



## EARLY CHILDHOOD

# Smart Parenting

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION ■ JULY 2011

### Creative Play

These ideas can help your children create a fantasy world of their own imagination:

◆ **Dress Up.** Little girls love frilly clothes. Give them glitter and tell them it's fairy dust. Add a few ribbons and bows, old jewelry and beads.

◆ **Swim Time.** Inflatable floats can become alligators, sharks or a pirate ships. The treasure can be objects on the bottom of the pool. At a lake, pretend to be shipwrecked and hunt for "pearls," find shells, small fish in the shallow water or search for frogs.

◆ **Build a Tent.** A sheet over a card table can create a hide-a-way where children can play house, fort or a create a variety of other fun worlds. Appliance boxes do the same thing.

◆ **Sandbox Time.** For children old enough not to eat the sand, try a few buckets, a small shovel and some sand molds.

---

Published in partnership with Parents as Teachers and LINC.

MU Extension contributors:  
Marsha Alexander, Dr. Carole Bozworth,  
Dr. Nina Chen, Kris Jenkins, Glenda  
Kinder, Shatomi Luster, Susan Mills-  
Gray, Diana Milne and Lisa Wallace.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
 Extension  
Live. And Learn.

## Make-believe is a powerful tool

*Free play helps children learn to discipline themselves*

How did you play when you were a child? Is it different than how your child plays today?

According to Kris Jenkins, MU Extension human development specialist, "Researchers at Brown University have found that children today play more with objects and less with their imagination." The play is centered more around a toy or device than it is an activity.

In the late 1950's, children tended to hang out in small or large groups with very little supervision. They played in backyards, on street corners or at the park and made up their own activities and their own rules. Basically it was free play, what looked like mostly doing nothing at all. They would move from one activity to other seamlessly and without effort.

With the invention of electronic devices, including TV, children suddenly were supplied with specific toys that directed their play. Instead of playing pirate with a tree branch, they played Star Wars with a toy saber or, more recently, video games that simulated extraterrestrial events.

In recent years, partially because of parents' concern for their children's safety and partially because of the number of homes where both parents are employed, children are directed to more structured activities in gyms or

other inside areas. What once was play time, now often is spent in lessons and classes or supervised play.

This approach to keeping your child safe and occupied actually can cut down on your child's developmental process. Time children spend in make-believe actually helps them develop the ability to self-regulate—one of the brain's more important functions. This ability to exercise self-discipline and resist negative behaviors is much slower to develop in children who spend almost all their time in a more structured environment.

Make-believe is such a powerful tool because children engage in a type of "private speech." In other words, they talk to themselves about what they're going to do, how they are going to do it and they analyze for themselves how it turns out. They learn by trial-and-error.

This make-believe unleashes the mind to possibilities but also is great practice for them to learn how to regulate their behavior, have self-discipline and learn about boundaries. Jenkins notes, "The ability to play and just be--without constant input from adults--actually strengthens a child motivation and imagination."

*Source: Work and Family Life, Vol. 25, No. 2*

# Family conflict disrupts a child's sleep

*Poor quality of sleep  
affects children's  
behavior and emotional  
development*

"Children who are raised in homes with high parental conflict are likely to show learning and behavior problems due to disrupted sleep," according to Nina Chen, MU Extension human development specialist. A study published in the January/February issue of the *Journal of Child Development*\* found that children from high conflict homes show more sleep problems. They found that children in higher conflict homes slept less, spent less time in bed actually sleeping and moved more during the night than other children in lower conflict homes.

When children have poor quality sleep and interrupted sleep, they are sleepier during the day. Whether conflict between parents shows hostility or disengagement, it can cause tension in the home environment and children feel anxious or worried even when their parents treat the children warmly. Anxiety and worry can decrease quality of sleep for children. Children with less sleep are likely to be irritable, easily frustrated, moody, and act more angry or sad in social interactions. Poor quality of sleep can also influence children's attention, motivation, behavior, learning, and emotion control and change information processing.

While conflict is inevitable and a part of life, parents may not be aware of how children can be affected by family conflict. Conflict between parents may negatively affect children's well-being, long-term behavioral and emotional development, academic achievement and feelings about their families and relationships. Conflict can be constructive or destructive depending on how often conflict occurs, how parents manage conflict and anger and how the conflict is resolved.

*\* Dr. El-Sheikh and colleagues from the Auburn University*

## University of Missouri Extension

### Bates County

1 N. Delaware, Butler, MO 64730  
660.679.4167

### Cass County

302 S. Main St.  
Harrisonville, MO 64701  
816.380.8460

### Clay County

1901 NE 48th St.  
Kansas City, MO 64118  
816.407.3490

### Henry County

100 W. Franklin, Room 16  
Clinton, MO 64735  
660.885.5556

### Jackson County

1106 W. Main St.  
Blue Springs, MO 64015  
816.252.5051  
2700 E. 18th St., Suite 240  
Kansas City, MO 64127  
816.482.5850

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
 Extension

[extension.missouri.edu](http://extension.missouri.edu)

equal opportunity/ADA institution

## Snack Ideas for Vegan Kids

Your child may be eating a vegetarian diet and it's been proven that well-planned vegan diets have been found to offer protection against many chronic health diseases. The American Dietetic Association supports this type of diet for children, though they caution that poorly planned vegan diets can be deficient in vitamin B12, iron, vitamin D, iodine, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids. According to Susan Mills-Gray, MU Extension nutrition and health education specialist, "Rapidly growing children have specific nutritional needs and small stomachs; they require food dense in energy and diverse in nutrients." Whether vegan or not, these are healthy snack choices for us all!

- ◆ Spaghetti/ tomato sauce
- ◆ Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
- ◆ Chicken-Free nugget (soy protein nuggets )

- ◆ Baked French fries
- ◆ Burgers, hot dogs and sandwich slices made of tofu or meat substitutes
- ◆ Whole wheat bread
- ◆ Soy cheese sandwiches
- ◆ Veggie pizzas with soy cheese
- ◆ Oatmeal with apples and cinnamon
- ◆ Pancakes with pure maple syrup
- ◆ Waffles with fruit
- ◆ Barley and veggie soup
- ◆ Green leafy and deep yellow vegetables
- ◆ Baked potato with broccoli and tofu sour cream
- ◆ Rice and beans
- ◆ Spinach lasagna
- ◆ Calcium-fortified orange juice or soy milk
- ◆ Iron-fortified cereal with calcium-fortified soy milk
- ◆ Fruits, bite sized
- ◆ Raisins
- ◆ Trail mix
- ◆ Applesauce
- ◆ Fresh berries and sorbet (all fruit, no sugar)
- ◆ Fruit smoothies
- ◆ Popcorn

You and your child can prepare this together!

### Fruit Salsa

- 1 cup strawberries, finely chopped
- 1 orange, peeled, seeded, and finely chopped
- 3 kiwis, peeled and finely chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh pineapple, finely chopped
- 2 green onions, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup yellow or green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lime juice

Put all the ingredients into a bowl and mix well. Cover and chill for several hours or overnight.

Source: [webmd.com](http://webmd.com)  
[keepkidshealthy.com](http://keepkidshealthy.com)  
USDA