



# TODDLER TOPICS *PLUS*...

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

2006 – ISSUE THREE

**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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## Talking About Books

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

Interaction happens when you take a break from the book's text to talk with your child. If you take time to help her make sense of what she is seeing and hearing, she will learn more. Your child then becomes actively involved in the story.

Try to stop briefly every few pages of the book to talk, as long as your child seems interested.

- ✓ Ask your child to name the pictures. Ask, "What is this?" Then, add more information. "Yes, that's a car." See the wheels?" **Labeling pictures helps build children's vocabulary.**
- ✓ Ask your child to complete the sentences. Stop before the last word and see if your child can make the word rhyme. **Children learn phonics from rhyming words.**
- ✓ Ask your child to tell you what is happening in the picture. This kind of question helps children put the story into their own words. **It will help you see what your child understands about the story.**
- ✓ Ask your child what he thinks will happen next in the story. **When children make predictions about a**  
**(cont.)**



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### Talking About Books (cont.)

story, they learn how stories begin, develop, and end. This helps them become better readers.

- ✓ Ask your child what the characters are thinking or feeling. Young children have a lot to learn about thoughts and feelings of other people. **You can use storybooks to help them develop their ability to think about other people.**
- ✓ Ask your child if she remembers a related experience. You might be reading a story about farm animals. Ask your child if she remembers a visit to the farm. **Children use books to expand their own experiences.**

### Stretch a One Parent Income

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

If you're living from paycheck to paycheck, there's no comfort in knowing that many others are in a similar situation. Whether you are a single parent or a family with only one income, meeting expenses is possible. Even if a second income is a possibility, poor planning could result in being no further ahead financially. In fact, a recent book by Elizabeth Warren: The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle Class Mothers and Fathers are Going Broke.

explains how families with two incomes become dependent on the total income and struggle when they suffer an income decrease.

**So, if more money isn't the answer to stretching your income, what is?** First, get a clear picture of how much you are spending and where by creating an itemized list along with the monthly cost. Next, identify the absolute, can't live without, and must be paid needs. Housing, utilities, transportation, food, clothing, and childcare generally top the list for families. Evaluate each spending area for ways to economize. \$5 or \$10 saved each month in several categories can really add up. Get the kids involved in this activity and discussion. **As a parent, your role is to make sure 'needs' are met first and then some of the 'wants' if any money is left.**

Planning for your financial future is another consideration. **Set aside a little bit each month in a savings account.** If it's hard to live within your current means - what if things get worse: your hours are cut or you get hurt and can't work for a few weeks. By planning ahead and saving for these what-ifs, you can better weather the problems that life can throw your way. You are also teaching your children money management skills. If they see you spending everything you make and more (through the magic of credit cards) they catch on very early that spending is more fun than saving.

(cont.)



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### Stretch a One Parent Income (cont.)

Stretch your income by using resources available in your community. You might be eligible for food stamps, food bank, free and reduced school meals, help with rent and utility expenses, help with child care expenses, etc. **Don't assume you are not eligible for certain programs and don't be too proud to accept help when it is needed.** Perhaps you will be the one to offer help to someone in the future.

**Finally, explore your tax situation.** Taxes can be complicated and hard to understand, but you should be aware of your particular situation. For example, if you get a tax refund (not counting the EITC-Earned Income Tax Credit) you have allowed the government to take more money from your paycheck than necessary. Consider opening a bank account and modifying your withholding so that less goes to the government and the difference goes to the bank account to earn interest. At the end of the year, if you owe any taxes, it is in your bank account...plus you've earned interest on *your* money. Improve your record-keeping skills to make sure you can document all tax benefits to which you might be entitled.

**REMEMBER – IF YOUR EXPENSES EXCEED YOUR INCOME THEN YOUR UPKEEP WILL BE YOUR DOWNFALL!**

### What's to Eat?

Fran Alloway, Nutritional & Family Living Educator, Delaware County

**Protein Power** - The growth rate for toddlers slows from that of their first year of life, but they are still developing at an incredible speed, both mentally and physically. **Growth requires protein.** Protein foods include plants such as nuts, beans and peanuts or animal sources such as eggs, meats, fish and poultry. Animal proteins are better sources of vitamin B12 and iron but toddlers can still grow normally with careful inclusion of plant protein sources. At least two ounces of protein should be included each day for two year olds. This would be the size of half of a playing card.

Try these **homemade chicken fingers.**

- 1 boneless chicken cutlet
- 1 egg, scrambled w/ 1 Tbsp. of water
- 1/3 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 2 Tablespoons vegetable oil

Place egg mixture in a flat dish or pie plate. Dip chicken cutlet in egg to moisten all surfaces. Mix cornmeal and seasoned salt. Sprinkle cutlet with cornmeal mixture on all sides. Heat the vegetable oil in a skillet over medium heat. Place cutlet into the hot skillet and cook 2 minutes or until golden brown. Turn over and cook until done, check by cutting with a knife to see it's no longer pink inside. Place cooked cutlet on a cutting board and slice diagonally into 1" strips.



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### Screen Time for Pre-Schoolers

Nancy Stevens, Montgomery County

Television and electronic media such as computers, movies and video games are a way of life for most children in our country. Most two to five year olds watch television an average of 31 hours each week, or more than 4 hours each day.

#### **Children react to television differently according to their age and development.**

Preschoolers have an attention span long enough to sit and watch short programs. They usually can only remember small pieces of what they see and often cannot tie everything together. They can get frightened by what they see on television and often get confused.

Many children develop strong fears from the numerous acts of violence they see (an average of 26 violent acts per hour in typical children's programming). Violence on the evening news can be just as frightening. **Researchers are also finding that children become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others after repeated exposure to "electronic violence"**. They gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems and often imitate the violence they observe on TV.

**Another growing concern is the tie between childhood obesity and screen time.** Children are mostly inactive while watching TV and researchers have found that metabolic rates of those watching

television are the same or lower than when sleeping. Non-stop ads encourage high-calorie snacks and beverages. From age 2 to 17, children are bombarded with as many as 360,000 such commercials.

**Another concern is that recent research has concluded that increased television viewing may lead to poorer school performance and increased aggressive behavior.** Children who spend a lot of time on the Internet may spend less time with family and friends and may become depressed and lonely. TV and video games are a one-way communication. Children learn best through hands-on activities, making things or manipulating objects and asking questions. **Parents can provide alternative activities for children.** Try art projects, outdoor play, blocks, and garden or kitchen activities.

**Keep the television in family areas for family viewing.** More than one-third of children have televisions in their bedrooms. These children watch an average of five and a half hours more television each week than those without a television in their rooms.

**Take some time to watch TV with your children.** Find programs the entire family can watch together. Look for examples of how people treat each other and discuss it. Challenge comments made by the actors and compare them to your family's values. Talk about the difference between real life and make-believe. When watching commercials, talk about gimmicks (cont.)



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### Screen Time for Pre-Schoolers (cont.)

the advertisers are using to entice you to purchase their products.

**And finally, limit television viewing and video/computer games to less than two hours a day.** Encourage children to take a break and move around every half hour. Television should be a choice, not a habit.

By the time an average child graduates from high school, he or she will have spent more time in front of a television than with a teacher. **Help your child to turn off the screen and turn on their brain!**



### Math at Home

Phyllis Wright, Extension Educator,  
Warren County

Kids can learn about problem solving and math at home, as part of school readiness. Here are examples:

#### Numbers

- Count up to 10 objects in a room.
- Use water in glasses to see which has more or less
- Identify number 0-10 on road signs.

#### Patterns

- Sort crayons by color, shape, size, etc.
- Make dot patterns such as red blue, red blue, red blue...
- Recognized rhythmic patterns as clap, clap, step, and repeat.

#### Space and Shapes

- Recognize a circle, square, and triangle.
- Follow directions using positional words: in, over, under, beside, etc.

#### Measurements

- While playing, use standard objects (measuring cup, clocks, and ruler) and non standards (different lengths of string, big and little containers) to measure.

#### Problem solving

- Observe what is happening next when reading a story. Ask what would happen IF....?
- It's not failure, when problems are solved though trial and error! Keep trying.

#### Puts ideas together

- Put events in order from one day to the next - yesterday we visited Joe, and today we will visit Susie.
- Name two or three things together - 3 different cars, 2 types of foods, etc.



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### The Family Dinner Table

Vanessa Dickson, Ameri-Corps Member,  
Penn State Coop. Ext., Indiana County

**Did you know?** Eating dinner frequently with your children reduces their risk of substance abuse. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University consistently finds that the more often children eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink or use drugs. The conversations that go hand-in-hand with dinner will help you learn more about your children's lives and better understand the challenges they face.

CASA created Family Day as a day to eat dinner with your children in 2001. Family Day is a national effort to promote parental engagement as a simple, effective way to reduce youth drug abuse and raise healthier children. Family Day is celebrated on the fourth Monday in September.

**Make a date for dinner...** Good food, great conversations and loads of laughs - that's a family dinner. The benefits of gathering around the dinner table are about more than just sharing a meal. Busy schedule? - Try sharing a breakfast, lunch, or an afternoon tea. For more traditional family time, have a regular Sunday brunch. Everyone can help with the prep work and clean-up. **Your family can sing and dance while working together to wash the dishes!**

### The Story Lady's Tip

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

#### **Find connections!**

Look for similarities between the books that you read with your child. When you seek the common factors, it opens the door for conversations and comparisons. Both will build your child's memory, vocabulary and enjoyment. Look for details within the text and the pictures. If you have a book with farm animals in it, look for animals in other books. Then you can discuss why the cows look different and which animals are found in a zoo but not often on a farm. From there you can plan a trip to a local farm or zoo or remember a trip you have already taken. The more you make connections with your child, the sooner they will begin to look at books in a similar fashion. Make sure you listen as they make connections - you'll be delighted by their memory and perceptiveness!

### Gifts to Give Your Children

Karen Bracey, County Extension Director  
Wyoming County

#### **THE GIFT OF WORK:**

Something hard earned has far more value to us than something obtained with no effort. Allow your children the privilege of working hard for something and then enjoying the rewards.

*"Things come to those who hustle while they wait." Thomas Edison*