

Gainesville Parenting

For the community, by the community.

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Is a freestanding one in
Gainesville's future?

Giant Issue!

*Separation
Anxiety*

Helping Your
Child Cope
with Loss





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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It's been crazy here at Gainesville Parenting, as the company has been readjusting for the new year ahead of us. Readers called to our attention in droves that the magazine was MIA in their favorite grocery stores and shops, and we appreciate every call of concern! To make it up, we've put together a larger issue of Gainesville Parenting to make up for all our lost time. In this issue you'll find even more information, advice and laughs.

Remember, this magazine is not possible without the support of our readers. There is no mother of the quarter without your nominations, contest winners without your contestants, and most importantly, there is absolutely no magazine without the support of our local businesses. Right now, as a small magazine trying to make headway into the community, we are going to be published quarterly to create a balance of monetary capability and satisfying the thousands of readers that the magazine has generated. If you or any of your friends have businesses looking to reach out to Gainesville families, tell them about us!

So enjoy this larger-than-life issue, and we look forward to another year of growth with you and your family!

Happy Reading,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CL' or 'Chilly'.

Christiana Lilly
Gainesville Parenting Managing Editor

Mother of the Quarter

Kathy Rodriguez-Tsin

Every quarter we feature a mother in Gainesville of outstanding character – a woman who contributes to the community and is dedicated to her children.

By Megan Heron

Kathy Rodriguez-Tsin may be a full-time student at St. Leo University, but that doesn't stop her from spending time with her family. She has one son, Justin, 6, and has been married for 11 years to her husband Felix. While working to complete her elementary education degree, Kathy balances school work during the day and classes at night, with family time everywhere in between. She shares her home with her mother, and feels blessed that she has three of her four siblings living in the same town. Her son Justin was born 13 weeks early, and spent three months in the hospital, but pulled through perfectly. With the love and dedication of her husband Felix, and the strength of her son, Kathy feels like the luckiest mother on earth.



What do you enjoy most about your children?

"I enjoy his easygoing personality. We laugh a lot in our household, and he's a big snuggler. He'll call my cell phone and say, 'Mom can you come home so we can snuggle?'"

What do you hope to impart on them?

"I hope to instill a sense of security that he knows that he'll always be loved, no matter what happens."

What is your favorite thing about raising children in Gainesville?

"I love the sense of community. I used to live in South Florida, where you never knew your neighbors because everyone was caught up in the hustle-bustle. I moved to Gainesville six years ago and found

a lot of lovely friends and family that I never had before."

What is your favorite memory of growing up?

"I grew up in South America in Ecuador, with my four siblings. We had a farm outside the city, and we had no electricity. I remember spending a lot of time there just playing, and finding things to do since we didn't have TV. At night we'd light candles to eat dinner, and every morning we'd wake up with the roosters. That's just something I've never experienced since then."

What is the most important thing you've learned from your mother?

"My mother is so patient. I can count on one hand how many times she's raised her voice. There

was never a lot of yelling in my house, and I learned a lot about being patient with children."

What is something about you that no one knows?

"Everybody knows I love animals, but if I had my career of choice, I would be a veterinarian."

Do you have a hidden talent?

"I really like scrapbooking, but I wouldn't say I'm the best one out there."

What do you enjoy doing around town?

"We all like going to the springs. We also like to travel to experience different atmospheres. One thing my husband and I love doing that we don't do enough is bowling."

Do you know an
**Outstanding
Father?**

Write in and let us know of an outstanding father. He may be featured in our next issue for Father's Day! Write to christiana@martonickpublications.com





Possum Creek Park

By Jessica Warshaver

Possum Creek Park is a peaceful getaway for parents and children within the hustle and bustle of an urban area. The 80-acre park includes both cleared and forested areas, and is home to a fun playground, picnic pavilion, nature trail, and soccer field.

Children can climb monkey bars, run through a fish skeleton, fly down twisted slides, and even climb a kid-sized rock wall. The large picnic area is nearby, so a day at this park can include lunch and play host to birthday parties and get-togethers.





The vast field sports four soccer nets, and there is no shortage of trees for shade from the harsh Florida sun. Just beyond the field lies a nature trail – a playground for butterflies, love bugs and other forest critters. Parents can traverse this plant-infested wonderland with their children and pets, but must be sure to bring good shoes and bug

repellant! Follow the trail to a small creek, or, for more adventurous souls, travel on.

Possum Creek Park's completion will include a skate park, dog park and restrooms. This new Gainesville recreational area is great for seekers of both active and passive fun activities. The park is located at 4000 Blk NW 53 Ave. at the intersection of 43rd Street and 53rd Avenue.

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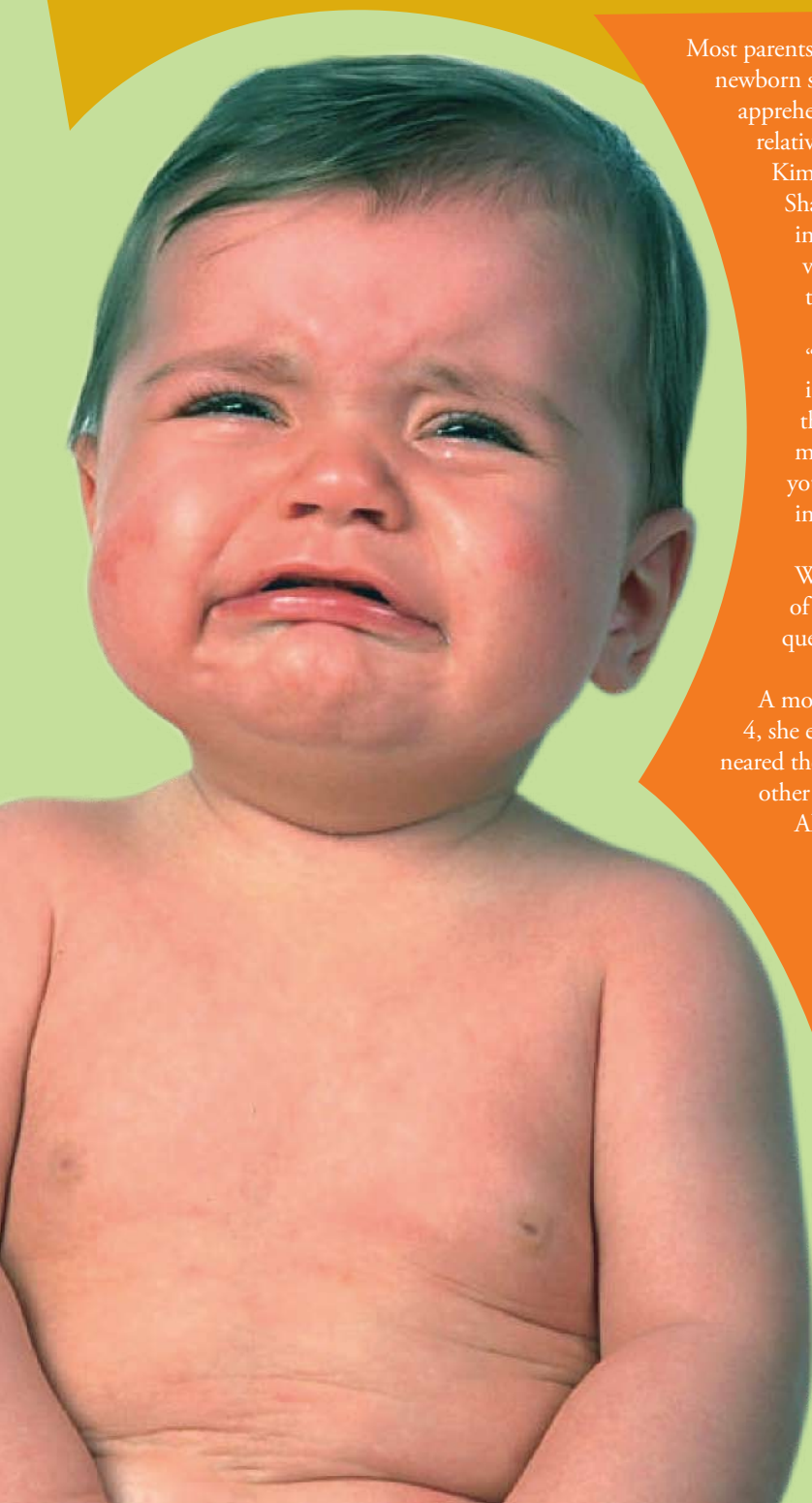
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MOMMY DON'T GOOOO!

By Karen Shimonsky

Many parents are unfortunately all too familiar with the gut wrenching scene of leaving their child -- be it with a childcare provider or on the first day of school -- while he or she screams in complete agony. Separation anxiety often causes both the parent and child stress and discomfort when the issue of parting is addressed. But there are ways to deal with separation throughout different stages in your child's life that can dispel this anxiety and help your child grow and learn.



Most parents will notice that in the beginning of their child's life, from the newborn stage to about 6 to 8 months, rarely does their child exhibit any apprehension around strangers and leaving them with caregivers or relatives is usually no problem. According to child psychologist Dr. Kimberly Shaw, there is an explanation to this. Separation anxiety, Shaw says, traditionally begins to appear between 8 and 18 months in most children. This is when, Shaw said, infants begin to develop stranger wariness and may become apprehensive when in the absence of parents.

"For most children this anxiety usually peaks at about 1 year and it is common for anxious behavior to persist until the child has the language skills necessary to cope with separation from their mother or father," she says. "Once your child can understand that your leaving isn't permanent and is able to talk through their feelings, separation stresses can be lessened."

While language skills do help with easing anxiety, the symptoms of it will probably not go away entirely but just become less frequent as the child grows from infant to toddler, Shaw says.

A mother of two, Katie Glasscock said that with her first child Lexie, 4, she experienced a very similar progression of anxiety as her daughter neared the age of 1. Being their first child, Lexie was constantly around other people and never had a problem with strangers holding her.

Also, the Glasscocks were able to leave their daughter with a mother-in-law with ease. It wasn't until Lexie was 11 months old that she suddenly started suffering from separation anxiety.

While this came as a shock to both her and her husband, they soon learned that these feelings of anxiety in their daughter weren't permanent. She says that like Shaw described, once Lexie learned to talk more and developed an understanding of what they were saying to her, it became easier to leave her.

"We started her in preschool when she was 3 years old, and by this time she understood that when we dropped her off it wasn't a permanent departure and that mommy and daddy would be back in a little while," she says. "I don't think I would have been strong enough to send her to preschool if I knew that she was going to be hysterical each day."

Dealing with the Anxiety

Shaw acknowledges that leaving an anxious child can be just as hard on the parent as it is on the child. However, no matter how upsetting the situation, it's important for parent to model the behavior they want from their child.

Many children use what is known as "social referencing" when trying to cope with separation from their parents, Shaw says. They will look to their mother or father to see if the situation is OK. If they see their parent crying or upset about leaving as well, this will only heighten the child's response. A good example of this is when a new caregiver is introduced into a child's life. The first few times a child is exposed to a new babysitter or teacher, they will often watch their parent's reactions and demeanor to judge what their response should be.

"Your child is really looking for reassurance that everything is going to be ok and that is going to come from the parent," she says. Shaw offers other tips for parents to make the transition easier on the child when they are left with someone else. She said an open dialogue is important between parent and child. Another idea is to leave the child with something to remind them of their parents while they are going to be away. Shaw used the example that a simple lipstick kiss on the child's hand before they go to school can be enough reassurance to calm a child's fears.

Jamie Baldwin, a mother of two children, says it has been the constant and open dialogue between her and her children that has gotten them through spouts of separation anxiety. With her oldest daughter Caryss, 7, she was sure to encourage her daughter to talk through her sadness rather than just crying when she was younger. "Caryss had a really hard time being apart from us when she was about 3, but we were so diligent about telling her how long we would be gone for and where we were going so she knew we were always coming back. We also encouraged her to talk about it when she was sad," Baldwin says.

After she left her daughter, Caryss would still cry but would also explain to her caregivers that "she knew mommy and daddy were coming back, but she was just a little sad about it," she says. "It was great to hear from our sitters that she was so openly talking about it. It definitely got us through her anxiety faster," Baldwin said.

Persistent Anxiety

While most children's anxiety will disappear with age, some children may experience prolonged or more severe anxiety associated with separation, and Shaw said that this is something parents should be sure to monitor. If you notice a difference in the level of impairment in your child, such as more intense anxiety, longer lasting spells and more frequent tantrums, then your child may be suffering from separation anxiety disorder, which is different than the normal levels that many children experience. If this is the case, consulting a professional may aid in bringing your child's anxiety levels down, Shaw says. It is important to note that your child's reaction to new environments may be a signal for you that they are not ready for this next step.

"Separation anxiety is a great example of developmental conflicts. This may be a signal from your child that the demands of the environment around them are too great for where they are at. If you work closely with your child to get through these changes, your child can learn necessary adaptation skills that will help them throughout their life," Shaw says.

v





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Ask a Nurse

Lice

Sheri Curtis, MSN, ARNP

Professor Curtis is a Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Florida College of Nursing. She practices at Archer Family Health Care, a nurse-managed health care practice that provides high-quality, holistic, health care for children, adults and families in Archer, Florida.

M“My child just came home with a note from school about an outbreak of lice! She attends a very nice neighborhood school. How could this occur? What can I do? How do I know if she has lice?”

The return to school is an exciting time for many children, full of many new experiences. Unfortunately, one of those experiences might be a lice infestation. Lice, the ultimate equal-opportunity bugs, do not care about the family income or social status of their hosts. Infestations are most common in preschool and young children, probably because this age group tends to be very social and likes close contact. Lice are primarily transmitted by head-to-head contact but can be spread by contact with hats, brushes, scarves and surfaces an infested child lays on such as a mat or couch.

Signs of an infestation are complaints of a “tickling feeling” in the hair, constant scratching of the head, sores caused by the scratching and of course, the bugs or the nits (eggs) themselves. Nits can be hard to distinguish from dandruff, but the difference is that nits do not easily pull away from the hair strand. Look for signs of live bugs or nits behind the ears or on the nape of the neck.

The life cycle of the head louse has three stages: egg, nymph and adult. Nits are laid by an adult louse and attached to the hair shaft close to the scalp. They are small, oval and usually yellow to white in color. If not treated, they will hatch in six to nine days. When the nymphs hatch, the nit becomes dull and remains attached to the hair shaft. Nymphs become mature adults in about one week. The adult louse is about the size of a sesame seed, has six legs and is tan to grayish white. Females can lay up to eight nits a day and can live for about one month so long as they feed on their host’s blood several times a day.

Over-the-counter and prescription medications can treat a child with a lice infestation. Before applying medication, remove all

clothing from the waist up and do not use any cream rinse or combination shampoo/conditioner. If your child has extra-long hair, it may require using two bottles of medicine. Read the directions as to how long the medication should be left on and whether or not to rinse it out. After treatment, comb dead or remaining live lice and nits out of the hair with a “nit comb.” Don’t rewash hair for one to two days and

make sure your child puts on clean clothes. Continue to check and comb hair every two to three days until no more lice or nits are found. If you are using over-the-counter medication, you will need to retreat your child in seven to 10 days. If after eight to 12 hours no dead lice are found and live lice are still active, contact your health care provider as some lice are resistant to treatment and a different medication may be needed.

You will also need to machine wash all clothing and bed linens your child used in the last two days before treatment. Use the hot water cycle and dry on high heat for at least 20 minutes. Dry clean any clothing or bedding not washable and store all clothing, stuffed animals and comforters that cannot be washed or dry cleaned in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks. Helmets and headgear will also have to be placed in a sealed plastic bag for two weeks. Soak all combs and brushes for one hour in rubbing alcohol, Lysol, or wash with soap and hot water. Vacuum the floor and furniture where the infested person usually sits or lies. Do not use fumigant sprays – they can be very toxic if inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Check the heads of other household members every two to three days; you don’t need to treat them unless live bugs or nits are found.

Call your health care provider if your child continues to itch severely, develops a fever, has red, painful skin or a pus-like discharge, or if your child develops any wheezing or shortness of breath. Otherwise, vigilance and a positive attitude are the best strategies for getting through this challenging, but very common childhood experience.





Ask a Nurse

Poor School Performance

Teresa Bruney
MSN, ARNP

Teresa Bruney is a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Florida College of Nursing.

Poor school performance in children could be from one of hundreds of causes. We will first discuss these causes in four general groups: physical problems, genetic influences, learning disabilities and environmental influences. Then we will discuss steps parents and others can take to identify and help such children.

Causes

Children who perform poorly in school could be suffering from a relatively simple physical problem, such as vision or hearing impairment, poor sleep or not eating well, to something more serious, such as “absence” seizures, depression, anxiety, anemia or ADHD. Chronic pain can also interfere with a student’s ability to learn and do well in school.

There are numerous genetic syndromes that can cause either learning problems or diminished intelligence in children. Some are inherited, such as Down syndrome or Fragile X syndrome, while others can occur because of drug or alcohol use by the mother during pregnancy, such as fetal alcohol syndrome.

Learning disabilities are less understood. They can range from an inability to read fluently or understand what has been read, to math calculation difficulties, to problems expressing ideas on paper, to difficulty understanding spoken language, as well as many others. Many children with learning disabilities have normal or above normal intelligence but are slow in learning, usually in one area.

The environment can have tremendous effects on a child’s ability to learn in school. An environment at school where a child is targeted for bullying or even excluded by peers can affect learning. A home where there is little support for school success (i.e., no supervision of homework) can make success more difficult. A chaotic environment, where there is no quiet time or a quiet place for the child to study or get schoolwork done can be problematic. Children being overscheduled in extra-curricular activities can impede school performance as well.

The Solution

If your child is not performing well academically in school, the first step is to schedule a full physical with your child’s nurse prac-

titioner or pediatrician to rule out physical causes. Next, request an Educational Planning Team (EPT) meeting at your child’s school between you, your child’s teachers and a representative from the school’s guidance and administrative staff. An EPT meeting can be requested by a parent or guardian of the child when a problem is noticed. At this meeting, all parties will discuss the child’s strengths and areas of concern, and devise a plan to help the child perform better in school. This plan will be implemented, and about six weeks later, there will be another EPT meeting to determine if the plan helped the child or not.

If the plan is helping, no further testing is usually done. The plan is written as a formal educational plan for the child, either as a 504 Plan or the more formal Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). These legal documents assure that all teachers and staff know about the learning plan that has been established for the child, and follow it.

If the plan is not helping the child perform better in school, other things may be recommended, such as a formal evaluation of the child’s intelligence and academic functioning. This evaluation is sometimes called a “psycho-educational” evaluation, and is performed by a licensed psychologist. These services are offered free of charge by the school’s psychologists, but the wait for the evaluation can be lengthy. These types of evaluations are an excellent way to determine the child’s academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as determine the best way to teach the child. Once this evaluation is complete, the EPT meets again to talk about the best way to help the child in the classroom.

If your child is not performing well in school, there are literally hundreds of reasons that might be responsible. The first steps you should take are consulting your child’s healthcare provider for an appointment to rule out physical causes, and then asking for an EPT meeting at the school. This is the best way to begin solving the mystery of poor school performance, and help your child toward academic success.

More information can be found at the MedlinePlus Web site, sponsored by the US National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health at www.medlineplus.gov. This site offers current, evidence-based information to consumers about a variety of health topics.



Why Hire an Au Pair?

By Ashley Mihlebach

Au pairs are becoming a more popular and affordable options for working parents. But is the benefit worth the effort?

When Kerri McCabe found out she was pregnant with her third child, she was overjoyed—and over stressed. As a successful state attorney and part-time Acting Village Justice, she worked more than 40 hours a week and was already paying a large chunk of her salary to childcare. Her accountant recommended the solution that would save her salary and her sanity: an au pair.

Au pairs are becoming a popular option for parents trying to balance a career and a relationship with their children. Although the process of finding the right au pair can be long and drawn out, the benefits of finding reliable caretakers can make the somewhat risky experience a gamble many parents are willing to take. As the difficulties and expense of finding great childcare continues to increase, au pairs are becoming a more affordable option no longer reserved for wealthy families and the von Traps.

Why Hire Au Pair?

The terms “nanny” and “au pair” are often used interchangeably, but there are many differences between them. Unlike a nanny who considers her responsibilities a job and leaves at the end of a work day, an au pair lives with a family and is treated like a member of the family.

When McCabe was interviewing nannies, she calculated that it option would cost her about \$26,000 per year. She looked into nanny agencies for an English speaking, non-smoker with childcare experience, a good driving record and a clean background. Many agencies claim to supply qualified nannies, but they would only run in-state background checks, not multi-state criminal background checks, she said.

“Parents think they’re getting full background checks, but you

never know this day in age,” McCabe says. “When someone comes into your home they have access to everything—your mail, credit card information, everything.”

Her other option, daycare, would be almost as costly. With two children already in daycare, she was paying about \$18,000 per year, not including another \$260 per week for caring for the newborn. Also, her children would have to spend the majority of their day away from home.

“I have a house, I want [my children] to be able to come home from school and play here,” she says. “I don’t want them to have to stay at daycare every-day while I’m working.”

On the other hand, with an au pair, children can get individualized attention in the familiar surroundings of their own home. McCabe explained that living with the au pair is also an advantage because you get a better sense of her lifestyle. If you hire a nanny and they have to be at your house by 7:30 a.m., you never know where they were or what they were doing an hour before they arrived, she says.

“It’s really just what works best with your family,” says Kelly Fritchman, a working mother of two.

Fritchman, who lives in a resort town in Delaware, decided to look into an au pair when her options for a nanny were running out. Students working as nannies over the summer would return to college and she would be right back to where she started, Fritchman says.

Instead of resorting to daycare, Fritchman said she decided to use an au pair. The idea of getting an au pair is becoming more and more popular, she says. About a quarter of her friends who have children use an au pair from overseas.

A Cultural Exchange

Many families not only look to au pairs for childcare but also an educational opportunity. In most cases, au pairs come to the U.S. from other countries and stay for a year, the maximum length of time a foreign citizen can obtain a working visa without going to school or applying to obtain citizenship. An au pair can bring culture into a home and possibly teach the children another language. As bilingual qualifications are popping up everywhere from teaching positions to nanny applications, the bilingual benefits au pairs can offer appeal to some parents.

“It’s so much easier now, while they’re young,” Fritchman says. “The kids are

developing left and right, this is the time to teach them different languages.”

Sandra, Fritchman’s German au pair, taught her daughter Melanie, 4, many songs in German and Russian that she still remembers a year later. On the other end, many au pairs want to better their English, and since children speak slower, spending time around them can really help with pronunciation, says Fritchman.

“It’s quite an exchange,” she says. “They teach the children and the children teach them.”

Although cultural difference can have a positive affect on children, some parents feel that there’s too much emphasis on teaching children to be bilingual or multilingual. Au pairs should have good command of English

so they can help with homework and can communicate with the children, says McCabe.

“People are unrealistic trying to teach their kids multiple languages,” she says. “Nobody lets kids be kids anymore.”

Kim McCall, a University of Florida professor and mother of 6-year-old Carson, says the chance of a communication difficulty is the reason why she decided to go through a nanny agency as opposed to hiring an au pair.

“Carson has difficulty communicating anyway,” McCall says. “Even an accent might throw him off and be too much of a challenge for him.”

“Regardless of the living quarters you have for the au pair, it’s a big transition to have someone come into your home and live with you over night.”
- Kelly Fritchman, mother of two



Au pair Sandra spends a day outside with Melanie and CJ Fritchman



Au pair Liz poses outside their home with the McCabe children

The Unwritten Rules to Choosing a Good Au Pair

Regardless of how much interviewing and screening you can fit into your busy schedule, you never know the true intention of your au pair until she arrives. These few tips will save you from starring in of those horror stories you never thought could happen to you.

- * Talk to families who have employed au pairs to make sure it's the right decision for your family. Find out about the limitations and hidden costs of using an au pair. For instance, getting car insurance, paying for classes and going out to dinner.
- * Choose au pairs from countries with strict driving laws and reliable background records.
- * Choose an au pair who was raised in an environment similar to where they will be spending most of their time. If they were raised in a large city, they may get bored in the suburbs, or not be used to traveling without public transportation.
- * Ask potential au pairs to describe their

families. Much can be revealed through how they view their own upbringing and what they may expect as part of your family.

* Go through an au pair agency that handles "rematches" the way you would like them to be handled. This is the main area where agencies differ. If an au pair doesn't work out, you don't want to be stuck with her for an additional 30 days just because it's required through the program you chose.

* Try to "pre-match," meaning find your au pair before you go through an agency. Most agencies don't like when people do this, but it often results in more reliable matches.

* Talk to the au pair more than the one time agencies require a phone interview. You should feel like you know the au pair before she arrives.

* Check the au pair's recommendations

* Go with your gut instinct. Sometimes it's okay to judge people by their appearances and ask personal questions you wouldn't normally think polite.

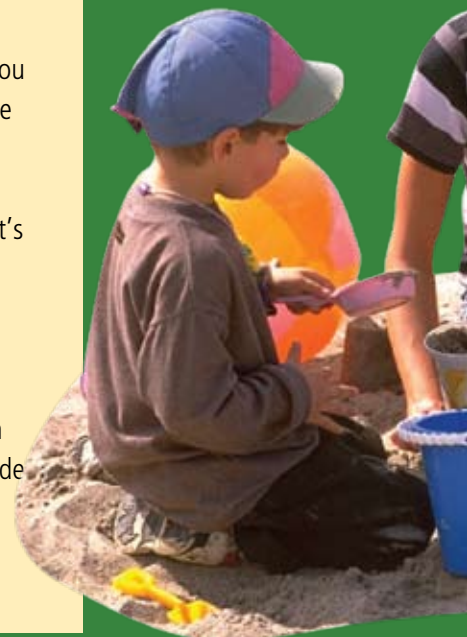
* If you hire an au pair who is under 21, remind them that they can't drink legally in the United States. Their response will provide insight into their motivations.

Finding the Perfect Au Pair

The process of finding an au pair is easily summarized in its first step: filling out a 14-page application. It's a difficult process and a big decision, Fritchman says. The document is incredibly detailed to best match the families with au pairs and vice versa. Based on her own experiences with four au pairs from different countries, Fritchman estimated the process took three to four months, from the interview to the au pair arriving at her doorstep.

Potential au pairs are typically young women from Europe, Asia, Latin

America, Australia, and South Africa between the ages of 18 and 26. According to popular au pair Web sites, the au pairs go through a detailed background check that verifies their education, non-family-related references, criminal background check and psychometric evaluation. They are required to speak English and make a 12-month commitment



to living with an American family. Families looking for an au pair see photos and applications, and can communicate with candidates by e-mail and over the phone. However, the most effective test run is when parents actually meet the au pair. Of the four au pairs, Fritchman says only one worked out well.

“It’s very frustrating,” she says. “Sometimes they have other goals in mind: marriage, citizenship, school, city life. You never know [an au pair’s] true intention.”

On her application, an au pair said she loved to swim, but didn’t even know how when she arrived. Living on the beach, it ended up being a problem for the Fritchmans.

According to McCabe’s previous au pairs, taking a job as an au pair is the cheapest legal way to live in America for a year. McCabe says she goes on her gut feeling about which au pair will get along best with her family.

“Some are earnest. They really want to live in America and truly want to be around children – but then some don’t,” McCabe says. “Lots of girls just want to go to California or Florida. You see a photo that looks like they’re trying to model and think ‘okay, they can’t be serious.’”

McCabe says caretakers like her first au pair, Liz, who was from Norway, are the reason so many families are determined to endure the lengthy process. She says she knew instantly Liz was right for her family.

“I would just pray every night for her to come to our family, and when she did she instinctually had more experience with babies than I ever had.”

Liz said she chose the –family because McCabe was the only one who spoke with her on the phone and didn’t pressure her or make her decide right away. She asked McCabe for a picture of her family to show her parents, which gave insight into her own personal background.

Great Expectations

As many first-time families realize, the obstacles don’t magically disappear as soon as the au pair arrives. It can be difficult trying to balance the time parents have with their children and

the time their children spend with the au pair. Communication differences and unparallel expectations can invoke strife between the au pairs and the families with whom they’re placed.

“Regardless of the living quarters you have for the au pair, it’s a big transition to have someone come into your home and live with you overnight,” Fritchman says.

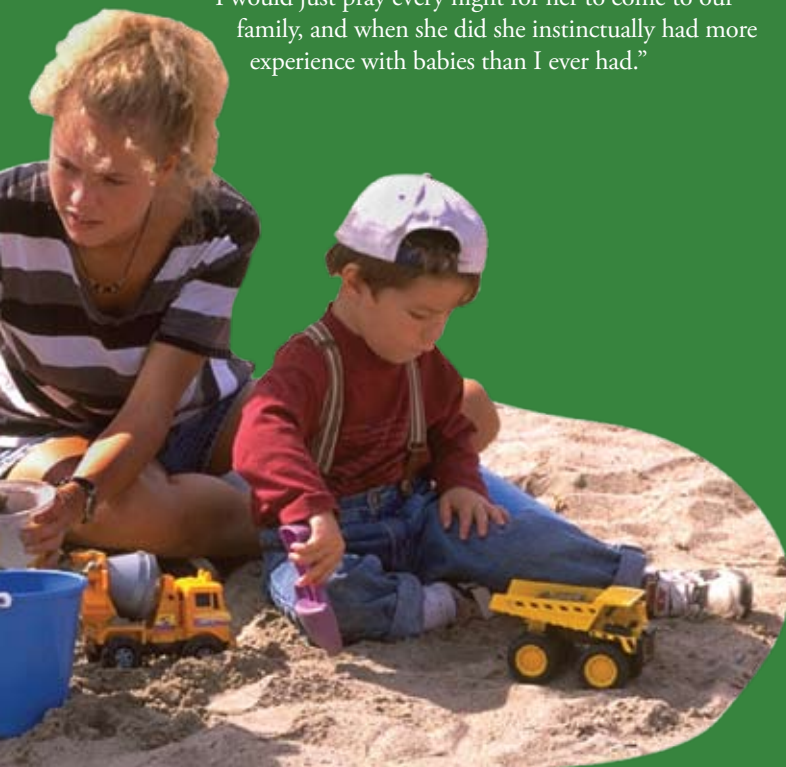
Online agencies encourage making lifestyle expectations to the au pair clear from the very beginning of the process. Families need to realize that au pairs aren’t just nannies—they are supposed to be treated as part of the family.

“Some are earnest. They really want to live in America and truly want to be around children – but then some don’t. Lots of girls just want to go to California or Florida. You see a photo that looks like they’re trying to model and think ‘okay, they can’t be serious.’”
– Kerri McCabe, mother of three

“Some au pairs are just treated lower than low,” McCabe says. “I heard of one family going out to dinner on their au pair’s birthday and not even inviting her.”

Au pairs are paid on average \$158 to \$268 per week, but families should be aware that there are lots of added expenses. Going out to dinner, providing the au pair with a cell phone and paying for car insurance are only a few of the extra costs that arise. Other limitations families should be aware of are the hours and regulations of when the au pair can work. An au pair can only work 45 hours per week, 10 hours per day. They are never allowed to spend a night with the children alone, which can be an inconvenience for parents who travel. Many families with au pairs end up having to get a sitter or nanny on top of an au pair.

“Families looking into hiring an au pair need to remember that au pairs are not professional nannies,” McCabe said. “They’re an extra set of hands, but sometimes that’s all you need.”



From a Working Mom

By Andrea Shirey



As I saw my son off to daycare the other morning, I fought back the tears as he blew me a kiss and told me “bye” in his sweet little voice. As soon as he and my husband (who graciously takes him to daycare each day because I just can’t do it) were out the door, the waterworks came. One would think after seeing him leave everyday for daycare for the past 18 months, I would be “over it.” But the tears still come and so does the guilt.

For most of my life, I imagined having a baby and then being the ultimate stay-at-home mom. I would play with the baby all day, in between cleaning the house, going to the gym, volunteering in the community and preparing dinner for my husband. Now, 21 months after the birth of our first child, life couldn’t be more different. Instead, we are a family with two working parents and a child who spends more time at daycare each week than he spends at home. It isn’t what I dreamed, but for us, it’s reality. The truth is, I’m not sure I’d cut it as a stay at home mom, but I would give up just about anything I have to try it out.

I know this debate has been around for years, and I’m not one to say that either those who work as full-time moms or those who work outside the home are “better” moms. I think both perspectives provide the child with different opportunities and both are models that work, based on the family. Personally, I see the benefits every day of my son going to daycare. I’m continually amazed at how well he adapts to new situations, how he responds to people he’s not familiar with and how great he plays with other kids. But then there are the days I talk with my good friend who is a full-time mom to a 21-month old and I think, “Wow, I wish I had her life.” She tells of taking him to music class, going for walks, reading time at the library and my guilt soars to new levels. I’ve spent

my day in an office and in meetings and haven’t seen my child in nine hours – she’s been with hers the entire day.

For me, dealing with this kind of guilt is the hardest part of being a mom. Somewhere along the way, I’ve started holding myself to a standard that just isn’t realistic. The guilt telling me I should manage my time better, make more sacrifices and be a better mom drowns out the good feelings of earning an income to help my family and making a living by doing work I enjoy. I focus on the things I’m missing instead of the benefits that come with being working mom. I did manage to see his first steps (on a weekend) but what else have I missed? Sometimes I look at him and wonder if he’ll resent me later in life for all the days we dropped him off at 7:30 in the morning and picked him up in time for dinner. I wonder if he’ll know that I did it all for him – that I made the best decision I knew how to make and that every single choice I made involved him in some way or another.

I ignore the fact that by having a two-income family, we can afford to give our son a little more while breathing a little easier. The extra money from a second income isn’t about material wealth – it’s not about more toys or designer clothes or expensive furniture. It’s about the quality of life we can provide our son and about the op-

opportunities we can give him. I think about how private school will be a reality instead of just a wish, how saving for college will be less of a challenge, and taking family vacations every year to visit all the places he'll learn about in school won't just be something I wish I had done as a kid. I also hope he'll see my strong work ethic and learn that raising a family is about teamwork. The competing pressures between career and families are going to exist long after my lifetime, so I'm learning to deal with it. I'm learning to be okay with feeling good about a hard day's work at the office, to let myself enjoy my career and at the same time not let the guilt seep in.

I don't think this kind of guilt ever really goes away. Sure, it will change when he starts school and we have to be apart every day, but then it will just be guilt over something else – the after school care or missing a performance or practice due to work. Perhaps it will be there the rest of my life – always wondering if I gave up enough for him and if I did everything I could to give him the best possible life. As a mom, I will probably always doubt myself even when I watch him grow up to be man and make his own decisions about taking care of his own children.



Hopefully, I'll learn to let the guilt go by that time and realize that holding on to it will only prevent me from seeing the great things in his life. So for now, as I head off to work and watch him go in the other direction, the guilt is a little less but the tears still come.

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WEEKEND PARENTING: **ORANGE** AND **BLUE** GAME

By Gayle Shlafer

Gator Football starts in August, but you can get a sneak peek at the upcoming year in the annual spring Orange and Blue game. I've lived in Gainesville for over 15 years and had never been. Since I wasn't sure what to expect, I took only Ben with me to the game last April.

I've experienced football mania in this town, so we left the house early enough to fight the traffic, find parking, get tickets and get seats. However, we didn't encounter any of the long lines and overheated cars that are expected on normal game days. I parked in the lot on Gale Lemerand Drive and had my choice of spaces. On our way to the stadium, we hopped on the shuttle bus and I knew right away that this weekend activity would be a success. Ben loves riding anything that isn't a car.





When I do this again, I will make use of the things I learned. There is no need to leave the house early to fight traffic. Parking is plentiful. Lines are not long, and there will be seats available. If the sun is out, sit in the shade instead of being close to the field. If I followed these rules, we may have made it until halftime. Still, it was an enjoyable afternoon, and this year I'll be brave enough to take both my boys with me.

Once we got to the stadium, we stood in line to buy tickets. It moved fairly quickly and soon we were on our way inside the stadium.

I wanted to be close enough to see all the action on the field, so we got seats along the 50-yard line. Though arriving half an hour early sounded like a good idea, I now had 20 minutes where I needed to entertain my 5-year-old child. I pointed out the players

on the field doing their warm-up stretches. I told him to listen to the band. I showed him everyone wearing orange and blue. I took him to the bathroom. We changed seats... and only five minutes had passed.

After an eternity, the Orange and Blue players went to their respective sidelines. We were Blue. The game started and I told Ben how to follow the ball. We had a good time watching the throwing and hand offs.

After the first quarter, Ben decided he had enough and it was time to go home, with the score 14-0 Blue. We left the stadium and strolled through campus to the parking lot – the shuttle buses

weren't running yet to take us back to our car. Blue ended up winning 27-21.

Incidentally, we went to the Spring Arts Festival the next day. As we were looking at a booth, Ben sang, "DA dada dadada." About five people around us finished the chant, "Go Gators!"

For more information:

Location: University of Florida Ben Hill Griffin Stadium

Web site: www.gatorzone.com/football/

Cost: \$5/ticket

Rating: 😊😊😊😊/😊😊😊😊😊😊



COMMUNITY CALLS FOR A FREESTANDING CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Gainesville families and
pediatricians come together

By Stacy Fournier

Imagine a room packed with injured adults. Several have waited hours to see a doctor. Some are bleeding, others shouting obscenities. One late-night patient lies on the floor, too drunk to find his seat. Imagine taking children into such an atmosphere where they see people they should never see or hear words they should never hear.





The halls (above) and playing area (below) at St. Joseph's Hospital



Heather Greist, a Gainesville mother of three, remembers her trip to the emergency room at Shands AGH with her fevered 1-year-old twins last March. The waiting room was packed with adults, she says, recalling the stomach-turning coughs and the bloody wounds. Her and her husband held their boys tight. After about 20 minutes, nurses took the Greist family to a separate waiting room. They were the only family with children. The staff provided snacks and did the best they could to care for the children, she says.

children just as much, he says. The emergency wing and trauma center employs 12 doctors – all double-board certified in pediatrics and emergency care – and nurses all with specialized pediatric training, he says. Eventually, St. Joseph's Children's Hospital broke ground for a freestanding hospital, Aubin says. The hospitals are connected, located on the same campus and share some services such as laundry, food and expensive equipment. But the medical staff, board and pharmacy are independent. This month, the building is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

"The people tried," Greist says. "But you can tell the difference between doctors and nurses who work with children all day in a pediatrician's office and those who work with all different ages in the E.R."

Currently, there are two University of Florida physicians who specialize in pediatric emergency medicine working in and out of the Shands AGH emergency room. For some medical professionals, this is only one ripple in a whole sea of troubles. Their solution: a freestanding children's hospital in Gainesville.

Hospitals Make the Break

"I fear for my kids or my patients that have to go to the E.R.," says Gainesville mother Dr. Ana Moros-Hanley, who practices at Healthy Steps in Gainesville. "When you enter a children's hospital, it's just another world. It's a child's world."

This world became a reality for St. Joseph's Children's Hospital of Tampa. The children's hospital was in a larger hospital, like Shands Children's Hospital, but pediatric professionals realized the need for a place where staff could focus their resources entirely on children, says Michael Aubin, an administrator at the hospital and a past president for the Florida Association of Children's Hospitals.

About 15 years ago, St. Joseph's built a children's emergency wing, separate from what Aubin calls "adult land." Crying children annoy adults, but injured and hostile adults scare



The lobby at St. Joseph's Children's Hospital greets families with rainbow-colored banners and over-sized tinker toys of blue, red and yellow hanging from the ceiling. The "light, bright and colorful" décor ease young anxiety, Aubin says.

"Part of the healing process for children, or anyone really, is the environment," says Nina Beauchesne, the administrative general manager for Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood, Fla., which embarked on a capital campaign this past November for a freestanding building.

"The patients and families in the [Gainesville] community deserve to have one," says Dr. Sanjeev Tuli, a UF pediatrician at Pediatrics at Haile Plantation.

And, he says, he'd like to see it happen "today."

The Necessity for Separation

"A children's hospital will help us coordinate and deliver care," says Tuli, who struggles to organize care for his patients at Shand's Children's Hospital, especially for children with multiple health problems who need different tests and services.

While Shands offers excellent pediatric programs, they get "mixed in" and "lost in the shuffle," of adult services, Aubin says. If a children's hospital is within another hospital, pediatric staff can too easily be pulled to work with adults on busy days, he says.

"Specialists tend to like to be at a place where the principle focus is on one thing," says UF College of Medicine Dean Bruce Kone, who also sits on the board of directors for Shands Healthcare.

A freestanding children's hospital, focused only on children, will help recruit more pediatric specialists, an unfortunately scarce commodity, Tuli says.

Marci Slayton, a pediatrician at Worthington Pediatrics, says she remembers one of her 4-month-old patients who needed an appointment with pediatric neurology because his head was not growing. The appointment wouldn't be until July – five months later. Some services, like pediatric urology, are nonexistent at Shands, forcing families to travel for care, Slayton says.

Proponents Meet Resistance

In an attempt to improve the system, administration split Shand's Children's Hospital between Shands AGH and Shands at UF a year ago, Kone says. Administration also discussed devoting all of Shands AGH to pediatrics, as "Shands at UF was bursting at the seams," Kone says. However, plans to turn Shands AGH into a children's hospital fell through, and splitting the services only fostered more discontent, he says. The chairman and big proponent of the split left.

Parents didn't know where to take their children, and those who needed services at both hospitals were forced to ride an ambulance between medical facilities, Slayton says. If children at Shands AGH needed an MRI at 2 a.m., they were sent to Shands at UF. Although she refers to the pediatric specialists as phenomenal, Slayton says they are working in a broken system.

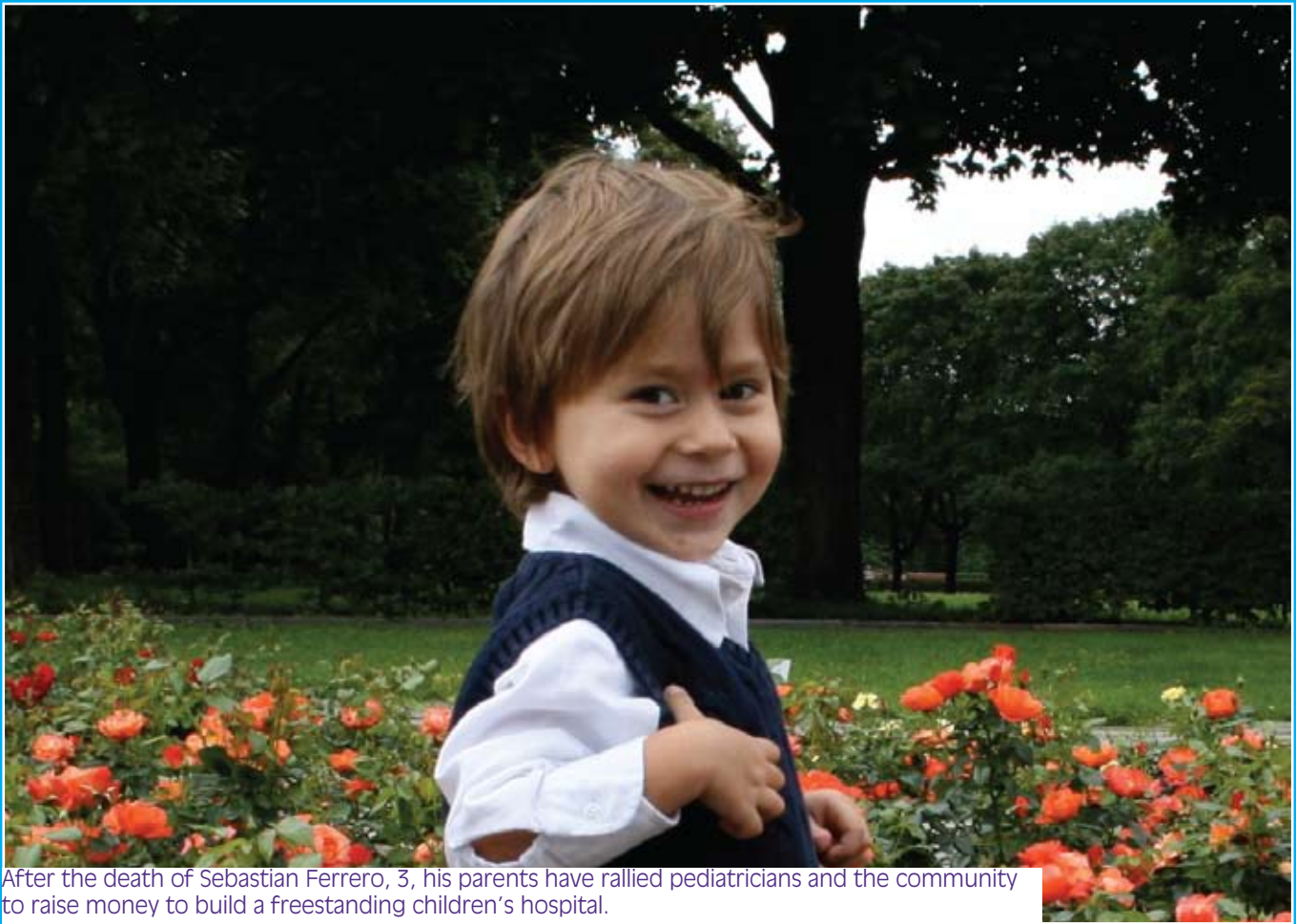
"Pediatric care at big Shands is an afterthought," she says.

UF & Shands plans to reconsolidate pediatric services at Shands at UF by this summer, Kone says. But plans for a freestanding children's hospital are still up in the air.

"A freestanding children's hospital would be a financial burden," Kone says.

Although he says it is the best way to take for children, Kone says he must also consider the financial aspects, like the bad state of the health care system and the declining economy. In addition, Shands is building a cancer research center requiring all its resources, Kone says.

"Big organizations think about the money," says Aubin, of St. Joseph's Children's Hospital. "You have to focus on the community." Kone says he fears a new, expensive building could limit access to care for many children without adequate coverage as the number of people without health insurance is growing. But, he and Shands



After the death of Sebastian Ferrero, 3, his parents have rallied pediatricians and the community to raise money to build a freestanding children's hospital.

leadership still talk about the pediatric need, sometimes in three-to-four-hour meetings, he says.

"We want to provide health care to as many people as possible," Kone says.

Community Focuses on Ferrero

While the issue of building a freestanding hospital in Gainesville pressed on the minds of medical professionals and community members, a tragic event rallied them together – the death of 3-year-old Sebastian Ferrero.

In October 2007, Sebastian died after a routine procedure at the University of Florida Physicians Pediatric Outpatient Clinic.

"He was a beautiful, healthy 3-year-old," says Moros-Hanley, who was his pediatrician.

Sebastian needed a test to check his growth hormones. Medical professionals administered the medicine arginine through an IV. The test turned deadly after a series of mistakes at the clinic and at Shands outpatient pharmacy. In the end, Sebastian received 12 times the correct dose of medicine, Moros-Hanley says.

"It is so easy to make a mistake," Aubin says. "So you have to have people that are constantly thinking about kids, double-checking, triple-checking."

Because medications and dosages differ substantially between children and adults, St. Josephs Children's Hospital developed a pediatric pharmacy team, which constantly meets with pediatricians, Aubin says.

Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital took a similar step by building a separate pediatric pharmacy after a near overdosing, says Beauchesne, the hospital's administrator.

Shands now requires the pharmacy manager to review all IV infusion medication dispensed from the outpatient pharmacy and UF requires any child receiving an arginine infusion to be treated at an infusion center, not an outpatient clinic, according to press releases and statements.

But community members and pediatricians are teaming with the Ferrero family for something bigger. Shortly after his death, his family started The Sebastian Ferrero Foundation. Its goal: to create a state-of-the-art, full-service children's hospital in Gainesville. The cost: about \$300 million. Amount raised as of February: about \$62,000.

“My hope is that the more money we raise, the more we’ll interest Shands,” says Slatyon, who is a member of the foundation’s strategic planning committee.

The foundation plans to fundraise at least 20 percent of the cost with other funding coming from bonds, private investors and state funding, says Horst Ferrero, Sebastian’s father. Members would like to see the hospital built in the next five years, he says.

“It is our wish that Sebastian’s tragic death will serve as a catalyst for a profound change in the way pediatric patients are cared for in Gainesville, so that no other child suffers Sebastian’s fate,” Ferrero says.

The foundation, with about 150 members on its contact list, hopes to work with Shands to give children and their families a separate emergency waiting room and eventually a separate facility, Ferrero says. He says he has had positive meetings with the UF College of Medicine and Shands administrations.

“At this point, we are not discussing our plans with any other hospital system,” he says.

Aubin says he agrees a team approach between the community and Shands would produce the best results for everyone in Gainesville, in addition to reducing the overall cost of the project.

“If I were in the [Gainesville] community, I would be demanding a couple things from Shands,” Aubin says. “They need to have a separate building for children.”

To learn more about The Sebastian Ferrero Foundation, including ways to donate and dates of upcoming community meetings and press conferences, or to participate on committees or in discussion forums, visit www.sebastianferrero.org, call (352) 331-4579 or e-mail sebastianferrerofoundation@gmail.com.

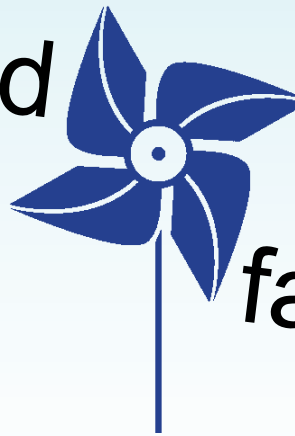


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911 Column:

Window Covering Safety

By Budget Blinds

In the past 16 years, the US Consumer Product Safety Council has received reports of 174 strangulation deaths involving cords and chains on window coverings, according to a CPSC press release. Of these, 152 deaths involved the outer-pull cords, which raise and lower the blind and the last 22 deaths involved the inner-cords, which run through the window blind slats.

Outer-pull cord deaths typically involve children ranging in age from 8-months to 6-years. Inner-cord deaths typically involve children ranging in age from 9-months to 17-months who are placed in cribs or playpens located within reach of window coverings. In all cases, the children became inadvertently entangled and died from strangulation.



In response to these numbers, window-covering manufacturers have redesigned their products to reduce cord hazards, as well as attaching tie-down anchors and built-in cord stops. The redesigns have lessened the hazardous loops in the cords or chains. However, these solutions don't entirely eliminate the problem.

"Repairing or replacing your window coverings is the first line of defense," says CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton in the press release.

Although October has been proclaimed "Window Covering Safety Month," parents can keep their children safe all year round. Parents are urged to inspect the cords and chains of all of their window coverings, consider cordless coverings and replace old window coverings.

About Budget Blinds of Gainesville

Budget Blinds of Gainesville began operation in October of 2004 and is owned and operated by Bruce and Jody Dolsberry of Gainesville. The company proudly serves homeowners and businesses in the Gainesville area, offering complementary in-home estimates and consultations, professional measuring and installation, and a rich selection of quality window treatments including shutters, blinds, cellular shades, faux woods and window film. Budget Blinds works with leading window covering manufacturers such as Norman Shutters, Kathy Ireland Home by Alta, Hunter Douglas and offers its own private label line of window treatments, Signature and Select Series.

In recognition of the potential hazards of window coverings, Budget Blinds, the largest and fastest-growing window covering franchise in the United States, offers the following tips to help homeowners make their window treatment areas safer for children, pets and themselves:

- Place cribs and other low-standing furniture (beds, bookshelves, toy boxes, chairs, etc.) as far away from windows as possible.
- Try to keep all cords out of reach from small children and pets.
- Equip existing window blind cords with safety tassels, or consider using cordless window coverings, which are widely available and cost-efficient.
- Install retractable cords that remain at a constant length when the shade is not being operated, making it less accessible to children and pets.
- Motorize your window coverings to eliminate choking and entanglement hazards from cords.
- Secure all pull cords out of reach by using either a cleat or permanent tie-down device.
- Install window guards, as screens are meant to keep insects out but may not be strong enough to stop a child or pet from falling out a window.

“Our goal is to provide safe and high quality service and products to our customers,” says Jody Dolsberry, co-owner of Budget Blinds of Gainesville. “Budget Blinds applauds the efforts of organizations such as the CPSC and all others that work to protect consumers from potentially dangerous products and situations.”

About the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission

The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer under the agency's jurisdiction. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard or can injure children. For more information, please visit www.cpsc.gov.



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Keeping Childhood Carefree

By Sarah Mendonça McCoy

Most adults I know complain about the level of stress in their lives. Whether it's caused by work, family, health problems, finances, or some combination of the above, we all experience anxiety in our lives. And it seems that as we get older, the levels of stress just continue to rise as we face more responsibility, experience greater challenges, and have more to lose than ever before.

I know that my own stress level has skyrocketed at times since I became a parent. In retrospect, it seems that I was able to manage my life with relative ease before then; but suddenly, I'm constantly weighing the impact of my actions on my children, and my responsibility and concern for them are as constant as the earth's rotation on its axis. This was especially true after my second child was born, when I suddenly felt pulled in multiple directions all at once. I was often overwhelmed when they both needed me at the same time, and even two years after she was born, I still fuse out when the demands of the moment exceed my capabilities as a single human being with only two hands.

While stress is probably inevitable for most adults, and especially for parents, I sometimes worry that our children are experiencing stress far too early in their lives. Whether it's a shy toddler in a large, noisy playgroup, or a preschooler with back-to-back gymnastics and music classes right after preschool, or an elementary school child facing high-stakes testing, our kids are feeling levels of anxiety that were unthinkable 100 years ago, or even 50 years ago.

This has been on my mind a lot recently since my son's prekindergarten program this year suddenly turned our daily routine upside down. Last year, when he wasn't in school at all, our days were largely flexible, and I could adjust our schedule based on how tired the kids were, or how busy the previous day had been, or what they felt like doing.

Now, our whole day has to be structured around his drop-off and pick-up times, and we haven't been able to do our usual fun outings in the morning because then he would be too tired at school in the afternoon. I've had to push my daughter's nap time an hour later, which is pushing back her bedtime and leaving her with less of that critical nighttime sleep. And the challenge of getting both of them to eat their lunch quickly so that I can brush their teeth, put their shoes on, load them in the car, and get him to school on time has been making me more than a little cranky most days. What amazes me is when I think about some of our friends whose kids have even busier schedules, with multiple children who are enrolled in sports, dance, music lessons, and an ever-expanding list of extracurricular options, not to mention children who all attend different schools, each with a different starting time and ending time.

Awhile ago, I read an article about the importance of "unstructured time" for children, and how most children today don't get enough of it. In a way, the article made me laugh, thinking of how parents are already challenged enough trying to schedule enough time for reading time, exercise time, quality time, sleeping time, homework time, practice time and now we're supposed to squeeze in unstructured time, too? Then I started noticing how much happier my kids were on the days when we would just take it easy and hang around at home. They had time to play with their toys, use their imaginations and build their relationship with each other, and I wasn't all wound up about getting everyone ready to go on time. I felt more relaxed, and I had time to sit and play with them a little bit. Even better, I've found that unstructured time is when I get the most of those delightful, spontaneous hugs and kisses, those smiles of pure affection and admiration, those outbursts of playful laughter that are some of the best rewards of being a parent.

My kids are still pretty young, but I have already seen how stress can creep into their lives, and how my own stress level affects their sense of peace and stability. I'm realizing that if I can do a better job of keeping my stress level down, and if I can set a good example about how to handle stressful situations, I can give them a foundation for emotional health that will hopefully have a life-long payoff for them. And I'm learning that, sometimes, a little bit of quiet, unstructured time can go a long way towards making my kids happier people – and making myself a happier mom, too.

There will be plenty of time later on for them to face the stress and anxiety of adult life. They only have a few precious years of childhood in which they can feel carefree and unburdened by jam-packed schedules and the pressure to perform. It won't always be easy for me to insulate them from stress, but I've decided that it's a goal worth pursuing for the whole family's sake. So I'm trying to keep life simple, to make sure they get to play outside a little every day, to sit down on the floor with them for games and general silliness, and to give them time to just be kids. I figure that's the least they deserve to enjoy their childhood while they still can, because I know from experience that there's no going back!



First Annual Reindeer Run

By Jessica Warshaver



Get ready. Get set. GO!

At the signal, a costumed reindeer and a herd of toddlers flock toward the ribbon-draped finish line. Hundreds cheer from the sidelines.

So began TaylorFit for Kids' Reindeer Run. On Dec. 8, over 300 kids piled into Diamond Sports Park in Gainesville. Each was given a complementary reindeer hat and t-shirt for participating.

Children of all ages were welcome to join in on the timed run. Kids 1 to 2 years ran 50 yards in the Diaper Dash, ones 3 to 4 ran 100 yards in the Tot Trot, and the largest group, children in kindergarten through 8th grade, ran a whopping one mile through the park. Each child who finished the run received a ribbon to recognize his or her achievement.

The run was developed by H-E-R-O (Help Eliminate & Reverse Obesity), which was created to motivate children to be physically active and healthy. Julie Douglas, founder of the TaylorFit for Kids, hopes the run inspired kids to see the fun in an active lifestyle.

"Most of these kids actually trained for the event, so it accomplished what it was meant to do by motivating kids to get active," Douglas says.

The park also sported a bounce house and various other games, and the Gainesville Fire Department displayed their truck and gave out free hats.

For those who missed December's run, don't get your running shorts in a twist. H-E-R-O is sponsoring another run in May, and Douglas hopes it will be equally if not even more successful in getting kids moving and exercising in preparation for the big day. The run will take place on the University of Florida campus on May 10. More details will be available soon on the program's Web site, www.taylorfitforkids.com.

"The reason I started Taylorfit for Kids was because I believed that I could provide an opportunity to show kids the fun in fitness and reward them for their dedication to being active," Douglas says. "It seems to be working so far!"





THE ALACHUA COUNTY CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE TURNS 1

By Ashley Mihlebach

This spring, the Alachua County Children's Alliance will celebrate its first year as an active organization, and members certainly have a lot to look forward to.

The alliance is an umbrella organization that unites the county's child welfare agencies. Although Alachua County is a leader in funding services for children, the alliance will enhance its positive impact by ensuring that each program is a part of an integrated system.

More than 130 representatives comprise the alliance from organizations like the Harn Museum of Art, the School Board of Alachua County and Partnership for Strong Families. The ACCA held its first meeting in March 2007, where members discussed their overall goal: a community that values all children and families by providing care from the prenatal stages of child development through the teenage years.

Inspiration to form the alliance was the fact that although many people work hard to fight for children's rights, they never network, says Jim Stringfellow, ACCA vice chair and long-time children's advocate.

"They have to deal with the courts, adoption agencies, foster care agencies and trying to get funding," he says. "They're very involved in what they do, just not each other – until now."

At the alliance's monthly meetings, agencies that fund and provide children's services collaborate to more effectively evaluate the areas where there is too much and too little attention.

The most beneficial part of the alliance so far has been the first few minutes, says Sheriff Sadie Darnell, ACCA chair. Each meeting, a few groups introduce themselves and discuss exactly what their organizations do. The meetings allow organizations to share information about programs and projects and, more importantly, help organizations identify any duplication and gaps in existing services.

Multiple organizations working towards the same goal often vie for the same source of funding, Stringfellow says. Through the alliance, advocates can unite efforts, making it easier to work with local and state government agencies, he says.

Darnell agrees. It leads to better funding and quicker results, she says.

"We are quite candid with each other and what we think will work best. But it's much easier to work together when the end goal is the same."

As for its first project, the alliance decided on the creation of an intergenerational center where everyone, regardless of circumstance, can interact and take part in various activities. Darnell described



the intergenerational center as both a daycare center for children and an activity center for the elderly.

"We have a very active elderly community," Darnell says. "And there are a lot of children that need that kind of parental guidance. It works out very well."

The site, structure and funding for the center are still major issues in the completion of the project, but Darnell says that the centers have been very successful throughout the nation and are worth overcoming the obstacles.

Stringfellow says the center is a more effective plan than programs like those to prevent high school drop-outs, which he refers to as "intervention by band-aid." Programs need to start at infancy, not high school, he says.

Children won't be the only ones who benefit from these strong collaborative efforts, he says. The community's quality of life will also improve as the at-risk children grow up to be active members.

"As neglected and abused children grow up and raise children themselves, the cycle continues," says Stringfellow. "The only way to break the cycle is to catch them at birth."

Projects like the intergenerational center have successfully reduced the number of neglected children, in some areas like Hampton, Va., by 40 percent. Alliance members look to models similar to their project goals and to other children's alliances that have been active longer. Similar children's alliances exist on the city, county

and national level, all devoted to coordinating the efforts of child-welfare organizations.

The Marion County Children's Alliance, formed in 2000, acts as a positive example what Alachua can accomplish. According to the ACCA, the Marion County alliance has "served as a forum for agencies to connect with one another."

In Florida alone, there are 50,000 children in foster care at the Department of Children and Families and 121,000 victims of abuse and neglect. About 100,000 children a year move through

the state juvenile-justice system and 11,000 children are in locked up in state custody. Most children's services work to help the local average of 1,800 neglected and abused children in Alachua County, Stringfellow says.

The high numbers are not the only problem. Darnell says there are great difficulties in reaching out to children and families in need of assistance.

"Children are very resilient, but they need a voice," she says.

"They have to deal with the courts, adoption agencies, foster care agencies and trying to get funding. They're very involved in what they do, just not each other - until now."

- Jim Stringfellow, Alachua County Children's Alliance vice chair

The alliance has functioned solely with the help and donation of their members and has applied for status as an accredited non-profit organization.

"It's been a wonderful community experiment so far," says Stringfellow. "It's working, but it takes a community to believe in it."

For more information or to get involved in the Alachua County Children's Alliance, check out its Web site at www.alachuacountychildrealliance.com



Adeline is still learning to properly sign more

TOO SOON TO TALK SO MUCH TO SAY

By Stacy Fournier

Parents turn to sign language to communicate with their youngsters

Thirteen-month-old Adeline sat in her highchair. It was dinner time.

“Do you want to eat?” her mother asked.

Adeline raised her right hand, pinched all five fingertips together and emphatically touched her lips over and over again.

Mommy scooped mac ‘n’ cheese onto her tray.

With her gums and only a few teeth, Adeline gnawed on the food;

cheese smeared over her cheeks. But the noodles began to run low. Adeline pinched her fingertips together again on both hands. This time she frantically tapped her hands together.

Although no words were spoken, Adeline’s mom knew exactly what her daughter wanted: more mac ‘n’ cheese. The two were communicating using Baby Signs, which parents Bryan and Suzanne Conrad began teaching Adeline when she was 6 months old.

More often, parents are turning to Baby Signs as a way to communicate with their infants and toddlers, even though they have

no hearing problems, says Michelle Freas, a Baby Signs instructor at Santa Fe Community College. Toddlers usually cannot verbally communicate until around 12 to 18 months but can start signing before their first birthday.

And while some believe Baby Signs impedes a child's speech, research is proving quite the opposite, Freas says.

Baby Signs, a national corporation developed in the early 1990s, became a common term after "Meet the Fockers" hit theaters in 2004, she says. In the movie, a little boy signs words like "milk."

Now, Baby Signs is traveling across the border to Canada and overseas to Japan.

According to Freas, Baby Signs has its roots in American Sign Language. In fact, about 90 percent of the Baby Signs are identical to ASL signs. But some signs are just too difficult for little hands and must be modified and adapted to the limited dexterity of a baby's fingers. Baby Signs focuses on words commonly used in a toddler's world including animal, mealtime and playtime vocabulary.

The Conrads enrolled in a Baby Signs class at SFCC when Adeline was 6 months old, the minimum age to participate. They wanted to avoid the soon-to-come frustration of watching their daughter point and whine "ah, ah, ah" every time she wanted something, Suzanne says.

Now, when Adeline wants milk, she simply squeezes her hand into a fist over and over.

Freas says parents can start signing to their child at birth, but must be prepared to wait a while before witnessing the first sign coming back. She advises parents to start around 6 months and, although each child is different, tells them to expect a return sign sometime around 12 months.

Mealtime signs are best for starters, she says, but sticking to one sign at a time is most important, especially for beginners.

Adeline used her first sign, "eat," at 11 months, Suzanne says. Now she knows "more," "dog," "thank you" and "all done." Next on the list are "daddy" and "cheese."

"Sign language is used like a tool," says University of Florida professor Michael Tuccelli, who has been teaching American Sign Language at the university for 13 years. "It allows babies to express themselves before they can speak."

A child's brain is ready to communicate long before he or she can actually vocalize a word, Tuccelli says. By teaching an infant to sign, parents can begin communicating with their baby months before usual.

"It's a natural form of development," Freas says. Babies already use gestures as their "first language," like when they reach their hands in the air to be picked up. Baby Signs allows infants to build on these gestures.

While many parents are jumping on the sign language bandwagon head first, others are hesitant. Some fear their child will rely solely on sign language to communicate, delaying their vocalization, Freas says.

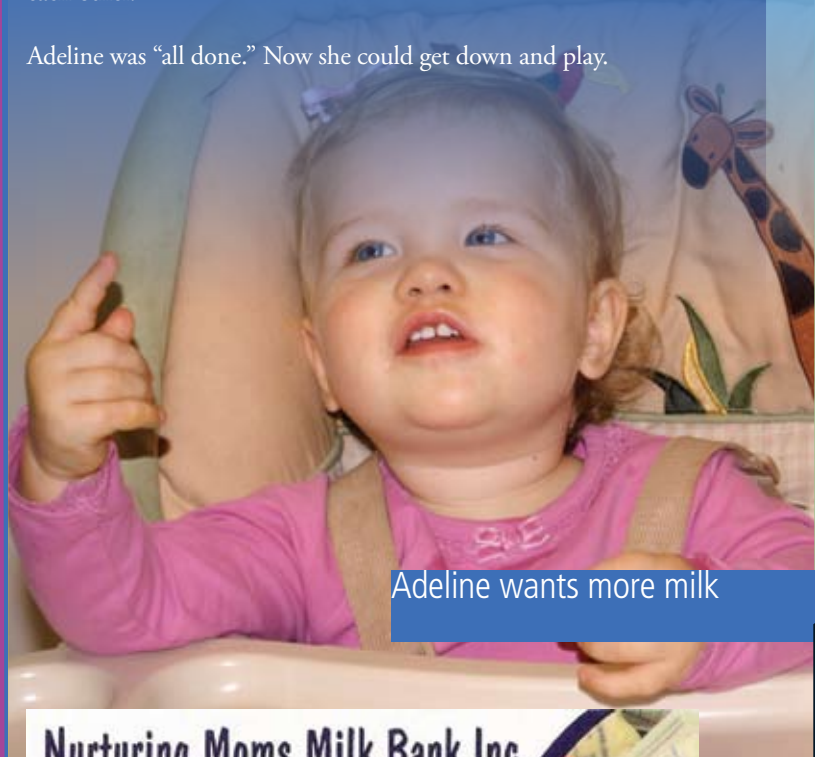
But on the contrary, Tuccelli says using sign language actually increases a child's ability to speak. In fact, research shows that a 4-year-old who used Baby Signs will have the language development of a 5-year-old who did not, Freas says.

By learning the sign for a given word, a child locks that word into their memory and eventually moves the visual image of the sign to the auditory part of the brain, Tuccelli says.

Although it is natural for children to stop using Baby Signs, it doesn't have to go away forever, Freas says. Children who use Baby Signs have a great foundation for fluency in American Sign Language, the fourth most-used language in America.

Communicating with sign also increases infants and toddlers' independence, self-esteem and pride, she says - feelings quite evident on Adeline's smiling face as she finished her mac 'n' cheese. Adeline turned her palms down and moved her hands away from each other.

Adeline was "all done." Now she could get down and play.



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Weekend Parenting

AN SFCC SAINTS BASKETBALL GAME

By Gayle Shlafer

In a city usually decorated with orange and blue, sometimes it's hard to remember there is another game in town. The Santa Fe Community College Saints play basketball, baseball and softball, so the boys and I decided to spend one afternoon taking in a basketball game.

We piled into the car and drove to the Santa Fe gymnasium. I didn't see any signs directing us where to go or where to park, but I think that's because the game seemed a fairly low-key event. However, I knew where the gym was, so the lack of signage wasn't that much of a problem.

There was no line to get in and plenty of seating available. The games were open seating and there was no designation of sides. The boys wanted to sit at the top of the bleachers, so up we climbed, sitting behind the officials' bench.

We watched the warm-ups, then each team gathered together before lining up center court. The players shook hands with the opposing team and I could tell my boys that although they're competing, sportsmanship is still very important. Then the buzzer sounded, starting the game.

Sammy immediately covered his ears with his hands and stayed that way the entire half. The officials blew whistles, the players' shoes squeaked on the court and music blared during time outs. It was noisier than I expected. Ben handled it mostly well, but he, too, covered his ears each time the buzzer sounded.

I don't know much about basketball. I know the ball has to go into the basket and you have a certain amount of time to try a shot. I know you need to keep your hands to yourself when someone else is driving towards the basket, but you can put your body in the way. I don't know anything about the defense, strategy or the skill needed. A woman seated near us explained each play to her son. I admit, I was jealous that she knew so much more than I did.

When the half was over, the Saints were ahead 40-35, but we left the game. Sammy and Ben both thought it was too noisy and they had more fun running around the front of the gym. I enjoyed it and will try to convince them that we should return for another game. The Saints ended up winning 72-66 in overtime.

When I asked them about their favorite parts of the afternoon, both boys said watching the team shoot baskets. Now that I know about the noise factor, I can better prepare the boys the next time we take in a sporting event.

Going to a Saints game is a good way to see if your child would like watching without having to pay the higher orange and blue prices. Though I gave it a low rating, I was very glad we went, and I had a good time. If you have a child who is into sports, I would definitely recommend this as a weekend activity.

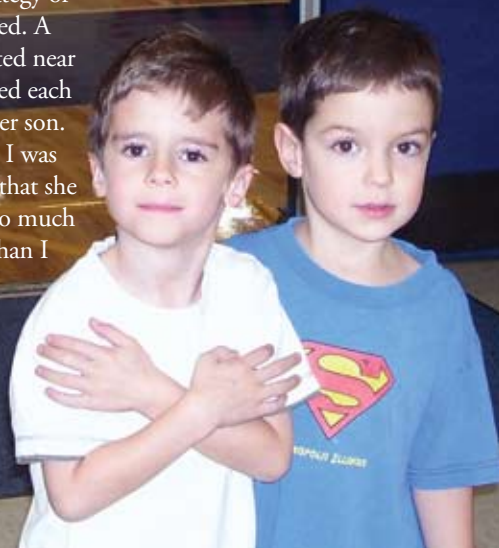
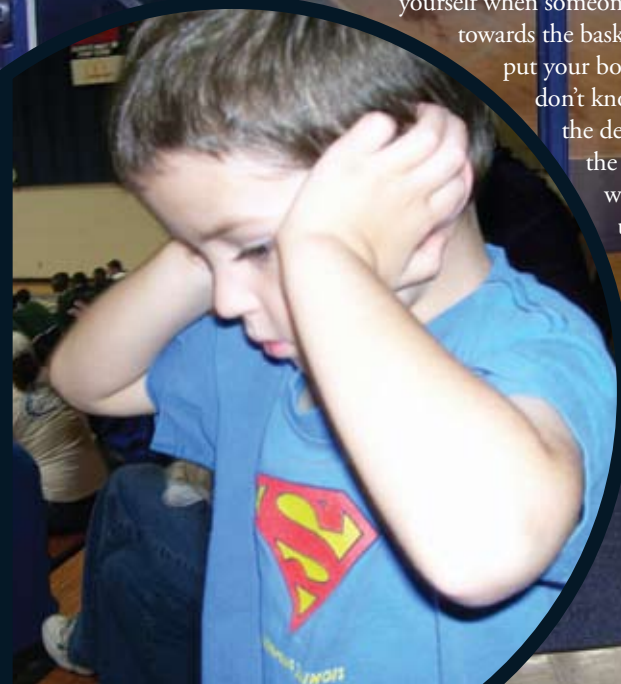
For more information:

Location: Santa Fe Community College, 3000 NW 83rd St.

Web site: <http://inst.sfcc.edu/~hes/>

Cost: \$5/adults, \$3/children

Rating: ☺☺ / ☺☺☺☺☺☺



Turning Over a New Leaf: Resolutions for Greener Living

10 Easy Ways to Make the Planet Cleaner

By Sarah Mendonça McCoy

Habits are hard to change, and the busier we are, the harder it can be. For parents struggling to manage a household, it's a challenge just to keep up with our kids' changing needs, let alone trying to revamp our lifestyle. But since we keep hearing more and more about global warming, environmental pollution, and toxins in our food and our children's toys, maybe this is a good time to change a few habits. Those of us who are parents can't help but wonder about the world that our children will inherit from us, and the long-term effects of all this pollution and climate change. But where do we start?

Several years ago, my husband and I decided to start using canvas shopping bags instead of accepting new plastic bags every time we went to the store. This habit took us months to change. First, we had to acquire the canvas bags. Then, we had to remember to bring them in the car when we went shopping. Once we'd done that, we kept forgetting the bags in the car. Then we would forget to give them to the cashier. We were proud of ourselves when we finally brought our first grocery load home in canvas bags, but then... we had to remember to put the bags back in the car for the next grocery trip. But now, after lots of failed attempts, this habit has become almost automatic for us. We even take them to Target and the mall, even though we often get funny looks.

There's more ways you can make a positive impact on the environment. Here are 10 habits that are relatively easy to follow and will make a big difference in leading a greener lifestyle:

1. REUSABLE GROCERY BAGS: Over a billion single-use plastic bags are given by stores each day, according to www.reuseablebags.com. The manufacturing of plastic bags requires petroleum and often natural gas, which are non-renewable resources that increase our dependency on foreign suppliers. Still worse, the manufacturing process creates global warming emissions, and also allows toxic chemicals to get into our water supply. So, whether your bags are made of bamboo or canvas or cotton or recycled plastic, when you reuse them, you're making a really big difference!

2. REUSABLE DRINK CONTAINERS: Guess what else is clogging up our environment? Plastic water bottles! They have the same problems that plastic bags do, except that they require even more resources to manufacture, and take longer to break down. Buy yourself a reusable drink container, preferably made of stainless steel to avoid the toxic chemicals in plastic drink bottles, and refill it with filtered tap water. Or bring coffee to work in a stainless steel thermos, instead of using a new Styrofoam cup each day.

Some great stainless steel containers are made by Kleen Kanteen in a variety of sizes and with several different kinds of spouts.

3. TURN YOUR ENGINE OFF: This might not be practical in the middle of the sweltering summer heat, but during the rest of the year, try not to let your engine idle while you sit in your parked car. Whether you are at the drive-through ATM or waiting for someone to run a quick errand, turning your engine off for even a minute or less will cut down on your carbon emissions.

4. HAZARDOUS WASTE: Remember that anything that goes in the garbage or down the drain ends up in our water supply, which is where we get our drinking water, and which gets into the food that we eat. Any toxic household wastes, such as paint, paint thinner, household cleaners, and car fluids, should go to the local hazardous waste facility.

5. LET YOUR DISHES AIR-DRY: Using the heat cycle on your dishwasher requires a lot of electricity, and so does your clothes dryer, and your hair dryer, and anything else that produces heat. Heat also tends to cause plastics to break down, releasing toxic chemicals. So save some energy by letting those dishes dry through good old-fashioned water evaporation.

6. USE NON-TOXIC CLEANERS: It's hard to believe, but you can very effectively clean and disinfect your house without using anything that is toxic to living things! Natural ingredients such as vinegar, lemon juice, and baking soda work perfectly well and also cost a lot less. For example, to clean your drains, just combine baking soda and vinegar, and flush with boiling water. Lemon juice can remove mildew, and corn starch will deodorize your carpet. If you don't want to make your own cleaners, consider buying a brand like Seventh Generation or Method, and avoid chlorine bleach as much as possible.



7. **BUY ORGANIC:** When my husband first suggested this to me, I immediately replied, "But we can't afford it!" Now that I know more, I have a hard time buying non-organic items, because I'm aware of the effects on my health, my kids' health and the environment. Fortunately, organic grocery items are becoming more affordable, and prices will continue to drop as the organic market expands. Even if you only buy one organic item, like milk or apples or cereal, you'll be reducing the amount of pesticide in our environment.

8. **GET A NEW SHOWER HEAD:** Water-saving devices for faucets and showers can save up to 20 percent of hot water usage – meaning a lower electric bill and fewer carbon emissions. Using a faucet aerator will reduce the amount of water flow without reducing the water pressure, so you might not even notice the difference!

9. **BUY LOCAL:** Buying locally produced meat, produce, and dairy products helps the environment in many ways, and also helps the local economy. When food has less distance to travel, there is less fuel required, less carbon emissions, less packaging,

and best of all, the food retains more of its nutritional value. Consider shopping at local farmer's markets (downtown on Wednesdays from 4 to 7 p.m., or in Haile Village on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon) and look for foods labeled "locally grown" at the grocery store. If you don't see locally grown foods at your store, then ask for them!

10. **CUT BACK ON JUNK MAIL.** Cancel your catalogs. It just takes a few minutes of calling the companies and asking them to remove you from their mailing list. There are also some services that will ensure that you won't get any more credit card offers or other junk mail items, such as www.greendimes.com and www.optoutprescreen.com

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Psychologist

Tom Dikel

Thomas Dikel is a doctor of psychology with a Ph.D. from a joint developmental and clinical psychology program at the University of Minnesota. He works in a private practice in Gainesville with Counseling Associates and has advanced training in child neuropsychology. He's treated children for several agencies, including the Department of Children and Families, States Attorney's Office, Child Protection Team, Guardian ad Litem, State and Federal Public Defenders' offices. He's also a parent.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

In the last issue I wrote a column in which I discussed a recent medical emergency. As I don't want this column to become self-oriented, I will simply say for anyone who may be interested that I underwent surgery on November 14; the surgery was reportedly successful and the tumor benign. With those glad tidings I will cease to discuss the subject.

As we enter 2008, thousands of men and women are returning from Afghanistan and Iraq with wounds both physical and psychological. It is increasingly important for us to understand trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is by no means exclusive to combat and warfare: Most people in the United States with PTSD are women and children. PTSD research, and knowledge about the disorder has been government funded and focused on male combat veterans. PTSD can also be caused by sexual and physical assault, child maltreatment, witness to extreme violence, natural and man-made disasters, and terrorism.

PTSD is defined first by exposure to a traumatic event in which someone experienced, witnessed or was confronted with death or the threat of death, serious injury, or a threat to the "physical integrity" of one's self or others. The event was experienced with intense fear, helplessness or horror. Children may appear disorganized or agitated. There are three primary symptom groups: re-experiencing (recurrent intrusive memories, dreams/nightmares, flashbacks, psychological or physical distress when reminded of the trauma), avoidance (attempts to avoid reminders, amnesia, detachment, emotional numbness), and hyper arousal (sleep problems, rage, concentration problems, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response). To meet the diagnosis, individuals must have

meet one or more reexperiencing criteria, three or more avoidance criteria, and two or more hyperarousal criteria. Problems must last more than one month and cause "clinically significant" distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

As with most mental health issues and disorders, PTSD is defined by diagnostic criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Forth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). It was first presented in DSM-II, in 1980.

The first DSM was published in 1952, while close to 260,000 American troops fought in Korea. It included a Gross Stress Reaction for cases involving severe physical demands or extreme emotional stress (including combat), applied to normal individuals attempting to cope with overwhelming fear. It was considered generally treatable.

The second edition of DSM was released in 1968, with nearly 850,000 draftees brought into the war in Vietnam and a January draft call that would raise that number to nearly one million. Gross Stress Reaction was removed and replaced with Adjustment Reactions of Adult Life. Examples of such reactions included unwanted pregnancy, accompanied by resentment and depressive tone and mani-

fested by hostile complaints and suicidal gestures; fear of combat manifested by trembling, running, and hiding, and; capital criminals facing a death sentence providing approximate incorrect answers. So between 1968 and 1980, American mental health professionals based their interactions with veterans on the official view that an entity such as PTSD did not exist. A senior psychiatrist in charge of a large Veterans Authority (VA) psychiatric service reported he believed that a substantial number of "so-called PTSD" cases in Vietnam veterans were more likely a syndrome of perceptual and imagery derangement due to excessive smoking of marijuana during the war.



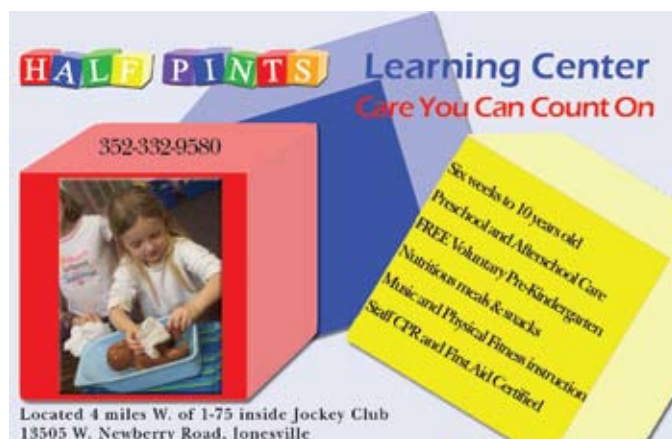
Thankfully, attitudes have changed. However, the VA system is overrun. Moreover, the military and the VA have restrictions on who can be referred – family members of veterans who returned with extreme personality changes, terrible wounds, cognitive impairment or those suffering from the death of loved ones are often not covered.

Well over a million troops have been deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Persian Gulf since September 2001, with some 300,000 deployed more than once. Returning combat veterans who need or could benefit from counseling may avoid mental health treatment for fear of jeopardizing their career. In fact thousands of U.S. soldiers and Marines in Iraq, as many as ten per day, are being discharged by the military for mental health reasons. According to an article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch this past October, the Pentagon maintains that the problems are not due to the war -- rather, it claims the discharged had "pre-existing conditions" that disqualify them for treatment by the government. The Pentagon saves money, however, many who are actually suffering from combat-related problems don't get the help they need. Over 20,000 troops with alleged pre-existing personality disorders have been "kicked out." Meanwhile, untreated psychological problems contribute to the highest suicide rate among the military in 25 years, and one in four homeless are veterans.

Barbara Romberg, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist from Washington D.C., is making a difference. Over the last two to three years, she has built an organization called Give an Hour (GAH), a nonpolitical organization that offers mental health counseling to returning veterans and their families at no charge. Over 800 practitioners have been recruited from all over the United States to provide one hour per week of therapy or counseling at no cost to the veterans or their families. Romberg has made it clear that she expects to work in partnership with the VA and other military service providers. GAH will offer services including individual, marital, family, therapy, substance abuse counseling and treatment for PTSD. Services are offered to parents, siblings, and unmarried partners not entitled to receive mental health benefits through the military.

For more information, access the GAH Web site at: www.givean-hour.org, or write to Romberg in care of Give an Hour, PO Box 5918, Bethesda, MD 20824-5918. I am also a member of the GAH Advisory Board and can be reached at Gainesville Parenting.

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HELPING KIDS COPE

How parents can help their child understand and accept death

By Megan Heron

Whether it's a goldfish named Mikey or a close relative, explaining death to a child and helping them grieve can be a difficult task. Most of us have had the shoulder of a companion during tough times, but what happens when we have to play the supportive role?

"Parents need to at least be aware that developmentally, children understand the concept of death and loss differently at different ages," says Carol Burns, co-founder of the Children's Bereavement Center in Miami. "What you would tell a 5-year-old, an 8-year-old and a 15-year-old would be the same in terms of your honesty and simplicity."

Younger children may not understand that the person will never come home, Burns says. They may understand loss, but the permanence of death differs with age. As a result, children who are younger than 10 and experience a death may act out later when they really start to understand its solidity. Parents and schools might see kids acting out again in fifth or sixth grade, and not understand why.

"Children grieve and re-grieve throughout their lives, and honesty and simplicity are first and foremost," Burns says.

Nina Powell, manager of bereavement services at Haven Hospice, says parents should talk to children on their level of understanding, and advises against using euphemisms. Associating death with sleep or God can be dangerous because young children are concrete thinkers; such metaphors could cause conflict between the child and sleep or God. Lying or using euphemisms can also cause children to fantasize about the worst-case scenario, which is always worse than reality. Children, like adults, can imagine connections between how their actions affected the loss.

"A 6-year-old might think since he didn't eat his peas, his Daddy left the house angry and got hit by a drunk driver. He might think that if he ate his peas, Daddy would still be alive," Powell says.

When explaining death to a child of any age, Burns suggests first sitting in a neutral room. Avoid bedrooms and kitchens because the child needs to sleep and eat.

Parents should keep the conversation simple, and pause afterward so the child has a chance to ask questions.

"This gives you a moment to gather your thoughts, and to really see how they perceive the situation," Burns says. "A 5-year-old

might say 'oh' and then run outside to play because that's all his little body can handle."

The best way to get a child to talk about his feelings is by spending one-on-one time with them, Powell says. If a child enjoys finger-painting or playing basketball, the parent should join in. Parents may be surprised by how much a child opens up.

"You could be driving down the interstate when they ask a question," Powell says. "If they don't want to talk, they won't. It has to be when they're ready."

When arrangements for the funeral and services are made, the child should be invited to participate in family rituals. Whether it means attending the funeral or writing a note to put in the casket, most children want to be involved in some way. Powell suggests giving them options. By explaining the funeral process, giving them an option to attend, or leave early if they're uncomfortable allows for closure.

"They're little adults," she says. "Protecting them doesn't necessarily work. They are a part of the family, and you need to share with them."

Diana Schuh recently answered questions about death when her son Harry, 9, learned of actor Heath Ledger's death. Schuh, who was once a counselor at a public mental health center in Georgia, says she tries to keep conversations simple, and lets him lead with questions.

Harry asked how the actor died. Schuh offered what information she knew, and admitted she didn't have all the answers. When Harry was 4 and his goldfish Mikey died, Schuh decided to leave the fish in the bowl until he came home from school.

"I wanted to make sure he saw Mikey, and I gave him a choice of what to do with him."

The two buried Mikey in the backyard, which Schuh believes helped give Harry closure.

Harry and Schuh also had a cat that died. Winkie had kidney problems, and Schuh asked her son if he wanted to go with them to the veterinarian. He was given the option to go in the office or wait in the lobby, and he chose to go inside. After she was put down, the two took Winkie home to be buried. Like Mikey, she was buried in the backyard.

"It was all terribly sad and hard, but I think he got through the process a lot faster," she says.

Burns says that while grieving and dealing with the aftermath of a loss, there is no rush to do anything. Parents shouldn't feel the need to remove pictures and memories.

"Although the person has died, the relationship still continues," she says, "and a family that has a good support system can prevail over a significant loss."



Recommended Reading

Carol Burns suggested books for both children and adults that can help teach about death.

1) *The Brightest Star* by Kathleen Maresh Hemery.

The story of a girl whose mother died, and how her father helped her cope.

2) *When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death* by Laurie Krasny Brown
A book that answers children's questions, fears and curiosity about death.

3) *Talking about Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child* by Earl A. Grollman
A guide for children and parents to understand death, and learn where to get support.

4) *Never too Young to Know: Death in Children's Lives* by Phyllis R. Silverman
A combination of research, history and individual stories combined to help parents talk to their children.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hershey's Kisses

Valentine's Day may have passed, but no one can ever pass up a bag of Hershey's Kisses! All year round, the drops of chocolate are dressed in their seasonal attire to satisfy the sweet tooth of people all over the country and beyond.

By Stacy Fournier

The History of Hershey's Kisses

Hershey's Kisses were first produced on July 7, 1907, seven years after the Hershey's Milk Chocolate bar, in Hershey, Pa. Covered in a simple silver foil with no flag, or "plume," coming from the top, these chocolates were hand-wrapped, according to the Hershey's Web site.

It wasn't until 1921 that automated wrapping machines wrapped and adorned Kisses with the familiar white flag. With factories in Pennsylvania, California and Virginia, Hershey's produces more than 80 million Kisses every day -- and if that doesn't seem like a lot of Kisses, it adds up to over 29 billion Hershey's Kisses in one year!

Today's machines are capable of wrapping up to 1,300 kisses every minute, which is almost 22 Kisses a second!

But the history of Hershey's Kisses entered a dark point in 1942. There were no Kisses to be found for seven years because of World War II's rationing of silver foil, keeping the factory from producing Kisses until 1949, according to Kiss Connections, a Hershey's publication full of company information and recipes.

Following this brief lull in their history, Hershey's Kisses soared to new heights, combining a classic candy with innovative colors and variety.

The Evolution of Hershey's Kisses

According to Hershey's, Kisses made their first appearance in colored wrappers in 1962. Red, green and silver foils filled the shelves for the holiday season. However, it wasn't for another 24 years that Valentine's Kisses became available in red and silver foil.

In addition to the "splash of color," a term used by Hershey's to describe the new wrappers, different types of Kisses were also added to the Hershey's family. In 1990, Kisses with almonds, wrapped in gold foil, hit shelves, according to Kiss Connections.

And, what's a kiss without a hug, right? Given its name because of the Mini Kisses "hugged" by white chocolate, Hershey's Hugs were produced in 1993. Ten years later, dark chocolate Kisses were introduced, followed by Kisses with caramel in 2004.



Along with many permanent additions to the Hershey's Kisses family, Hershey's has also offered a variety of other limited favors. There are Kisses filled with peanut butter, chocolate truffle or mint truffle and candy cane mint, strawberry, toffee, fudge or strawberry Kisses. For an even more outrageous twist on the silver-wrapped Kisses, Hershey's also introduced both milk and dark chocolate Kissables -- miniature Kisses coated in colorful candy shells.

The Loving Side of Hershey's Kisses

While grabbing a bag of red and silver Kisses sets the mood for Valentine's Day, there are other special ways to share Kisses with those you love. The Hershey's Web site offers personalized Hershey's Kisses, which allow you to include any message on the flag.

But regardless of what Hershey's kisses say, how they look or what new flavor they come in, they'll remain an important part of Valentine's Day sweets and the Feb. 14 festivities for years to come.

Sweetheart Layer Bars

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter/margarine, divided
- 1 ½ cups finely crushed unsalted thin pretzels
- 1 cup Hershey's Mini Kisses Brand Milk Chocolates
- 1 can (14 ounces) sweetened condensed milk (not evaporated milk)
- ¾ cup Hershey's Cocoa
- 2 cups Mounds Sweetened Coconut Flakes, tinted pink (Put 1 teaspoon water and ½ teaspoon red food color in small bowl)

Instructions

1. Heat oven to 350° F.
2. Put ¾ cup butter in 13x9x2-inch baking pan and place it in oven until butter melts. Remove pan from oven and stir in crushed pretzels. Evenly press pretzels into bottom of pan. Sprinkle chocolates over pretzel layer.
3. Place sweetened condensed milk, cocoa and remaining ¼ cup butter in small bowl. Microwave on high (100 percent) 1 to 1 ½ minutes or until mixture is melted and smooth when stirred. Carefully pour mixture over pretzel layer. Top with coconut, firmly pressing it into chocolate layer.
4. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until lightly browned around edges. Cool completely in pan or on wire rack.
5. Cut into heart-shaped pieces with cookie cutters or into bars.

Source: Kiss Connections

Did You Know?

Shamrocks vs. Four-leaf Clovers

Two Irish symbols, often used interchangeably, vie for their independence

By Stacy Fournier

Ah yes, it's that time of year again. Mischievous leprechauns are up to no good, green is the new black and you better not get caught wearing an outfit without the day's famous color, or you might suffer through a few pinches! Some people wear a shirt with a four-leaf clover for good luck and others buy headbands with antenna-like shamrocks. But wait... is there a difference? Although both are types of clovers, shamrocks and four-leaf clovers hold two very different meanings.

Shamrocks

The shamrock, now the most nationally recognized symbol of Ireland, rose to fame because of its symbolism, according to Encarta encyclopedia online. Although many legends of St. Patrick exist, one piece of history remains - the saint's use of the shamrock to represent Christianity's holy Trinity.

Around 440 A.D., St. Patrick, a stoutly religious man, traveled through Ireland to spread Christianity, according to About.com. To explain the trinity, St. Patrick looked down and plucked a shamrock growing by his feet. The first leaf: the Father. The second leaf: the Son. The third leaf: the Holy Ghost.

According to LollySmith.com, a Web site devoted to selling and educating people about shamrocks and four-leaf clovers, the word shamrock comes from the Irish word seamróg meaning "little clover." Because many types of clover plants fall under this umbrella term, historians struggle to determine exactly which clover species St. Patrick found at his feet that day.

Some speculate the hop clover is the original shamrock, according to Encarta. Other Web sites designate the white clover as the real deal. Regardless of the type, any trifoliate - or three-leaf clover - constitutes a shamrock and represents the Trinity.

Four-leaf Clovers

Unlike the shamrock, a four-leaf clover, as implied by its clever name, has four leaves and is commonly considered a symbol of luck opposed to a representation of the Trinity. Although historians are uncertain, many believe the four-leaf clover dates back to the pagan period when Celtic priests designated it as a charm to fight evil spirits, according to About.com. Like the shamrock, each leaf of a four-leaf clover possesses its own meaning. The first leaf: faith. The second: hope. Third: love. And of course, the fourth leaf represents luck.

But four-leaf finders are luckier than they realize: only one four-leaf clover grows for every 10,000 shamrocks, according to Lollysmith.com. Unfortunately, there is no four-leaf clover seed,

just patience and a lot of luck. Also, some plants may seem to bear four-leaf clovers that aren't the true lucky leaf, according to lollysmith.com. The *Oxalis deppei* plant produces nothing but four-leaf look-alikes. Not too lucky to come across when every sprout is four-leaved. However, it's often used in place of the true rare find. A trick to tell the difference: a true four-leaf clover has three leaves of equal size with the fourth leaf just a bit smaller than the others.

So while they're both green and both clovers, shamrocks and four-leaf clovers serve as symbols for two very different things. A shamrock has three leaves. It represents the Trinity. A four-leaf clover cannot be called a shamrock. It has four leaves and symbolizes Irish luck. Hopefully now that you know your Irish facts, that mischievous little leprechaun will cut you some slack... but wear some green just to be sure!

Grow Shamrocks!

Grow your own shamrocks for St. Patrick's Day by following these basic steps. Maybe you'll be lucky enough to sprout a four-leaf clover!

Materials:

- Small planting pots or trays
- Any moist, well-drained soil
- Packaged seed starting mix

Steps:

1. Fill the pot or tray with soil.
2. Distribute seeds on the soil surface and cover them with additional soil. Use ¼ teaspoon seeds for every square foot of area.
3. Put the pot or tray in a shaded location until the seeds germinate. (This will take about a week.)
4. Keep the soil moist. Do not allow it to dry out.
5. After the seeds germinate and leaves appear, move the pot or tray to a sunny location.
6. When two to three clovers appear, begin fertilizing the plant with an all-purpose fertilizer. Follow the fertilizer's specific directions.
7. If necessary, thin-out any weak clovers. The plant should fill out in six to eight weeks.

Note: Shamrocks can grow indoors or outdoors.

Source: www.fourleafclover.com

Home Remedies for Winter's Pesky Woes

Warmer spring weather is coming soon, but cold and flu season isn't over yet. Try these home remedies in place of over-the-counter or prescription medicines.

By Sara Ajluni

Colds

1. Chicken soup. It's one of the best hot fluids you can consume when you have a cold. Scientists believe the soup's fumes release the mucus in your nose and help your body fight against viral invaders. Chicken soup also contains cysteines, which are good at thinning mucus. Also, the soup provides easily absorbed nutrients.

2. Honey. Make your own cough syrup by mixing together 1/4 cup honey and 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar. Pour the mixture into a jar or bottle and seal tightly. Shake well before using. Take 1 tablespoon every four hours.

3. Sesame oil. Dry nasal passages are breeding grounds for the cold virus. Although doctors typically recommend saline nose drops to keep nasal passages moist, a recent study compared saline drops to sesame oil. People who used sesame oil had an 80 percent improvement in their nasal dryness while the people who used traditional saline drops had a 30 percent improvement. Try rubbing a drop around the inside of the nostrils next time!

Coughs

1. Honey. Honey has long been used in traditional Chinese medicine for coughs because it's a natural expectorant, promoting the flow of mucus. Mix 1 honey into 1 cup hot water and enjoy. Squeeze some lemon juice in if you want a little tartness.

2. Garlic. Garlic is one of nature's best cures for coughs. It's full of antibiotic and antiviral properties — plus, garlic is an expectorant, so it helps you cough up stubborn bacteria and/or mucus in your lungs. Some experts advise eating it raw, but swallowing the recommended four to eight raw garlic cloves a day is hard for most people



to stomach. So if you make a pasta sauce, put the garlic in at the last moment (because heat can spoil garlic's effectiveness). Or, toss garlic slices into your salad.

Dry hair

1. Don't overdo the shampoo. Shampooing too often is one of the most common causes of dry hair.

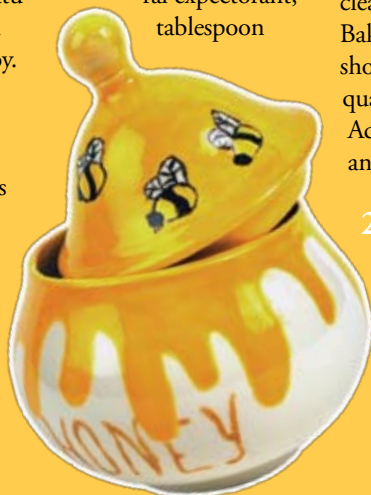
Many people believe that squeaky-clean hair is healthy hair, so they wash it one or more times every day. But, shampoos often contain cleaning agents that can strip away your hair's natural oils. On the other hand, a gentle shampoo will stimulate the oil glands, so you probably shouldn't go longer than three days without a good lather.

2. Pour the hot oil. Hair-care professionals often recommend hot oil treatments to repair dry, damaged hair. Over-the-counter hot oil products are available that you heat and place on the hair, according to package instructions. Wear a plastic bag or shower cap over your hair while the hot oil is on, then wash the hair thoroughly with a gentle shampoo.

Dry skin

1. Baking soda. Instead of using an abrasive dishwashing cleanser, try sprinkling skin-friendly baking soda in your dishwater. Baking soda is also a skin-friendly alternative to jumping in a hot shower. Try a sponge bath using 4 tablespoons baking soda to 1 quart water. A baking soda soak is a folk remedy to relieve itching. Add 1 cup baking soda to a tub of hot water. Soak for 30 minutes and air dry.

2. Oatmeal. Adding instant oatmeal to your bath will soothe your skin. The oats are packed with vitamin E, a nutrient vital to healthy skin. Oatmeal is also used as a folk remedy for treating dry, chapped hands. Rub your hands with wet oatmeal instead of soap. Dry your hands with a towel, then rub them with dry oatmeal.





3. Vinegar. Try this for chapped hands: Wash and dry hands thoroughly, then apply vinegar. Put on a pair of soft gloves and leave them on overnight.

Flu

1. Broth. Canned broth, whether it's beef, chicken or vegetable, will keep you hydrated and help liquefy any mucous secretions. Broth is easy to keep down, even when you have no appetite, and will provide at least some nutrients.

2. Tea. A cup of hot tea is just another way to take your fluids, which are essential when you have the flu. Just be sure to choose decaffeinated varieties, as caffeine is a mild diuretic, which is counterproductive when you have the flu.

3. Lemon. Being highly acidic, lemons help make mucous membranes distasteful to bacteria and viruses. To make a flu-fighting fruit drink, place one chopped lemon—skin, pulp, and all—into 1 cup boiling water. While the lemon steeps for five minutes, inhale the steam. Strain, add honey to taste, and drink hot lemonade three to four times a day throughout your illness.

Sore Throat

1. Drink cider vinegar. For sipping: Mix 1 tablespoon each of honey and cider vinegar in 1 cup warm water. For gargling: You'll need 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 cup cider vinegar, and 1 cup warm water. Dissolve the salt in the vinegar, then mix in the water. Gargle every 15 minutes as necessary.

2. Gargle with warm salt water. Make a saline solution by adding 1/2 teaspoon salt to a cup of very warm water. It cuts phlegm and reduces inflammation. Dissolve 1/2 teaspoon salt in 1/2 cup warm water, and gargle every three to four hours.

Source:
howstuffworks.com




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The Final Thought

Where Fresh Starts Await

By Jacki Donaldson

There's something about a new year that brings hope for new beginnings. While it's not actual resolutions we make in our household, we do give some thought to how we'll approach the 365 days that lie before us. We like to think of our plans as fresh starts.

We all have ideas for fresh starts, all four of us. I want to eat out less, cut back on purchasing items we don't need, and reevaluate where our hard-earned money lands. In a nutshell, I want to do better at saving our dollars. I also want our kids to learn how to responsibly manage their own funds when the time comes.

I also wish to whittle away at the tasks I take on that are not central to my life goals. I function so much better in this world when my plate is not overcrowded. Still, I tend to take on more than I can handle – an extra project here, an extra commitment there. I don't like feeling scattered. I want a healthy balance.

John, my trimmed-down hubby who has overhauled his diet and lost 40 pounds, says he'd like to exercise again. He did great for a while, biking bunches of miles in the evenings, but his bad back slowed him down. He knows there's more he can do, though, to stay physically fit and he's ready to do something about it. He'd also like to get more sleep – with work and

family responsibilities, he never seems to get enough.

Joey, our 6-year-old, tells me he's planning for 2008 to ask less for candy and toys. Why?

"So mommy doesn't get mad," he reports. I like how he thinks.

Joey also wants to be nicer to his daddy and mommy. He wants to stop hitting his brother, stop talking back and stop getting out of bed at night. When asked if there's anything about school he wants to work on, he replies, "No. School is good."

Four-year-old Danny says the same – "School is good." Although he does say he wants to stop climbing fences at his school.

"Do you climb fences at school?" I asked him.

"No," he says. "Well, when I was 3 I did."

Danny might be on to something – pick an action you've already mastered and the follow-through becomes much easier. He is also a man of few plans at his young age.

"What else do you want to change?" I inquired.

"I don't want to do this," he tells me. And so our discussion about fresh starts comes to a close.

I don't know how many of our new plans will come to fruition. I'd like to think we'd make good on a few but for now, I'm just happy we're communicating about what we might do better in our lives. Communication is key, I think. It's what I hope we'll always do in our family – talk.

Wait – Danny has one more thing to say: "I want to try not to say bad things."

Good idea, Danny. Very good idea.



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