



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Smart Parenting

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Guilt-tripping

Many parents freely admit to feeling guilty at times—either for something they have said or done to their children; or by *not* doing or saying something that they should have! Sometimes guilt is justified and it motivates us to make positive changes in our parenting habits; but it might be a result of our lack of self-confidence, ineffective time management skills or unrealistic expectations.

Do Moms and Dads deal with parental guilt differently? Research appears to say “yes.”

Moms seem to have a stronger sense of “guilt” regarding their parenting than do Dads. Moms report feeling guilty about not spending enough time with their children; struggling with trying to balance work and family demands; or feeling too tired to really enjoy the time they do have with the kids. Dads, on the other hand, rarely report feeling “guilty” about their parenting role, but they do use words like “frustrated”.

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Live. And Learn.

How Moms and Dads Parent

Children Benefit from Differences in Parenting

In most two-parent households, the common expectation is that both Mom and Dad will be involved in caring for the children. However, even when couples have shared values and goals when it comes to parenting, that does not mean they are going to parent exactly the same. According to Diana Milne, MU Extension human development specialist, “Studies show that mothers and fathers differ quite markedly in some areas of parenting.”

Here are some of the findings, published in a recent issue of the “*Work and Family Life*” newsletter:

- Mothers tend to pick up their infant in the same way over and over—usually to change a diaper, feed the baby, comfort the baby. Fathers usually pick up a baby to do something with him/her; and they pick the baby up differently each time.
- Fathers use humor more; they tend to make every day activities such as dressing, bathing and feeding more playful.
- Fathers support “novelty seeking” behaviors; such as encouraging children to explore their environment. Dads also are more likely to let kids master tasks on their own before stepping in to help.
- Moms emphasize relationships and the social costs of misbehaving; Dads discipline by using more real-life consequences. For example, Mom might say: “You’ll hurt your friend’s feelings if you don’t share.” Dad might say: “You won’t have any friends if you’re selfish with your toys.”
- Fathers adjust their speech patterns for infants, but with older children they

tend to use more “adult” language; bigger words and longer sentences. Mothers tend to hold on to “baby talk” longer.

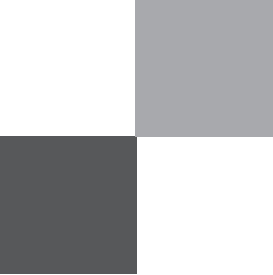
By understanding some of the subtle parenting differences between men and women, moms and dads can learn to appreciate the attributes that each bring to the role of parenting.

Dads don’t “mother” they “father”, and according to the Yale Child Study Center, there are beneficial differences between moms and dads. Here are some examples:

- A dad looks, smells, sounds and acts differently than a mom. Understanding these differences are a child’s first experiences with diversity!
- Dads provide safe and loving interactions that build up a child’s self-confidence. Infants who have had positive interactions with their fathers are more likely to explore the world around them with excitement and interest. They are less fearful and more curious.

What if there is no father present in a child’s life? Granted, not all children grow up in a family where there is a father present. However, a grandfather, uncle or trusted family friend can also help provide children with opportunities for positive interactions that stimulate intellectual, emotional and social development.

(Source: *Work & Family Life*, January 2012)



Thinking about adding a pet to your family?

*Getting a pet is a big
decision.*

*Don't expect kids to care
for pets without a gentle
reminder.*

Have you been resisting your children's pleas to get a pet? Are they begging for a dog? They promise they'll take care of it all by themselves. Have you been telling them to "wait until spring?" Well, spring is almost here!

"Adding a pet to the family is a big decision that lasts for many years," reminds Saralee Jamieson, MU Extension human development specialist. As parents, you have been right not to make the decision too quickly. On the plus side of having a pet: the benefits go beyond companionship. Studies suggest that living with a pet may help children develop great empathy and higher self-concept. This is because pets give their love and attention unconditionally. Having a pet can also give children a new role as caregivers.

Don't overestimate your child's responsibility or ability to provide primary care for a dog. Most kids are not usually able (or willing) to do this until their midteens. And parents should not think that getting a pet will help make an irresponsible child responsible. Kids will need gentle reminders daily to feed and water the pets.

When it comes to choosing the right pet, experts advise paying more attention to an animal's temperament than to its size. Children need to be taught that a pet is a member of the family and deserves respect and consideration. You also need to take into consideration the cost of care—food, housing, vaccinations, preventive medicines and grooming.

Puppies frolicking in pet store windows are adorable, but for impartial advice on which breed of dog is best for your family, you are better off asking a veterinarian, a dog breeder, or your local shelter or breed rescue group.

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Move Like the Wind!

Encouraging gross motor skill development in young children strengthens muscles and increases coordination and overall health.

"Additionally, some kids are kinesthetic learners, who learn new information best through physical activities that require them to move their bodies around and burn some energy!" shares Susan Mills-Gray, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist. Before you know it, you and your children will be laughing, growing stronger and becoming healthier!

Touching the Wind. Take children outdoors to feel the wind blow. Have them notice how the wind moves their hair or clothing. Which direction does the hair blow? What else around them is the wind blowing? Does everything move in the same direction?

Have them lift their arms to feel the wind. Can they catch the wind as it blows? Can they move or push the wind?

Streamer Dance. Give each child a long tissue-paper streamer to hold and go outside on a windy day. Invite them to join you and everyone dance along as the wind blows their streamers.

How Does a Flower Grow? Play music and have children make up a dance for each way a plant grows. Stages of plant growth might include:

1. A seed is planted in the ground.
2. The seed receives water and sun.
3. The seed sprouts roots that grow down.
4. The seed sprouts a shoot that stretches up and turns into a stem.

5. The plant spreads out leaves.
6. The plant sways in the wind.
7. The plant grows buds.
8. The buds open to reveal petals.
9. Bees and butterflies visit the flowers and spread pollen.
10. The petals drop off and the flower makes seeds.
11. The seeds leave the plant and travel to other places to grow.

Bend Like a Tree. Ask child to stand with feet together and while you both make wind sounds with your mouth, bend and sway like a tree in the wind.

