



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Smart Parenting

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION ■ MAY 2011

Outdoor Fun!

■ Bubbles

You will need: ½ cup hand dishwashing liquid and 5 cups water.

Gently stir the dishwashing liquid and water together. Give the children bubble wands or plastic berry baskets to dip into the mixture for bubble-blowing fun!

■ Rainbow in a Jar

You will need: a one-gallon jar, water and food coloring.

Fill the jar with water. Add a drop of food coloring to the water. Watch the color spread in the water. See how the color changes and moves in the jar. Add a drop of another shade of food coloring and have the children observe what happens to the water.

Published in partnership with Parents as Teachers and LINC.

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 **Extension**
Live. And Learn.

It is Time to Get Outdoors

Fresh air and outside play is healthy for children

Spring has finally arrived. It is time to spend more time outdoors—it's good for your children and it's good for you, too! The great outdoors can be a natural play laboratory for young children—the flowers, a puddle, bugs and frogs, clouds and butterflies can fascinate them. Diane Milne, MU Extension human development specialist recommends, "Allow and encourage your young children to explore the outdoors by letting them move, run and use their 'loud' voices!"

Other than just opening the door to your backyard play area or driving to the neighborhood park, try using a short list of outdoor activities with which to entertain your kids. Try these ideas:

Explore wind/air

- Make streamers from crepe paper or hold scarves in the wind.
- Find and collect milk-weed pods, dandelion seed pods and blow them in the wind.

Explore water

- Gather up water play toys such as sponges, funnels, plastic bottles, sieves, measuring cups, etc. and set up a water play table outside.
- Give kids a plastic bucket, fill it with water and give them paint brushes to "paint" the patio, outdoor furniture, the swing set, the fence, etc.

- Punch holes in the bottom of a plastic milk jug. Fill the jug with water and let the kids water the flowers and observe how the water flows slowly or more rapidly depending on the size of the holes.

Explore nature

- Use a magnifying glass to look at plants, rocks, insects, flowers, etc.
- Use empty paper towel tubes and "view" nature through the tube.
- Make a "nature bracelet" by wrapping a piece of masking tape around the child's wrist with sticky side facing out. Then, go on a nature walk in the back yard and let children collect items to stick on their bracelet, such as: flowers, grass, seeds, pebbles.
- On a rainy day, you can spend some time identifying their found treasures.

Outdoor sun safety

- As the temperatures get warmer and the sun is more intense, avoid sunburn and skin damage by always remembering to use sunscreen and/or wearing caps and wide brimmed hats.
- Whenever water is being used, in large or small amounts, always be sure that children are closely supervised.



Matching Socks and Responsibility

*Make helping a
family game*

“Me help, Mommy,” shrieks three-year-old Hannah as she sees mom unload a basket of clean clothes on the bed. Ten-year-old Kelly continues to concentrate on his video game as his sister runs to help fold washcloths and match socks.

Getting kids to help around the house is easy when they are young. Kelly is past the age of wanting to help; he no longer sees helping as fun. Hannah, like most young children, wants to help, but often we don’t let them because we believe we can do the job quicker and better ourselves. And, in reality, we can. But when we do everything for our children, we are taking away teachable moments.

According to Lisa Wallace, MU Extension human development specialist, “Allowing young children to help around the house and insisting that older children help around the house teaches life skills and responsibility.” If parents do everything themselves, they rob their children of the opportunity to learn a skill and to accomplish something they feel good about. Plus, the parents become exhausted and often resentful of having to do everything on their own.

Do all the adults in the household model responsibility by helping with household tasks like cooking, dishes and laundry? Does each family member have tasks that show helpfulness? Make helping a family game; all family members can be seen as team members who help each other get things done around the house.

Start early, when your little ones are matching socks and folding washcloths, they have fun while you are teaching them to be responsible for life.

Play More, Watch Less

Did you-know:

- ◆ 53% of all households have NO set TV rules.
- ◆ Average number of TVs per house is three.
- ◆ 68% of all kids have a TV in their bedroom.
- ◆ Children with TVs in their bedroom are 3.5 times more likely to smoke than kids who don’t.

Like it or not, TV and other screens are part of American family life. Americans spend three to four hours a day in front of screens watching movies, playing video games and surfing the Internet. These activities can be relaxing, entertaining and educational. “Like any good thing though, too much screen time can have negative consequences,” says Lynda Johnson, MU Extension nutrition and health


education specialist. “Research indicates we are more likely to snack on high-calorie foods while watching TV and less likely to be physically active.” The risk for becoming and remaining overweight before the age of nine increases with the amount of time spent watching TV.

Evaluate your family’s screen-use habits and compare “screen” hours versus time doing other activities. Consider these to reduce screen time:

- ◆ Take TVs out of bedrooms. Sleeping with the TV on, even with the sound off, can disrupt sleep patterns and contribute to fatigue. Kids with TVs in their bedrooms score lower in math, reading and language arts!

- ◆ Turn off the TV and cell phones Share events from each person’s day.
- ◆ Know what children watch on TV and do on the Internet. Ask open-ended questions.
- ◆ Set more limits gradually. Experts recommend no more than two hours of daily screen time for kids.
- ◆ As a family, create a list of alternate activities to sitting in front of a screen. Post your ideas for all to see.

For suggestions, go to: www.extension.missouri.edu and search for: Play More, Watch Less, F280.



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