent in Berks County, reminds us that, "Today more than ever before, we know about the importance of children's earliest years in shaping their learning and development. It is important children's environments, relationships and experiences at home, in childcare, in schools and in their community promote their early learning. As a child's first teacher, parents often realize how important their job is but can feel overwhelmed and not know where to begin."

According to Sue Giachero, "Parenting is one the most important jobs. Although it is a job with great joy, it can also be very stressful. Many parents take on the task of parenting without any prior experience or training." Sue Giachero also adds, "This lack of experience can add to the stress of being a new parent." To help

parents acquire information that will make these early years less stressful, Penn State Cooperative Extension Family Living Agents have created a learn-at-home newsletter series, "Toddler Topics."

According to Sue Giachero, "Toddler Topics" is a series of six newsletters addressing various areas of child development as well as providing practical resources and ideas. Articles in this series include topics relating to nutrition, literacy, grandparents, behavior, safety, and family fun as well as a variety of other topics. These newsletters will be distributed at no cost to more than 120,000 parents across the state. If you would like to receive "Toddler Topics," contact Sue Giachero at the Berks County Cooperative Extension office at (610) 378-1327.

Changing Face Of Grandparenthood

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Last year marked a milestone in American history that many people missed. The first of the 76 million Americans born between the years 1946 and 1964 — the well-known "baby boomer" generation — have reached the age of 55. This landmark occurrence signals some interesting changes in the enterprise of grandparenting.

First, we will see a surge in the numbers of grandparents. In their book, "The Nanas and the Papas: A Boomers' Guide to Grandparenting," Kathryn and Allen Zullo note that by the year 2005, there will be an estimated 80 million grandparents. Of those, nearly half will be baby boomers, and they are likely to be quite different from the grandparents of previous eras.

They should be more liberal (after all, this is the Woodstock generation!), healthier (thanks to dietary and medical advances), more active and wealthier. Further, they will identify with different historical events, have different ideas about work and play and have different heroes.

All of these differences translate into anticipated changes in the way grandparents spend time with their grandchildren. For example, it will be more common to see grandparents and grandchildren, side by side, engaging in such high-octane activities as mountain biking and martial arts.

Many grandparents and grandchildren will be looking for opportunities to learn together. One such example is the "Grandparents University" summer program at the University of Wisconsin. After two days of intensive indoor and outdoor activities together, participants reported that the experience had enhanced their relationship. More than 98 percent of the participants in the 2001 program noted their intent to return the following year.

Businesses and other organiza-

tions are waking up to the vast possibilities of catering to growing numbers of grandparents and grandchildren looked for shared activities. Elderhostel, a 25-year-old nonprofit educational organization for people over 55, now is planning educational trips for older adults who wish to bring along their grandchildren. They can choose from a wide range of activities, including stamp collecting, bird watching, hiking and touring museums around the world.

"Grandtravel" is a new commercial vacation travel program for grandparents and grandchildren who wish to share the pleasures of traveling together. Destinations are planned with school curricula in mind, and are both domestic and international. The agency does all the planning and teachers provide learning experiences along the way for the children.

Seagull Schools, a 30-year-old private, nonprofit corporation in Hawaii, plans to construct a \$2 million intergenerational facility that will include a childcare center, an adult community center and a training center for senior adults interested in mentoring young people. It also will offer tourism programs and packages designed to attract grandparents and grandchildren looking for combined vacations.

Seagull Schools Director Chuck Larson says, "If were one of those grandparents, one of the places on the top of my list would be Hawaii. Because this is a resort area, it lends itself to a large variety of activities that could be adapted to meet different abilities and interests for both children and older adults."

Not everybody can go to Hawaii, nor do they have to. There are various resources closer to home that provide helpful suggestions for how to nurture the bonds between grandparents and grandchildren.

Just visit any bookstore; you are likely to find books such as "Grand Activities: More than 150 Fabulous Fun Activities for Kids to do with their Grandparents" by Shari Sasser (Career Press,

1999). Among the activities that emphasize family connections is "Comfy Genes," which involves looking at photos of family members from different generations and listing the origins of each of the child's facial features (for example, grandma's nose).

The "Connecting the Generations During the Holidays" program, developed by Penn State Cooperative Extension, focuses on things that can be done to strengthen family relationships during the holidays. At family get-togethers, stimulating topics for discussion include: earliest holiday memories, happiest holiday memories, thoughts about how holiday celebrations have changed over the years and philosophies about shopping and gift-giving during the holidays.

Another resource, "The Holiday Activity Kit — 2001," developed by the Something to Remember Me By Legacy Project, provides other family-strengthening activity ideas during the holidays. For a listing of these activities, see the Website <http://www.tcpnow.com/holidaykit/intro.html>.

A surefire way to help grandchildren and grandparents appreciate family stories and memories is the "oral history" interview. The interview can be focused on the grandparent's life experiences either in a general way, or with an emphasis on a particular theme (e.g., how people dressed) or historical event (e.g., Woodstock). Any tape-recording or written record of the interview should be treated as a valuable family keepsake.

Whether it is through travel, discussion or other activities, shared experiences are gratifying for both grandchild and grandparent. These experiences also help lay the groundwork for strengthening family, a benefit to be enjoyed by future generations. Each family has its own identity, traditions and rituals for celebrating family.

It's never too late to start a new family tradition.

Give Children Time To Play Outside Every Day

Children need to run around and get their energy out. It's normal and natural for children to need a great deal of active play, such as running and climbing.

Make sure there is time to play outside every day and indoor active play when the children can't play outside. An extra 10 minutes outdoors may result in better behavior all day long.

The correct phone number for parents to receive the free video series, "I Am Your Child" is 1-800-986-2229. A feature story on the series appeared in the March 16th issue.

Smart Stuff with Twig Walkingstick

Dear Twig: I've been reading in the news about "the search for the ivory-billed woodpecker." What's an ivory-billed woodpecker, and what's the big deal about finding one?

The ivory billed woodpecker is a majestic, crow sized bird — black, white and red with a crest and a whitish beak — that may or may not be extinct. Scientists thought it was — but now they're not sure. A team of scientists recently went looking for ivory billed woodpeckers in one of the bird's last known haunts: the deep swamp forests of Louisiana. They didn't see any. But they found some possible evidence. For instance, they found dead trees stripped of long pieces of bark, something called "bark scaling." Ivory bills do this when hunting for bugs.

And they heard loud "signal taps" that sounded a lot like the signal taps of ivory bills.

In the end, the scientists said, "We have no proof of the presence of the bird in the area, but think it might be there. We recommend more searches."

Ivory bills were getting rare as early as 1900. Habitat loss. Their old growth forests were being cut down. Now some of these places are private land. So there's still a chance there are ivory bills out there. Keep watching (and reporting) further developments!

Twig

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