

# Toddler Topics 2005

## A series to help you parent your toddler

### ISSUE ONE

Welcome to the **2005 Toddler Topics**, a newsletter for parents of young children. Toddler Topics is created by Penn State Cooperative Extension Family Living Educators and colleagues.

Once again, we are offering Toddler Topics as an electronic newsletter. Camera ready copies are available for individuals who make the request. You may use portions of this newsletter in your own publications as long as the material is not changed and credit is given to the author.

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Contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension Office in your county for additional educational programs of interest to you and your family.

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### PARENTING PRINCIPLES

Jeannine Ruth Richlin, Extension Educator  
Sullivan County

Below we will highlight two principles from the must-read book for all parents: *The Ten Basic Principles of Good Parenting* by Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D. Future issues will contain two more principles. Dr. Steinberg condenses the essentials of good parenting into ten basic principles, which apply no matter what the age of your child.

#### **Principle 1: What You Do Matters.**

Dr. Steinberg reveals how to be a mindful parent, so that the consequences of your actions toward your child are the ones you've actually intended, rather than those that just happened by chance. He also explains: that genes don't make parents irrelevant, how much children learn by watching, how to handle influences outside the family, and how to learn from your mistakes.

#### **Principle 2: You Cannot Be Too Loving.**

What we often think of as the product of spoiling a child is never the result of showing a child too much love, Dr. Steinberg says. Rather, it is usually the consequence of giving a child things in place of love; things like leniency, lowered expectations, or material possessions. Dr. Steinberg discusses: the expression of physical affection, praising your child's accomplishments, responding to your child's emotional needs and providing a safe haven.

## TIPS FOR SELECTING TOYS

Dorothy F. Bromley, Extension Educator  
Somerset County



Young children are eager to investigate. Play is their way to discover, communicate, and express themselves. Just as you may have tools to do your job, so do children. Their “job” is play and their tools are their toys.

Since your child’s toys are tools for learning, it is important to choose wisely. Before buying a toy, ask yourself some questions.

### Is it appropriate for your child’s age?

Read the label. An age range is usually given. This is only a general guide. You know your child’s abilities.

**Does the toy stimulate your child to do things for herself?** Toys that make your child a spectator (like a mechanical duck that waddles) may entertain for the moment but they have little or no play value. Toys need to encourage children to explore and create.

**Is the toy versatile?** Can it be used in more than one way? Remote control cars are fun for a little while but are limited to what can be done with them. A better choice would be blocks to build many different things.

**Is it safe and durable?** Avoid sharp edges, loose and dangling parts, lightweight and flimsy materials or construction. Will it last? Be sure that labels state “non-toxic when appropriate.”

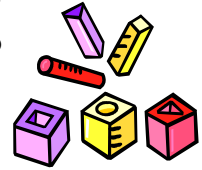
### Is it easy to wash and keep clean?

Toys handled frequently by infants and toddlers need to be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis, when soiled or when your child is ill. To disinfect washable, colorfast toys: wash the toys in hot soapy water, rinse, disinfect with a solution of  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup bleach in

one gallon water for 5 minutes before you rinse thoroughly and dry.

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**Does the toy work well?** Do the parts fit together easily? Is it hard to make the toy work properly? Is it too complicated for your child?

## FOOD JAGS

Lois Killcoyne, Food & Nutrition Educator  
Northampton County

Has your child ever asked for the same food over and over, day after day? This is called a “food jag” and is a common occurrence for young children. How should you react?

1. Be patient. **Realize this is normal behavior.** Eventually your child will move on to other food preferences.
2. Don’t get into “food fights”. **Feeding should never be a battleground.** This could lead to eating problems later in life.
3. Serve a small amount of the desired food along with other choices. Include a variety of the food groups, especially the fruit, vegetable and milk groups. **The child decides what and how much they eat.** Quietly remove what is not eaten at the end of the meal.

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## FOOD JAGS *(continued)*

4. For the dinner meal, don't be a short-order cook. **Serve the whole family the same foods**, even when the "favorite" is not included. Catering to everyone's food preferences can become a nightmare, and is not in the best interest of the child. Tantrums and refusals to eat will disappear when the child learns they will not get anything else to eat until the next scheduled meal or snack.
5. Letting your **child participate in shopping and meal preparation** can lead to consuming a wider variety of foods. Toddlers can be asked which new fruit or vegetable they want to try (beets or asparagus?). They can put the salad greens in the bowls (Wash hands first!) or cut up a banana with a plastic knife.

You are responsible for what is served and when. Food preferences are shaped as infants and toddlers. **A child may need to be exposed to a new food 8-15 times before they start eating it.** Have faith that serving a variety of healthy foods, while allowing for food jags and variable appetites, will pay off in the long run!

## TAX BENEFITS AND CREDITS FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Robin Kuleck, MSED, CFCS Extension  
Educator – Resource Management  
Elk County

April 15 is a day that strikes fear in the heart of many Americans – Tax Day! Oliver Wendell Holmes, once said, "Taxes are the price we pay for living in a civilized society." Our tax dollars protect national security, educate children, and provide for health care and emergency services, to name a few tax-funded benefits we all reap. In order to assure you pay only the taxes you owe, it is important to keep good family records. These documents will help substantiate any deductions or credits that you are eligible for.

Filing your tax forms is a process of reconciliation. Over the year, you paid income taxes based on the number of exemptions you indicated on your W-4 withholding form. At the end of the year, the tax form helps you do the math to determine if you overpaid (then you get a refund) or underpaid (then you owe taxes).

Each family's tax situation depends on many factors, so you need to complete the tax forms as accurately as possible to make sure you are only paying what you owe and are benefiting from all the credits to which you are due.



Factors that influence your taxes:

- Number of dependent children
- Child Tax Credit
- Additional Child Tax Credit
- Child and Dependent Care Credit
- Earned Income Tax Credit
- Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit
- Adoption Credit

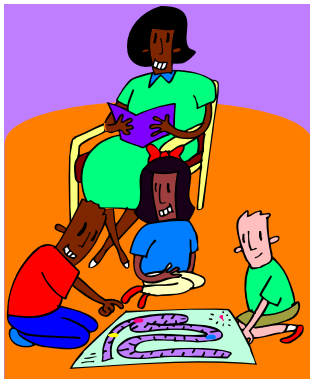
Being aware of these credits and paying attention to future tax law changes can help you pay only what you owe. When you have questions, ask an expert - don't reply on random suggestions. To learn more, visit the [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) website.

## FREE FAMILY ACTIVITIES

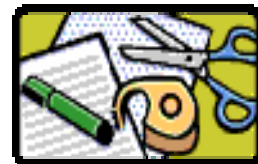
Laurie Weinreb-Welch, Extension Educator  
Clinton County

There are many activities that families can do together that require little effort or expense yet provide hours of enjoyable family time. Here are some ideas to use with your family:

- No matter what time of year, get outside with the kids and take a nature walk. In the fall, you can collect colorful leaves, in the spring and summer; you can collect a variety of flowers. Even in the winter, you can collect a variety of outdoor treasures.
- Institute a family game night. Have one family member pick a board game to play as a family. Each family member can choose a new game each week.
- Go to the public library. The family can spend hours of enjoyment reading books there and selecting books to take home and share. Many public libraries offer free family programs.
- Have a picnic. Even in the winter, spread out a blanket in your living room and have a meal eating picnic foods.



- Explore your hometown. Contact your local visitor's bureau to see what free events are being offered in the community. The number of free family activities available in your own community may surprise you.
- Contact a local factory or business to see if they offer free tours of their facility.
- Have fun creating crafts out of everyday household items.



- Have a family cooking night where the entire family helps plan and cook one meal.
- Plant a garden. Have all family members participate and help maintain the garden by weeding, watering and harvesting throughout the season.
- Volunteer. There are many organizations that are looking for families to volunteer for a variety of events.
- Share outings with other families or take turns having a potluck dinner at each other's houses. Adding new faces and friends to an activity – priceless!

It doesn't have to cost a lot of money to have a fun night with your family. All you need to be is a little creative. Have fun!

## **TEACHING CHARACTER**

Phyllis Wright, Family  
Life Educator  
Warren County

Weave character building activities into the normal activities with this hands-on approach to teaching good character traits.

**Respect**– In their coloring book or favorite reading book, print good words beside good deeds that they see in the picture. Add a smiley sticker by the person doing good deeds. Examples: talking or helping an older person, waiting their turn patiently, recognizing a person of authority (police officer,

clergy, child care provider, parent), caring for the environment, etc.

**Responsibility** – Do something special when a task is complete, such as more time with their favorite activity. Praise him/her in front of others. Take a picture of the completed task and display it for everyone to see. Post “Good Job” by the photo on the refrigerator.

**Fairness** – Tell them how proud you are of seeing them share. Talk about what is fair as they watch the media, read a story. Explain rules of the child’s game or home tasks.

**Caring** – Let them carry something for another person, create items and share with others (pinecone bird feeders, craft items) anytime of the year rather than just holidays. Show how working together will make the work easier for all. Celebrate when the job is done, praise the accomplishments of others. Send a hand made card to a neighbor.

Consider developing good character as part of family time. Before you know it both the children and adult’s attitude may be more positive about the family and life.

### **PREVENT THE UNTHINKABLE!**

Marcia Weber, Family Living Educator, York County

**TO A CHILD, DRUGS, AND SOME HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS CAN EASILY BE MISTAKEN FOR SOMETHING THEY ARE NOT.**

If I were a child in your home exploring under the sink or in the medicine cabinet, what would I see? Are there things lurking in there that look like goodies from the candy store or the grocery shelves? Many drugs and cleaning supplies on the market today look identical to candy and other edibles. For example – Do you have Antacids that look like Sweetarts, Laxatives that look like Hershey Bars, or decongestants that look like Red Hots? Is there a bottle of pine cleaner that looks like my favorite apple juice? Just give me a split second and I will gobble a handful or swallow a few gulps (I am a curious kid). This mistake may cause serious injury or death.

Here are a few tips to prevent your child from making a potentially fatal mistake.

- ❑ **Store medications and cleaning supplies under lock and key** - Children are very determined and will try very hard to get what they want, especially if it appears to be candy or something sweet.

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## PREVENT THE UNTHINKABLE!

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- ❑ **Keep bottle caps tightly sealed** – Childproof tops are effective only if you close them properly.
- ❑ **Always store medications and cleaning supplies in their original packaging** - Bleach in a soda bottle for the camper or headache pills in a film canister may equal potential disaster.
- ❑ **Watch your language** – When adults describe medicine as candy, they send a confusing message to children.
- ❑ **Teach your children well** – Make sure children understand that only adults are allowed to handle medicines.
- ❑ **Use extra caution away from home** - Grandma and friends with older children may not have homes that are safe for young children.
- ❑ **Be suspicious and act fast** – Accidents happen even in the safest homes, so if you spot open bottles, spilled pills or medicine in an unfamiliar place, act fast. Call Poison Control right away. Keep emergency numbers posted near every phone. Also keep a bottle of syrup of ipecac on hand in case a poison control expert recommends that you induce vomiting.
- ❑ **Don't rely on package guidelines for treating an overdose**-Even the most accurate general information can't take into account your child's specific information, like age, weight, medical conditions, etc.

**Nationwide Poison Control  
Number 1-800-222-1222**

## GREAT READS & WEBSITES

[Bread and Jam for Francis](#) by Russell Hoban  
This book describes how mom deals with young Francis' food jags in an amusing and calming manner.

[One Yellow Lion](#) by Matthew Van Fleet  
Fold-Out Fun with Numbers, Colors, Animals is the correct cover description! This book will hold up to the attention that it is sure to attract. Get silly and get ready to make noises.

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org) This site provides information broken down by ages and stages on 'normal' developmental milestones. It has many related links as well.

[www.thebestkidsbookssite.com](http://www.thebestkidsbookssite.com) This site provides book recommendations by age and activities to complement your reading interests. Reviews and themes included along with many related links.

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