



# TODDLER TOPICS *PLUS*...

## A parent newsletter for Toddlers, Pre-schoolers and beyond!

2006 – ISSUE FIVE

**TODDLER TOPICS *PLUS*...** a learn-at-home newsletter created by Penn State Cooperative Educators welcomes you. In an ongoing effort to serve the families in our community, we've expanded our intended audience to include the families of not only Toddlers but Pre-schoolers and beyond! Our 2006 Issues continue to be available on-line as well as in hard copy.

We hope you will find helpful tips and techniques to improve your family's time together while providing you with information that will enrich your child's learning process. **Contact the Penn State Cooperative Ext. office in your county for information on other educational programs of interest to you and your family.**

Ellen Meanix Helfrick, Editor

### **In this issue:**

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### Conversation Starters

Vanessa Dickson, AmeriCorps Member,  
Penn State Coop. Ext., Indiana County

- If you were a food, what would you be?
- Why do people drive on parkways and park on driveways?
- What do you think is the greatest invention? Why?
- Describe what it means to be a best friend.
- What is your earliest childhood memory?
- Is there something that you memorized long ago and still remember?
- Which way does the toilet paper roll go? Over or under?
- What is your favorite season of the year? Why?
- How many people are in your whole family? How many are male? Female?
- Who controls the TV remote control in your family?
- Name your favorite animated movie and tell why you like it.
- Which person would you like to see more often than you do now?
- If you were an animal, what would you be?
- What superpower would you like to have? What would you do with it?
- If you had to move to another state, which one would you choose?
- Name three animals that have toes. Name three that don't.
- Close your eyes. Now tell everyone the color of their eyes **(cont.)**



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### Conversation Starters (cont.)

- What special talent do you have?
- What can you do that makes people laugh?
- How many people do you know who are left-handed?
- Can you pat your head and rub your stomach at the same time?
- Name four items that can always be found in your refrigerator.
- Who is the best laundry folder in the family?
- If somebody makes a mess, who cleans it up?
- When was the last time you sent or received a card from someone?
- Which do you prefer, a shower or a bath? Why?
- If you were in danger, who would protect you?
- Name three sports that are played in teams. Name three that are not.
- What is your grandfather or grandmother's middle name?
- What color do you get when you mix blue and yellow? How about red and blue?
- How many teeth do you have in your mouth?
- Where does the water in your home come from? Where do the drains go?
- Which do you prefer, inside or outside? Why?
- Close your eyes. How many prongs are on your fork?

### Gifts to Give Your Children

Karen Bracey, County Extension Director  
Wyoming County

#### **THE GIFT OF APPRECIATION:**

Fresh water to drink, a warm blanket at night, food to eat when hungry, and people who love us. Just a few of the things in our daily life we need to stop and appreciate.

*REMEMBER: There are many for whom these things are a luxury.*

### Fussy Eaters

Lois Killcoyne, Food & Nutrition Educator,  
Northampton County

Do these common complaints from parents of young children sound familiar? My child will only eat macaroni and cheese and hot dogs. He won't eat any vegetables. My 2 year-old still drinks 4 bottles a day and eats very little food. She doesn't like meat. My 3 year-old wants apple juice with every meal and snack.

#### **It's important to remember:**

- ✓ **The parent decides what to serve and when.**
- ✓ **The child decides how much and whether to eat.**

Healthy eaters are not developed by serving your child only the foods they already like or want. Children learn to like to new foods by being exposed to them many times.

**(cont.)**



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### Fussy Eaters (cont.)

Plan menus based on including a variety of foods from all the food groups—

- Grain: “half of them whole”
- Vegetables: a variety of colors
- Fruits: limit juice to 4-6 oz.
- Milk: whole until age 2, then low-fat
- Meat & Beans: mostly lean choices

To determine the specific amount needed by your child, go to MyPyramid.gov and enter age, sex and activity level. Divide the foods into appropriate portion sizes (about 1 tablespoon for each year of age) in 3 meals and 3 snacks.

To encourage your child to begin eating a greater variety of foods, try serving it in different forms, allow him to help in selection and preparation, and invite others who like the food to eat with you. **Avoid forcing, bribing or making an issue of eating particular foods.** Eat together, serve the family all the same foods and refrain from fixing something extra for the child at the meal or between scheduled meal and snack times. Your patience and consistency will pay off in the long run!

For more information on dealing with feeding issues read one of Ellyn Satter’s books, such as How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much or contact your local Cooperative Extension office and ask for the series, “The ABC’s of Growing Healthy Kids”.

### What’s to Eat?

Fran Alloway, Nutritional & Family Living Educator, Delaware County

#### **Vegetables: Be Colorful for Good Health**

While many babies gobble down those jars of squash and peas, vegetables can be a harder sell for toddlers. As your children move into their second year, they are learning to exert their independence and the family dinner table can be the scene of these outbursts. **Continue to serve vegetables daily to your toddlers.** It is recommended that they have 3 servings a day, at least one tablespoonful each. Most vegetables should be cooked to prevent choking. **It may take at least 8 exposures to new foods for children to like them so don’t give up.** The best encouragement is for you to show excitement when you eat those same peas and carrots that are in your child’s meal.

Try these **cookie cutter yams** for a fun approach to healthy food.

- 1 medium yam
- Soft margarine, cinnamon/sugar
- Small cookie cutters

Cut yam into 3/8” slices and with small cookie cutters, cut each slice into shapes. Place the cut yam slices on a microwave safe plate, sprinkle with water and cover with plastic wrap. Microwave about 3 minutes until potatoes are soft. Top with a little soft margarine and cinnamon sugar mixture.



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### Picnic Food Safety

Janice Ronan, Extension Educator, Family Living/4-H, Erie County

Picnics can be especially enjoyable for young children. They combine eating and playing! A child's immune system is less mature than an adult's so they are more likely to suffer food borne illness if food is improperly handled. To keep food borne illness from being the uninvited guest at summer picnics, remember the following food safety practices.

- **Think food safety when planning your menu.** Choose foods such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and garden salads that are less likely to make people sick instead of lunch meats and mayonnaise-based salads.
- **Use plenty of gel packs or ice.** When packing perishable foods for your outing, pack food directly from the refrigerator or freezer into an insulated cooler.
- **Pack a separate insulated cooler for drinks.** This cooler will be opened more frequently and handled more often which can jeopardize the safety of perishable foods.
- Place coolers in an air-conditioned car instead of a hot trunk and then **store in the shade, not the sun.**
- **Wash hands often**—before beginning to prepare food, after handling raw meat, poultry or fish, and before eating. Remember to

wash hands after changing diapers, too. Bring along a separate beverage dispenser that has a spigot. Fill it with hot water and use it to wash and rinse hands. Bring along disposable paper towels for hand drying rather than using a shared towel that means shared germs, too!

- **Cook foods to proper temperatures.** There are many disposable temperature measuring devices available for use with grills. Temperature sensing barbecue forks work great.
- **Use a clean serving plate for cooked meats**—not the same one that held the raw meat!
- To assure food safety, **throw away food that has not been eaten** rather than trying to take it back home. There's a good chance it will be at unsafe temperatures too long.
- **Be especially careful with infant formula.** Consider using powdered formula and adding it to water just before feeding the baby rather than preparing it at home. Throw away any formula that remains in the bottle after feeding.



**FOR PICNIC SAFETY, KEEP HOT FOODS HOT (140 DEGREES F OR HIGHER); AND COLD FOODS COLD (40 DEGREES F OR LESS).**



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### Teaching Responsibility via Chores

Nancy B. Stevens, Montgomery County

There are always more than enough chores for everyone to share, so when is it time for children to help with household chores? There are many reasons to involve even young children in everyday jobs. **Children who have regularly assigned household chores learn new skills and feel a sense of self-worth and competency.** They also tend to demonstrate responsibility in other aspects of their lives. These children often see themselves as an important part of the family.

Children as young as age two can help with jobs like putting toys away or hanging clothes on hooks. **When teaching a young child a task, it is important to use materials of an appropriate size and items that are easy to reach.** This might mean using open shelves instead of pull out drawers for storage.

#### **Make the chores fun instead of drudgery.**

Encourage your child's participation with positive comments like: It is fun to put the groceries away with you helping. It makes me feel good to have a clean kitchen table. You will feel great with all of your toys picked up off your bedroom floor.

Preschoolers love to imitate their parents and often "help" with chores like vacuuming or dusting. Parents should encourage these efforts by focusing on the

process and not the finished job. None of us did a perfect job the first time we swept a floor and neither will your preschooler.

#### **Praise their efforts as they master a task.**

This will help to develop children who want to help and feel their work is important to the family.

#### **When demonstrating how to do a task, keep the lesson simple with few words.**

You will need to work alongside the child for at least the first few times. As their skills increase, you can advance them from the simplest of tasks to those that are more complex. As children get older you may want to post the chores that need to be done and let them volunteer for the ones they would like to do. Of course there will always be those few necessary tasks that no one wants to do. It is important to communicate the necessity of following through on their commitment to complete these tasks. **Consequences for not following through on chores need to be reasonable and you must be willing to carry them out.**

It often feels like it would be so much easier just to pick up the toys yourself than to spend the time teaching and coaching, but don't lose sight of the bigger picture.

**Learning to take responsibility for housekeeping chores is an important skill parents must teach their children. The reward will be a more helpful child today who will grow into a responsible and capable adult tomorrow.**



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### Pre-reading & Pre-writing Skills

Nancy Crago, PhD., C.F.C.S.

Senior Extension Educator, PSCE

Look for these indicators that your child is on his way to reading and writing.

- ❖ Pretends to write by scribbling horizontally
- ❖ Includes features of real letters in scribbling
- ❖ Writes real alphabet letters
- ❖ Writes words with invented spelling
- ❖ Retells stories from books with increasing accuracy
- ❖ Shows awareness that print in books tells a story
- ❖ Attempts to match telling of story with print in book
- ❖ Wants to know what particular print says

Note: Your child's natural development of reading and writing skills is happening at the same time through playful experimentation with materials in their surroundings.

Source: Beaty, J.J. 1994. *The Natural Development of Young Children*, 3rd ED.

### The Story Lady's Tip

Ellen Helfrick (A.K.A.: Miss Ellen)

#### **Create a reading habit!**

Make sure you read often and do so where your child can see you. Some parents hide their books to keep them safe or don't begin to read until all the children are asleep. This won't help model the behavior you are working to create. Vary what you read: hardbacks, paperbacks, newspapers, magazines, etc. and as you do so make sure you mention that you are reading. Help children identify all the different times you read: cereal boxes, cookbooks, maps, church bulletins, mail, directions, etc.

Talk about what you are reading: where the book takes place, what is happening to the characters, how it makes you feel, who you plan to pass the book to next, and more... Identify reading as a method to solving problems and learning information. Discuss these same topics when you read a book with your child.

Select a regular time for everyone to read as a family. Let your child see you prioritize this time as a pleasurable activity. Make sure your child knows how proud you are that they are reading – even as they are still building up their pre-reading skills. **Share your love of reading; let your child know that you consider books among your prized possessions.**