



Toddler Topics 5

A series to help you parent your toddler

Welcome to the **2003 Toddler Topics**, a learn-at-home newsletter series for parents of young children. Toddler Topics is created by Penn State Cooperative Extension Family Living Agents.

Fathers play an important role in the lives of their children. This issue contains material to encourage and support dads in the task of parenting. Know that the time spent with "daddy" is a very special time for a child. You will reap the rewards of time spent with your child over the many years to come.

Sue Giachero, Extension Agent, Berks County

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Tips for Dads

By: Rick Kauffman, Berks County

I've been lucky. When I look back over my life, I've been blessed with a family full of Dads who have set good examples for me. My dad, my grandfathers, my uncles and my father-in-law, have not only been tremendous influences on my life, but also on my parenting skills. As a father of two older teens, I've experienced the myriad of stages, changes and challenges that you will be facing in the years to come.

While, I know I'm still not "out of the woods," our children have done quite well for themselves and the relationship I've built with them is quite strong. Being a dad for me has been easy, again due to the many positive examples I've had. But for many new fathers, parenting is very difficult and confusing for many reasons. I believe, from my interactions, observations and discussions with struggling fathers, it's due in large part with images. There still remains the macho stereotype that raising the child is a women's job and any sign of letting that guard down makes you less of a man. I feel it takes a real man to overlook that image to become a real father, whose goal is to help his children be successful and well-balanced members of society. I'd like to share with you what I feel has been handed down to me to make my journey as a father, to this point, a rewarding one.

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Tips for Dads

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Shared Responsibility –

Raising your children is a 50/50 deal with your spouse. From the start, your attitude needs to adjust to this concept. If you feel it's a chore to care for your child at a young age, you're starting off on the wrong foot. Remember it's your child together.

• **Get on the Same Page** –

Take time with your spouse before the baby comes to agree on issues such as discipline, goals for your children, childcare, etc. This is so important and is often overlooked until you have to confront it down the road.

• **Dedication/Sacrifice** – By sharing responsibility and planning for success right from the start, you will automatically begin to display a sense of dedication to your children and family. Putting family first should not be just a cliché. Your

dedication will also mean some sacrifice in your personal interests. That's not to say you give up all your hobbies. That's unhealthy for both you and your children. Your positive use of free time serves as a good example for your children. You may need to limit or prioritize your activities.

• **Build a Relationship** – Do things **with** your children not for them. Literally from day one, talk to your children, not just in baby talk, but in real sentences, real conversation, always looking for teachable moments to show them and teach them about life. Values, the difference between right and wrong, and why things turned out the way they did are all things that you can discuss with your children. This will pay dividends later. The other end of course is listening. This includes both verbal and non-verbal cues. Every day, time needs to be spent talking and listening together. Avoid

judgmental injections during discussion that will stop a conversation cold. Ask simple questions and you'll be surprised as to what they share. How they feel is very important. Don't be afraid to listen to and share feelings. Teamwork, responsibilities, being part of family decisions, and making learning fun are also important concepts for building strong bonds and trust in one another

The mark you make as a father is entirely up to you. I firmly believe it must begin before your child arrives. Firmness, kindness, consistency, patience, dedication, and most importantly love were gifts my father and family provided me.

The responsibility to continue, or to start a new generation of, rewarding and positive fatherhood begins with you. Good luck on your journey!

Temperament Traits . . . What Now? (fifth in a six-part series)

By: Denise Continenza, Lehigh County

Some call it the “Eeyore Complex”. Others refer to this child as a “Negative Nellie”. Both are descriptions of a child who tends to see the glass as half-empty rather than half-full. On the temperament rating scale for predominant mood, this child leans toward the negative end of the spectrum. A child whose tendency to view life from a somber perspective can be especially exasperating for parents who are generally positive and upbeat. There are two key points to keep in mind when rearing a child with a tendency toward a negative outlook.

First of all, such a child is not necessarily unhappy. They simply have a way of looking at the world with an attitude of, “What’s missing from this picture?”, or “What would make things better?”. My eldest is one of these personalities, and I am of the “Tigger” mentality. For the longest time I could not figure out how one child could find so much wrong with what should have been the most enjoyable events of his life. During a vacation to Disney World when he was around 10, I became totally exhausted with listening to his chronic complaints about everything from the long lines to the intense heat to the hard hotel mattress. He appeared to be absolutely miserable. When we got

home I overheard his conversation with a friend in which he was telling about his fantastic vacation. I interrupted him and pointed out that he complained all week. My son looked at me, confused. “I had a great time! I wasn’t miserable. That’s just the way I am.” Bingo! For me it was an epiphany. I learned to acknowledge his “complaints” simply as his observations and use a bit of empathy. Avoiding confrontational responses like “You are never happy!” and replacing them with empathic ones like, “You really wish it would be cooler here” makes the child feel understood and builds the child-adult relationship.

Secondly, a predominantly negative child is not asking the adult to change things or make his world better. In many situations, including the Disney trip, I felt as if it were up to me to dispel his negativity. No matter what we changed, he still managed to see things for what or how they were not. By understanding his temperament I realized that he was not telling us to do better. Nor was he discontent. He is really a visionary! Children with a sober outlook have the potential for taking action to make the world a better place. Who can argue with that?

Vegetarian Toddlers

By: Fran Alloway, Delaware County

Are you vegetarian parents or do you have a child that doesn’t eat meat? You can still raise a healthy child, but a little more meal planning will be needed. Milk and dairy products are an excellent source of calcium, vitamin D and protein. If these are not eaten, other sources such as fortified soymilk, orange juice or some cereals can supply calcium. Vitamin D can be obtained with 20-30 minutes exposure to the sun 2-3 times a week or through supplements. Whole grains such as brown rice, oats and corn meal or legumes need to be included each day. Soy products are also excellent sources of protein. Vitamin B12 is found only in animal foods. It will need to be provided either through fortified foods or a vitamin supplement. Here’s an easy recipe that includes some of these foods.

Easy Vegetarian Spaghetti

1/2 cup onions
1 clove garlic, diced
1 cup diced, firm tofu
2 tsp. oil
2 (15 Oz.) cans seasoned tomatoes or 1 jar of prepared spaghetti sauce
Whole wheat spaghetti or other pasta

Saute onions, garlic & tofu in saucepan until onions are soft & tofu browns slightly. Add tomatoes or sauce. If using tomatoes, simmer slowly to reduce some of the liquid & season to taste. Cook pasta as directed on package. Serve sauce over hot pasta. Top with parmesan or mozzarella cheese if desired.

BOOK NOOK

Carolyn Wissenbach, Greene County

Recent years have witnessed a change in the way society views fathers. Studies have shown that close contact with both mother and father help children to be more confident and willing to explore their environment. When raised in a home with a caring, involved father, these qualities remain in children of school age. It's clear that the unique interaction a father has with his children is of enormous benefit to them as they grow up. Fathers should schedule a regular time to read to their toddlers. There are many books that define a father's role in a family.

- Porter-Gaylord, Laurel. *I Love My Daddy Because....* Fathers of all ages can relate to the reasons the child, like the animals, love their "daddy".
- Degen, Bruce. *Daddy Is a Doodlebug*. This book was inspired by the little things the author and his children used to do together.
- Cooke, Trish. *The Grandad Tree*. This is an intergenerational story rooted in the cycle of life.
- Numeroff, Laura. *What Grandpas Do Best*. The book not only shows interaction with a grandfather but also how a grandpa can bathe, teach and help the grandchild.

Fun with Water

By Mary Ann K. Oyler, Franklin County

Feel and Guess: Fill a bucket about halfway full with warm water. Add dish soap, and stir it up so the water is full of bubbles. Put objects such as a plastic car, rubber ball, plastic block, spoon, rubber band, etc. in the bucket and let them sink. Let your child reach into the bucket and feel for objects. Have them name the object before they pull it out. *Source: Building Blocks, October 1995.*

Sieve Fun: In the bathtub or kiddie swimming pool have your child drag sieves through the water, hold them up, and watch it rain. Sieves to try include: plastic flowerpots with holes in the bottom, plastic bottles with holes punched in bottoms and/or sides, large plastic cups with holes punched in the bottom or kitchen sieves.



Water Painting: Delight your toddler by letting them "paint" the house or sidewalk. With a small bucket of water and a 1" – 3" paint brush, your child can paint away without hurting a thing. This is a great activity to busy a toddler while you do the "real" painting.

Let's Talk: Most toddlers love to play in water. Outdoors or in the bathtub are great places for water play. The sensory feel of water entices young children, but adult supervision should always accompany water activities.

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