

Young Families

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A family-focused newsletter with young children in mind

Once Upon a Mind

Reading to children is one of the most powerful experiences you can provide as a parent or caregiver. Stories teach through content and listening to a parent tell or read a story builds strong relationships. Stories can be time effective since they have a beginning and end.

The first step in creating an effective storytime is book selection. (We will focus on storytelling in another column.) What you may want to achieve is mutual enjoyment of the story. This means taking time at the library or bookstore to find a story that you really like. For example, if I had a 2- or 3-year-old, I would select *Rosie to the Rescue* by Bethany Roberts; illustrated by Kay Charao (Henry Holt, 2003). The theme of helping another person in danger is very important to me. The artwork is

wonderful for any age. The story makes me laugh and Rosie's spunk and grit are touching. I think it's a great story with a wonderful message. You may or may not like it.

Browse the library or bookstore shelves and give yourself time to enjoy these wonderful examples of simple literature. When you find one that you like and think will be interesting to your child, bring it home. In the next column, I will talk about the next step in preparing to read.

For more information about children and storytime, including reviews of picture books, see the Story section of the WonderWise Parent at www.ksu.edu/wwparent/.

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Family Game Night

Playing board games with children can be a memorable experience. A quality board game provides many different types of learning experiences. When selecting a game, consider its level of complexity. Games can vary from low to high complexity. Complex games have a larger rule set and the game mechanics are more detailed than simpler games. Complexity is not the same thing as sophistication in game design. The best game designers create games that are easy to learn yet are excellent, challenging games.

There are many quality games available to play with children beginning around 4 years of age. I'd like to recommend Rat-a-tat Cat, a card game available from Gameright. This game is fun for both adults and children. As children play the game, they develop a sense of timing and an understanding of basic, but essential, mathematical concepts. They learn ways to remember their cards and strategies to figure out what cards other players might have. They also begin to develop an intuitive sense of probability. Children learn while having fun.

For more information about children and family game night, including reviews of many great games, see the Board Games section of the WonderWise Parent at www.ksu.edu/wwparent/.

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Loyalty Choices

Parents who are not living together because of divorce or separation may expect their children to feel about the other parent as they do. The child's positive feelings toward the other parent may be seen as a betrayal. In these situations, a child constantly feels uneasy and fears rejection from the parent when forced to play this loyalty game. In most cases, children do best with two caring parents in their lives. Parents who can acknowledge a child's need for a relationship with the other parent and encourage a connection are helping the child. For example, when something special happens in a child's life, a parent could say, "Would you like to call your Dad and tell him?" This encouragement relieves the child from dealing with a loyalty choice.

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Holiday Expenses

Holidays can be a time to be with ones we care about. For some it is a time of joy. For others the holidays are not such a happy time.

Just as the holidays can be a time of joy for some and sadness for others, holidays impact our finances differently. For some, paying for the holidays is a regular part of our cash-flow plan. For others, the bills linger long after the memory of the holiday is over. Which is it for you?

Think back to last year. How much did you spend to celebrate the end of the year holidays? Some people know to the exact penny. Others don't have a clue.

A quick Internet search shows that on average people spend somewhere between \$649 and \$1,600 on holiday-related expenses. The amount varies depending on income, size of family, and where you live.

How much money did you spend for holiday expenses last year? How did you pay for it? Did you pay by lay-away? Did you pay cash as you went along? Were you still paying for it six months later?

This year consider tracking your holiday expenses to see how you compare to the national average. This work chart can help you think about and plan your holiday spending.

Holiday Budget & Expenses		
Item	Budgeted Amount (\$)	Actual Expenses (\$)
Clothes	_____	_____
Decorations	_____	_____
Gifts*	_____	_____
Wrapping	_____	_____
Entertaining	_____	_____
Travel	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____

*Who will be on your gift list? How much can you afford to spend on each gift?

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Regular Schedules Fight Stress

As the calendar moves toward the end of the year, families may note that stress levels begin to peak. How can you help your family cope with the hectic holidays?

Remember the basics. Though we find our days and evenings filling up with programs, parties and events, keep regular meals as a family mainstay whenever possible. No matter what age we are, we function better when we maintain a fairly regular schedule that includes meal and snack times, rest times and bed-times. While there is certainly room for an occasional splurge or change in rules, you'll find that things go better when routines are kept. Work to keep mealtimes and snacks on time and as regular as possible. It will help keep the whole family happier, and holidays less stressful.

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Keep the Whole Family Physically Active!

Both adults and children should spend at least one hour each day doing physical activity, according to guidelines published in 2002 by the National Academy of Sciences. This amount is needed to have your heart and blood vessels at their healthiest level, regardless of body weight.

The new one-hour-a-day total exercise goal is based on studies of how much energy is used, on average, each day by people who maintain a healthy weight. The amount of energy you burn adds up throughout the day, including both low-intensity activities of daily life such as walking upstairs, and more vigorous exercise like swimming and riding your bicycle. Adults and children can work one hour of physical activity into their day by being active for several short periods, if it is more convenient.

You and your family could achieve the new exercise goal by doing a moderate-intensity activity, such as playing outside, doing vigorous housework, raking leaves, or walking the dog at a rate of 4 miles per hour, for a total of 60 minutes every day. Or, you could participate in a sport or other activity that causes you to breathe very hard, such as running or jogging, for 20 to 30 minutes four to seven days per week.

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