



TODDLER TOPICS *PLUS*...

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

2006 – ISSUE TWO

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

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TV and Literacy

Nancy E. Crago, Ph.D., C.F.C.S.
Senior Extension Educator, PSCE

Television (TV) is a big influence on children's development and behavior. Studies show that 26% of children between the ages of 2 and 4 have televisions in their bedrooms!

Children may learn some skills, such as letter names and sounds, from watching educational TV programs. **However, TV learning is passive.** The opportunity for learning by discovery is not there. Time spent watching TV takes away from children's active play, going on outings, and reading. In these kinds of activities, children are motivated to interact with other people and objects. They can carry on conversations. There is the opportunity for children to experiment with the ideas they have about language.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit children's viewing to one to two quality hours per day. NO television viewing is recommended for children ages two and below. It's not too late to establish good TV habits for your child. Start by taking a look at your own TV viewing habits. How much time do you spend watching TV? Remember that you are a role model for your child. Limit your child's viewing to mostly educational programs. Watch a program with your child. Afterwards, turn off the TV and talk about it.



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Planning for College?

Robin L. Kuleck, MSED, CFCS
Extension Educator, Elk County

Research continues to indicate that parents are children's first and best teachers. Reading to your children, interacting with them, limiting TV time, and exposing them to a wide variety of new experiences are just a few ways to help instill in them a love of learning.

Once they enter day care, preschool or kindergarten, continue to encourage their learning, ask about what they learned that day and stay involved in their education. Help them identify their strengths and build on them, as well as weaknesses that need to be strengthened.

Let your child know your expectations of high academic achievement and they most likely will strive to meet your goals.

Financially, the sooner you begin to save, the more options you have, plus there is more time for growth. Take a critical look at your current expenses to see if there are ways you could economize to come up with \$25, \$50 or more each month to set aside for this very worthy goal. Small amounts really do add up over time.

A realistic view of your current and future financial situation will help you determine if, when, and how much you can begin to set aside for what can be an extremely expensive undertaking.

Recognize that even if you want to fully pay for your child's college education, it may not be realistic for your family's situation. Most students finance their education with a patchwork of funding sources.

Is your family trying to maximize eligibility for financial aid or the most tax-efficient way to pay for college? This is a complex decision based on numerous factors such as family size, income, net worth, institution enrolled in, as well as several others.

If you are able to set aside money toward college, the following investment vehicles could meet your needs. Each has pros and cons and the rules can change immensely from today until graduation. **Take some time to do additional research before purchasing anything geared toward college savings. Generally ownership should be parents, not the student, in order to maximize eligibility for financial aid.**

- ✓ U.S. Savings Bonds – series EE & I (www.ustreas.gov)
- ✓ Coverdell Education IRA,
- ✓ 529 Prepaid Tuition Plan,
- ✓ 529 Savings Plan
- ✓ (<http://www.tapfacts.com/> for Pennsylvania product).



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Mind Your Manners

Cheryl Miller, Extension Educator,
Family Consumer Science, Perry County

“Mabel, Mabel strong and able,
get your elbows off the table.”

Do you feel like you are harping at your children to chew their food with their mouth closed, sit still at the table, and do not interrupt? **Avoid becoming the etiquette police.**

Manners are the socially correct way of acting. Keep the goals realistic when training children to behave in the appropriate way. Focus on the idea of manners and the way to behave. Manners make mealtime pleasant and shows consideration and respect for others.

Be realistic as you teach the basics.

Behavior is tied to their stage of development. For example, an infant learns about their world through play. They get their hands in their food and smear it. By the age of two, start setting limits. When she begins to play with her food, instead of eating it, remove it from the table.

Be a good role model. Teach by using good examples. Demonstrate manners by using a napkin to wipe your mouth or by passing the food around the table. It is important to explain the importance of using manners: When we wipe our mouth with the napkin we don't look messy. When we pass the food around the table everyone gets something to eat.

Start slowly. Two and three year old children are very active. It is more successful to set small incremental goals and increase expectations as the child achieves the goal.

Play Games. Young children love to pretend. While role playing, Mommy and Daddy show them how to act.

Having a tea party or a formal meal with place settings and party dress is a fun way to practice good manners.

Preschool children enjoy word play. Instead of nagging, exaggerate the word you want them to say. For example, “I would be ‘P-L-E-A-S-E-D’ to pass you the crackers.”

Try the “Manners Game,” give each child 10 peanuts at the beginning of each meal. The goal of the game is to keep as many of the peanuts as you can by the end of the meal. When you observe the child using poor manners, courteously explain the appropriate behavior before asking for one of the peanuts. Record the peanuts that each child has at the end of each meal. Tally the peanuts weekly; let the “winner” choose a special dessert for using good manners.

Use loving reminders. When attending special events lay out your expectations and know that you will have to prompt children. Be realistic and don't overload - work with these first: Say please and thank you, remain seated until finished, and ask to be excused.



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Recycled Art!

Sue Giachero, Extension Educator
Berks County

Save empty containers, boxes, fabric scraps, tubes, etc. Create a craft box where you can gather a variety of items for your child to create with. (This is the perfect thing to take out when you have a day at home!) Add to it some glue, markers, tape, paper, paint, etc. and you have a great art area for your child.

Allow your child to use these items to create whatever their imagination allows.

It is the process of creating that is important for your child, not the product. Resist the temptation to direct or “assist.” Of course, if your child asks for your help, be willing to do just that, help!



Here are some suggestions, but remember, your child is having fun and learning when they are involved in the creative process.

- Cardboard tubes can create animals of all sorts as well as trees and towers. Create a village, a zoo, a farm, a jungle or whatever using a collection of boxes and tubes. Your child can add animals, dolls, cars, etc. to bring the town to life.

- Paper bags make a great base for a puppet. Create the parts of the puppet using other items you have collected. A big box will make a great stage for a puppet show.
- Egg Cartons can be used to make animals, houses and flowers. They also make great containers for sorting or storing treasures.

The Story Lady’s Tip

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

Attend Programs

Begin taking your child to the library at a young age. Find out if the local library has story programs for toddlers. If not, suggest they begin one and offer to help them spread the word in order to assure attendance. If needed, seek out another library that holds story sessions for children in your child’s age range.

Once you know where and when, make attending story time a part of your weekly routine. If you can’t attend each week, then visit the library often so that your child can become familiar with the staff. **Help your child enjoy her time at the library by making friends with the story lady.** Make visiting the library and borrowing books a fun part of their day and they’ll begin a love for reading that will last a lifetime.



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Math and Preschoolers

Phyllis Wright, Extension Educator,
Warren County

Math is not just counting. It is relationships, comparisons, and record keeping. That is what today's world is all about! Sequencing is understanding what follows another for problem solving. Here are some examples of activities that will give preschoolers a good start for school readiness.

Have five objects to weigh on a small scale.

What do they weigh? (identifying numbers)

Print the numbers. (recognizing numbers)

Let's lift the three heaviest. (sorting and comparing)

Let's line them up by putting the heaviest one first and lightest one last?

(relationships)

Ideas to do with playing cards

How many red cards are there?

How many heart shaped cards are there?
(sorting & counting)

Let's put the heart shaped cards in their numerical order. (relationships)

Let's count backwards. (relationships)

Let's take all the cards and find the ones that have two objects on the cards.
(identifying shapes and printed numbers)

With many board games you have at home, let the toddler roll the cubes (*dice* is the old word) and have the toddler count spaces for Candyland, Chutes and Ladders, etc. Older

kids can read the directions. Try playing UNO, which can be scaled to any level of learning plus it's a great group game. Get creative and use items you have at home to teach basic math skills everyday.

Gifts to Give your Children

Karen Bracey, County Extension Director
Wyoming County

THE GIFT OF ANTICIPATION:

Waiting for something is part of the joy of finally getting it. We deprive our children of this gift when we give them what they want, when they want it.

“Getting there is half the fun!”

What's to Eat?

Fran Alloway, Nutritional & Family Living
Educator, Delaware County

As babies grow into young people, the food they eat differs less from what the rest of the family eats. As teeth appear, toddlers no longer need pureed baby food and can eat “table food.” Their nutritional needs are also very similar to adults. Each day toddlers should eat foods from each of the five food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy and protein sources. If you serve this taco with juice, you will include all of these food groups in one meal.

See recipe on next page



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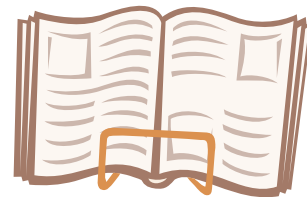
Tips for a Successful Family Dinner:

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

1. Cook together. Kids love to help in the kitchen and be creative. Let them help tear lettuce for a salad. When I make homemade sauce, my daughter loves to dip bread in the sauce and give it a taste test.
2. Let children help with setting the table. If you are having Mexican food, create a theme that represents Mexico.
3. Light some candles and put some fresh flowers on the table.
4. Put out your best china! Why wait for company? Celebrate family everyday.
5. Turn off the TV, but play some soft dinner music. Michael Bolton, Elton John, Harry Conick Jr., and Michael Buble have wonderful CDs that would work well during dinner time.
6. Design a meal jar. Have your kids write their favorite meals on a piece of paper and put it in the jar. Decorate the jar and display it on your kitchen counter. Once a week pick out a slip of paper and make that special dinner.



7. Each month research different countries. Prepare food that is customary to that country. For example: Italy – Italian Wedding Soup, antipasto, fresh fish, homemade pasta, and Italian bread.
8. Start a family cookbook. Craft stores provide an array of decorative supplies. Include menus from all the countries that you and your family researched. Have each family member write something about your new tradition and take pictures of your creations.



What's to Eat? (cont.)

One flour or corn tortilla, about 9”
¼ cup grated cheese
 or 2 slices American cheese
1 slice of ham lunchmeat
1 spear of cooked broccoli (can be steamed quickly in the microwave)

Place the ham and cheese on the flat tortilla, then the broccoli spear. Roll the tortilla with the broccoli in the center. Place the tortilla on a napkin in the microwave, with the rolled side down. Microwave about 20 seconds or until the cheese melts. Cut in half or smaller slices and let children feed themselves.