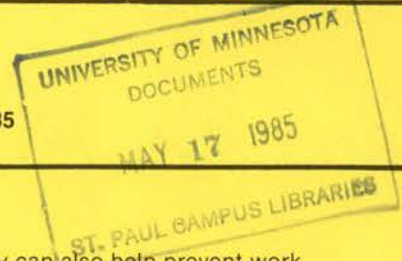


young families

No. 67
May — June 1985



Helping at Home

Children need to be included in everyday household tasks, even at an early age. Helping at home increases a child's sense of achievement, self-esteem, and responsibility. It strengthens the family, too, because everyone is involved in working together, sharing, and cooperating.

As an example, at mealtime everyone can share responsibilities. The four-year-old can help set the table, the six-year-old can clear away the dishes and straighten the chairs, and the eight-year-old can take out the garbage.

Preschoolers Can Help

The child of three or four wants to help parents around the house. For preschoolers, work and play are the same. Being alongside mother or father when there is kitchen work, cleaning, or yard work to be done is fun. A three-year-old can learn to feed the cat, dust, help sort laundry, and straighten up items on low tables, such as stacking magazines neatly. Even if the actual contribution is meager, parents should encourage a child's desire to help by showing appreciation and attention. Being accepted as a work companion does important things for a child's self-esteem.

Working alongside parents also increases companionship. The three-year old who wants to help mow the lawn or the four-year-old who wants to make dinner aren't likely to make great contributions, but their efforts are important. Such activities encourage a "we" feeling between children and parents. Such good feelings may keep the pattern going until an age when the child can truly be helpful.

Encouraging even young children to do their part in the family helps them develop a sense of responsibility and achievement. Young children are dependent on their parents for almost everything. They are fed, clothed, chauffeured, and taken to movies and the circus. The child who is expected to give nothing in return, even in a small way, will likely grow up thinking that this is the way life always will be. But if children have been taught from early childhood to make contributions to the family welfare, they are not likely to grow up expecting always to get something for nothing.

Learning Household Skills

One of the best ways parents can prepare their sons and daughters for adulthood is to teach them from early childhood how to do the wide range of things that make for a smoothly run household. Children—both boys and girls—need to know how to do domestic work well and should learn to take it for granted that they are responsible for some household tasks. Not only will they learn to be competent and

responsible adults, but they can also help prevent work overload for an employed mother.

Don't expect perfection in your child's efforts, or anything close to it. Certainly you could accomplish most tasks more quickly and efficiently by doing them yourself. But you would be depriving your youngsters of a wonderful learning experience as well as the chance to develop a feeling of truly useful participation in family life. If the child has not performed a job to your satisfaction, either let it remain as is or patiently explain it again to the child and let him or her do it over. If you redo the job yourself, your child loses all sense of accomplishment and personal incentive.

Creative Tasks

Once children develop skills and can do more tasks, be sure they aren't given only the drudgery chores. Reverse work roles with your elementary school age child occasionally. Take on some of the less satisfying assignments yourself and let the child have a crack at some important, creative, and satisfying ones, such as cooking.

Developing responsibility is a slow process. It grows from a desire to help others and to solve our problems. Your children will grow in responsibility when they sense a feeling of mutual concern and a need for mutual assistance. Even the youngest family members can begin to develop a sense of responsibility when it is a real part of everyday family life.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

Family Time

The good feelings that families have—belonging, affection, concern, commitment, and caring—don't just happen by themselves. They are nurtured whenever families spend time together, sharing feelings and experiences.

But work and social pressures often keep us from enjoying our families. It may take an extra effort to find "together time." One way to do this is by planning and setting goals.

Take a look at your typical family activities for a week or so. Just how much time does mother spend with each child? Father? Various combinations? The whole family?

Have a family meeting and review what you have found about your family's activities. Then develop a plan with definite goals for time together. Try to balance individual time, whole family time, time for various combinations of family members, and possibly time for the whole family to spend with others. Take into consideration the needs and interests of all. Otherwise, some members may resist family activities because they feel that others are dictating the terms.

If necessary, schedule family time by writing it on a weekly calendar. You may have to cross off other things on your list of activities. But think about your priorities. Do you really want to relegate your family to "leftover" time? If you want a family that is strong and caring, then it's up to you and your family to take the time.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist

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Caring for Pets

Parents of young children have to decide carefully whether their child is ready for a pet. The child's readiness depends on how mature he or she is. In some cases, it is better to postpone taking an animal into your home. Small children are apt to pull and squeeze, perhaps even maul, their pets. Children need to be told and reminded that the pet is a playmate, not a plaything.

A child of four or five is ready to begin occasional, but not full, care of a pet. At six or seven, children are ready for regular feeding chores. Whatever their age, you can't expect children to take on all the responsibility of walking, feeding, and coping with the many little details that come with pet ownership. Caring for pets will usually be the parent's responsibility, regardless of a child's promises and noble intentions. Children should be encouraged to participate in their pet's care, but if you expect your child to do all the chores, you're bound to be disappointed. And if you have to nag your child to care for the pet, no one's going to be happy.

In spite of all this, the responsibility and pleasure of caring for a pet offer many benefits to children. Pets help children learn about the processes of life: growth, feeding, sex, elimination, birth, death. These can all be less mysterious and more marvelous when the child sees them happening to an animal. Children can also learn the discipline of taking care of someone or something by having a pet. This may well be worth the occasional inconvenience to parents.

Ronald L. Pitzer
Extension Family Life Specialist



Children & Money: Spending

Handling money is a skill that children can learn in the same way that they learn other skills, such as pouring milk or riding a bike.

Teach preschool children the value of coins by calling them by value names, such as a five-cent piece or a ten-cent piece. With paper money, explain that a "Washington" bill is worth four 25-cent pieces. Give young children a few coins to take to the store and allow them to choose a toy or treat. Their choice should be within the limits of the coins you gave them ahead of time; don't add extra coins to enable a child to buy a more expensive item. Praise your child for considering the alternatives before deciding on one item.

Having an allowance and living within it are among the best experiences children can have in learning how to manage money. Six- or seven-year-olds can learn to manage a regular

allowance that covers their needs and allows a modest amount to be used freely. Within family guidelines, give the child freedom in spending the allowance. Keep restrictions as few as possible, protecting health, safety, and moral well-being. Give children plenty of time to learn responsibility without criticizing their choices.

Expect a child of six or seven to be able to save towards something that requires as long as a month or two. When children decide to spend the savings, they should be allowed to do so, even if, in your judgment, the money will be spent foolishly. Children often enjoy items that adults believe to be foolish.

Allow children to participate in family financial decisions. Children will gain more mature attitudes about their own purchases if they can help with the decision about which car or chair to purchase. They will certainly learn a basic financial fact of life: that money is limited. Watching parents make choices and compromises will help them understand how to live within their allowances.

Parents' attitudes and habits in handling money are an indicator of what their children's skills might be. Children develop better money management skills when their parents set positive examples.

Dottie A. Goss
Extension Specialist
and
Meredith K. Johnson
Administrative Fellow
Family Resource Management

A Safety Tip

Do not allow children under six to play with uninflated balloons without supervision. If the balloon is accidentally drawn into the throat, the child can suffocate. This can happen if a child breathes in instead of out while blowing up a balloon, chews or sucks an uninflated balloon, chews a piece of a broken balloon, or attempts to suck or blow bubbles in a piece of balloon stretched across the mouth.

A fully inflated balloon is not considered a hazard but if it breaks, immediately dispose of all the pieces.

This Issue

This newsletter is published for Minnesota young families by the Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, and distributed through your local county extension service office. Please call your county extension agent, Home Economics, with your suggestions for its content.

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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE



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May - June 1985

Greetings,

Here is the spring issue of the newsletter that is designed and written especially for you. The major topic this month relates to involving all family members in care of the home.

I find it interesting in that the organized home study group organization chose to study that same topic at leader-training sessions in January.

I was a resource person for Bonnie and presented information at seven meetings for mothers of young children, grandmothers, aunts, neighbors and friends of families with young children.

We have a few copies left of the materials I used that went into more detail about training children with skills that they need to learn in care of their own living spaces, their own possessions and the common areas of the home as well.

This not only develops skills that individuals will need for the rest of their lives, but also teaches responsibility, pride, sense of satisfaction and appreciation for a well-cared for living space. It promotes sharing and caring too.

If you would like a copy of those materials, do call the Extension Office in Plymouth, 559-4321.

Do have a good summer. If you are able to delegate responsibility for care of the home, to some degree, you as primary provider for the care of the home, may have a few extra minutes to enjoy the summer more fully with your family members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Corrin".

Diane H. Corrin
Hennepin County Extension Agent - Home Economics/Family Living

DHC:jh

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