

Learning About Kids' Toys Can Mean Learning About Kids, Too

Toys and games change, but the need for parents to know and understand their children's interests has not.

Parents who collected baseball cards may find it difficult to understand their child's enthusiasm for newer cards used to play a game related to a fairy tale, book, or movie.

Collecting can be an educational experience—building a collection usually involves thought, developing decision-making skills, and even some strategic planning. The cards themselves can be educational, too.

Parents are encouraged to choose toys for their children, rather than toys that they would like. Selecting a toy or game that you as a parent remember from childhood can be OK, but it's important to allow the child to develop his or her own interest in it.

A child's age, interests, and abilities should be considered in the selection process. Safety and durability are important as well.

Choosing toys that encourage imagination and/or stimulate creativity may be part of the mix, too.

Learn to play by the rules. Parents and grandparents may not realize that in choosing a game, there also is an opportunity to teach a child a sense of fairness. Should a parent always let a child win?

It's important to remember that value may not be related to price—kids usually like free things. A younger child who spends more time playing with a box rather than the toy that was packed in the box is a classic example.

Charles A. Smith

Choose Healthy Foods

Parents know that certain foods can be particularly important to their children's growth and health. Getting their children to eat the healthful foods may not, however, always be easy.

Start teaching good nutrition as early as possible. A toddler may welcome a whole grain, low-sugar cereal. The crunchy cereal will please the toddler, and the absence of sugar will benefit the toddler's dental health and appetite for more nutritious foods. Once a child is old enough to make independent food choices, continue to offer healthy foods.

Plan meals and snacks. Families who plan meals may find it easier to include more variety. Planning meals also alleviates last-minute stresses, and everyone is likely to be in a better mood at meal time.

Snacks are important because children have small stomachs and need to eat and refuel regularly. As an added benefit—adults who plan snacks are less likely to overeat.

Avoid foods that provide "empty" calories. Serve milk or water at meals or snack time, rather than sugary juice mixes or carbonated beverages.

Set a good example. When parents enjoy foods children learn to enjoy them, too. If a child turns up his nose at an unfamiliar food, it's best not to make an issue out of it. Plan to offer it again, perhaps in a different form. For example, if vegetables are an issue, parents may want to add tomato juice or vegetable cocktail to soups or sauces.

Offer appropriate portions. Preschoolers need about one tablespoon for each year of age. While activity may fuel the appetite, insisting that children clean their plates may be detrimental to their health. Children usually stop eating when they are full.

Allow for an occasional treat. A cookie or small dessert is OK once in a while, but it is not nutritionally sound to make a meal of chocolate cake or corn chips.

Sandy Procter

PARENTS CORNER

Discipline as Teaching

The words discipline and disciple are derived from the same original term meaning to be inspired, to follow someone for what he or she knows. Discipline means teaching, not just asserting authority and showing a child who is boss. Everything we do to help a child learn is discipline. Every time we attempt to teach our children deeply held values through word and example, we are using discipline. Our success with discipline depends not just on how well we stop a child from misbehaving, but on how well a child learns from us. The greatest teachers are admired and respected, not feared. Children will stop doing something, at least temporarily, through fear. But their character is molded by being drawn to someone they admire.

Chuck Smith

*From "Success by Six Cards,"
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Fathers Are Important

Children who have an ongoing, positive connection with their fathers do better in school and get along better with their peers. Children whose fathers play a positive role in their lives also tend to stay out of the juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, the latest figures show that 17 million children in this country have absent fathers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Communities can encourage fathers to be responsible and to promote children's welfare by:

- Increasing public awareness about responsible fatherhood.
- Offering information on how to prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood.
- Promoting fathers' economic responsibility.
- Encouraging fathers as nurturers to enhance family and other social relationships.
- Building leadership capacity around fatherhood issues at the local level.

Elaine Johannes

Then Comes Baby

When a married couple decides to have children, it may increase the amount of stress on their marriage. Absorbing the additional stress of parenthood can be easier if the couple can:

- Develop a pattern of interacting with each other.
- Learn to nurture their relationship.
- Bring up disagreements softly.
- Listen and communicate with each other.

If the couple has not made time for each other, it is going to be tougher when they begin having children

Charlotte Shoup Olsen

Is Tan Skin a Sign of Good Health?

Beautifully bronzed bodies on a beach may seem to be a sign of a person's active lifestyle and good health, but in reality it is probably a sign of poor skin health.

Tanning and prolonged exposure to the sun damages skin cells that, over time, can lead to skin cancer.

There is at least one known benefit of sun exposure. Ten to 15 minutes of sun exposure each day will help the body make vitamin D in skin. But, we also can get that through milk fortified with vitamin D. Other exposure to the sun does not help us at all.

In addition to using sunblock, protective clothing, and sunglasses that block ultraviolet light, people can decrease negative effects of sun exposure by choosing a diet rich in whole grain products, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, fish, and more.

Mary Meck Higgins

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