



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Smart Parenting

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Undivided Attention: A child's dream come true

Holiday gift-giving is over and many of your children's "must-have" toys are either broken or forgotten and shoved under the bed. You know what your children want most even if they don't say it? They want time with you...undivided attention.

Turn your cell phone off, push the newspaper aside and record your favorite TV show. Spend time with your child doing what they want to do and give them undivided attention.

Because "play" is child's work, sit down for a tea party or be a student in their make-believe school where they teach you. Or, play the same board game over again.

When you give your child undivided attention, he/she senses that you care, that you are interested and you want to spend time together. Something this simple can make a huge difference in your child's behavior and self-worth.

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Live. And Learn.

Back to Basics with FUN

Play is a creative outlet for children

"I'm bored," whines Shannon as you suggest playing another board game. It's a snowy Saturday and you've been out making a snow fort and snow angels twice that morning. According to Lisa Wallace, MU Extension human development specialist, "Play is the most important activity for children. Through play, they learn about the world and try to discover how it works."

Play is also a creative outlet for a young child's fantasy and imagination. It contributes to kids' sense of mastery and competence and gives them joy, pride and a growing sense of self. One of the best things about play is that it doesn't require a lot of expensive props or gimmicky mechanized toys.

The Work and Family Life Newsletter shares specific ways to have fun with your children as winter weather makes inside play inviting.

Encourage your child's play by providing blocks, dress-up clothes, stuffed animals, puppets, cars and trucks, miniature figures and picture books. These stimulate your children's imagination as they invent their own world and create their own stories.

Wallace encourages parents to join in the fun. Your child might invite you to be a customer in her store, the audience for a puppet show, a guest at a tea party or a patient in the doctor's office. Follow your child's lead as he plays.

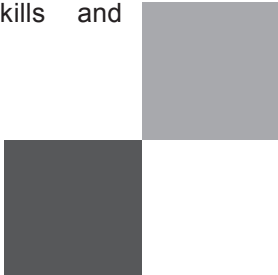
Play make-believe. Pretend play is the heart and soul of being a young child. Everything they feel, see, do, hear, read

and watch in their everyday experience is woven into their make-believe play. Children use fantasy and make-believe to make sense of what they are learning about the real world.

Here are examples of how you can encourage their play. Keep a dress-up box and paper plates handy for playing house, restaurant and tea party. Cartons of different sizes make stoves, forts and hiding places. Play office or school with pads, pencils, rubber stamps and paper clips. Play money can be used for playing store and restaurant. Wrapping paper rolls turn into fire hoses, magic wands and swords with special powers.

Count and do. Take out a set of dice and get ready to roll. The first player rolls the dice and counts the number that comes up. The second player has to think of an action and repeat the action the number of times on the dice. Actions can include clapping hands, wiggling your nose, jumping, singing a song, repeating a word or reciting a nursery rhyme. Take turns and enjoy the fun as your children count and follow directions.

Have fun with your child's creativity, playfulness and imaginative view of the world. Though you may get bored playing simple games, your child is mastering new skills and having fun.





Spend less but eat well!

Simple tips can help you stretch your food dollars

Learning to spend less, but still eat well can be done with determination and know-how. Lynda Johnson, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist offers tips to stretch food dollars:

- Begin by tracking all food purchases at the grocery store, as well as food and beverages eaten out. Americans spend more than 40 percent of their food dollar away from home. To identify points where dollars can be saved, keep a running tab of all money spent for food – fast food, concession stand and vending machine snacks. Include expenditures for bottled water, soft drink and latte purchases at convenience stores.
- Inventory all food on hand at home. Think about meals which could be made using these foods.
- Check supermarket ads and plan meals around weekly specials. Save these meal plans and rotate them throughout the month.
- Prepare a shopping list and shop only once each week. This saves gas, time and money. The more you frequent supermarkets, the more you spend.
- Compare prices. Try store brands which cost less. Convenience mixes and snack foods like chips and crackers are more costly. Purchase occasionally rather than weekly.
- Avoid waste. Store food to preserve freshness or freeze to prevent spoilage. Serve smaller portions to prevent waste. Incorporate leftovers in future meals or carried lunches or freeze. U.S. families throw away millions of dollars of food every year.
- Limit meals eaten away from home. These foods cost two to three times more than similar items prepared at home.

Check out “**Money Management: Living on Less**” for more strategies to save on food, housing, and energy at <http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/hesguide/famecon/gh3600managing.htm>.

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“Coulda-Woulda-Shoulda”

We’ve all heard the expression “Hindsight is 20-20.” That phrase rings true for many who have raised children to young adulthood and now look back on all the things that perhaps could have or should have been done differently!

According to Diana Milne, MU Extension human development specialist, “If you’re a parent of a young child, you might want to consider some of these suggestions by author Elizabeth Pantley in the *Work and Family Life* newsletter.” She suggests:

- The “big picture” is more important than any single action. What’s more important is your overall philosophy and approach to child rearing.
- Relax more and stress less. Trivial details do make up a large part of our daily lives as parents; however, if these things cause too much stress

we lose sight of the joy that children bring to us.

- Enjoy play time with your children (without keeping an eye on the clock).
- Break the “rules” sometimes. Loosen up! You don’t always need to be the dull, authoritative boss.
- See the world through the eyes of your children. A child’s actions, thoughts and words originate in a place of innocence—from their view the world. View your child’s behaviors at face value rather than evaluating it from an adult’s perspective.
- Discipline doesn’t need to be unpleasant to be effective. Don’t be too quick to jump in with harsh discipline. Try gentle methods first, such as a kind request or polite reminders.
- Rest assured that your kids DO love you. They may get mad at you when you say “no” and they want to hear “yes.” but that is normal.

Remember, young children are concerned with getting what they want and they’re just learning the concept of sharing or considering the wants of others.

- Don’t be a worry-wart. Obsessive worrying serves no purpose. Most things we worry about never happen. Be prepared and consider safety, but some things you just can’t control.
 - Live in the moment. Connect and bond with your children. Watch, listen and cherish the “age and stage” of their development right here, right now.
 - There are no “perfect” parents, but these suggestions will enhance your journey.
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