

Gainesville Parenting

For the community, by the community.

Attachment items

*Is your child's
lunchbox safe?*

Tips for staying
safe in the sun



Published & Produced By:

Martonick Publications, Inc.

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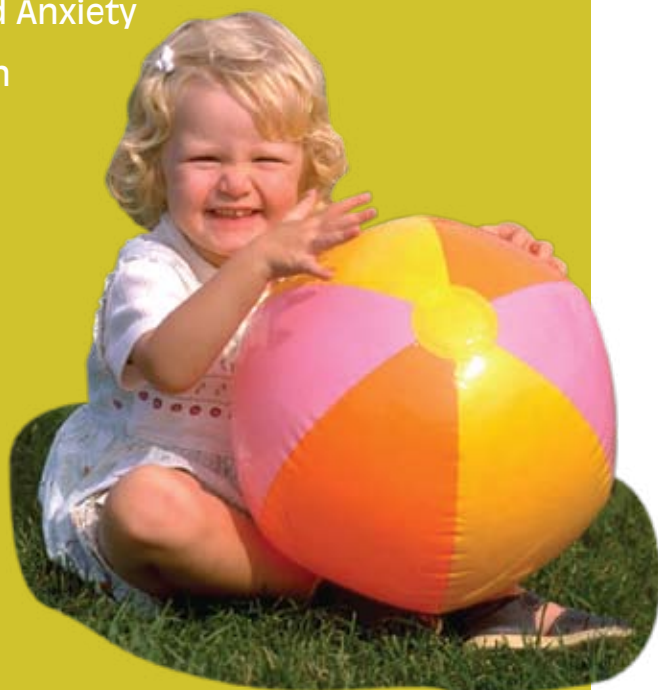
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Mother of the Quarter

Tamara Nelson

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 Sara Ajluni

Tamara Nelson is an Alachua mother who was born in La Mesa, Calif. She and her husband of nine years, Tyler, have a 15-month-old daughter Jamie, 4-year-old son Jesse and stepdaughter Krystal, 18. They've lived in Alachua for five years, where Tamara enjoys being a stay-at-home mom. In her spare time, she likes sewing as well as reading and learning about raising her children.

What do you enjoy most about your children?

I enjoy just watching them grow and learn. It amazes me, especially seeing the differences between the two. We enjoy going to the Florida Museum of Natural History, the library and the park. Jesse likes to pick up cans. He has about 20 people collecting cans for him. He calls it "going canning." He's very passionate about it. He's learned about money and about talking to people. People call him "Jesse the Can Man."

What do you hope to impart on your children?

To have passion for something and to love what they do. I want them to have fun and be a little less uptight than I am. You have to develop your own character. I want them to take the good things from the people in their life and give back to them. Don't be a taker. Be a giver.

What is your favorite thing about raising children in Gainesville?

We love the museum and the entomology department at UF, and just taking advantage of all the free things they have to offer. There are a lot of neat festivals in Alachua and Gainesville too. We've also been to almost all the libraries. Me and Jesse check out 30 books a week at least.

What is your favorite memory of growing up?

My fondest memory was going on vacation when I was 10 or 11 years old. We went to the Smoky Mountains, went camping and enjoying nature.

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

She taught me to be responsible... even though I thought she was being mean at the time. I have a strong sense of responsibility. I think there's a difference between being responsible and having a sense of responsibility. Having a sense of responsibility comes from within.

What is something about you that no one knows?

I am such an open book. I would read you every single page even though I don't want to read. If you ask me a question, I'll tell you.

Do you have a hidden talent?

I have a strong passion to help people save money. I cut coupons, but everybody knows that. It's not a hidden talent, but a gift that keeps giving. I was shopping at Publix and I had coupons for \$5 off a \$50 purchase. I bought my groceries and I had an extra coupon. Instead of throwing it away, I gave it to the lady behind me in line. This is my contribution to my family. I feel like this is my job.

What do you enjoy doing around town?

We enjoy going to see plays, but we don't get to go that often. We like to go to the Hippodrome. We partake in the Musikgarten where they have music for children of all ages. They teach different tones and songs. We also do gymnastics at the YMCA. We go to Sun Country Sports Center Stay and Play in Jonesville.

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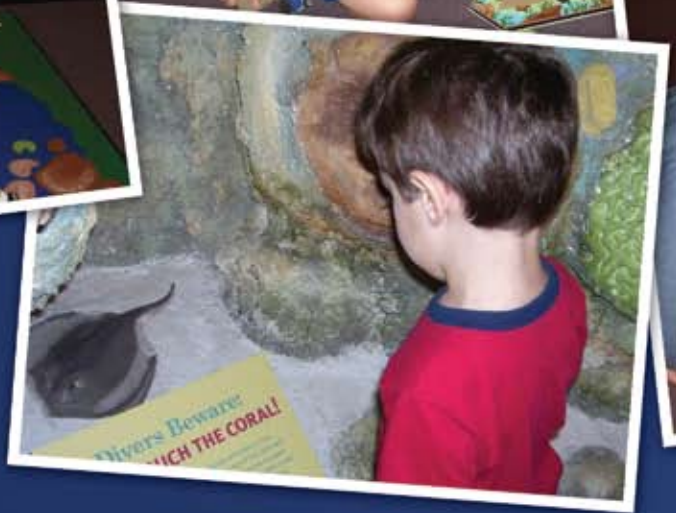
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Weekend Parenting

The Discovery Room

By Gayle Shlafer

Every summer for the past few years, the Florida Museum of Natural History opens up the Discovery Room. Activities are spread out in a huge room, giving kids plenty of places to play and explore. I checked to see when it would be open this year and found out that because of its popularity, the Discovery Room was already open and staying open through the end of the year.

The Discovery Room is a great place for the kids to hang out with their friends and the large room boasts two very important characteristics: One, it's inside, and therefore air conditioned. Two, there is only one way out, so it's easy to keep the adventurous little ones contained.

Anna, 6, Sagan, 6, and Enzali, 3, joined my sons Ben and Sammy for their Discovery Room adventure. The room has several activity centers to keep young minds and bodies busy. Sammy, 4, and Ben, 6, immediately went to the puzzles, dumping the pieces on the floor and putting them back together. Ben was particularly fascinated with a game that lets you attach gears to each other to make them all spin at once. Sammy moved on to the large prairie picture which was dotted with Velcro. Sammy, Sagan, Anna and Enzali all helped place the animals in their prairie habitat, then giggled as they took everything down, then giggled some more as they put everything back up again.

Afterwards the kids all did something different. Sammy went to

the animal marching station. Anna looked at shells. Ben stayed with the puzzles and Sagan joined him. Enzali colored. Then five minutes later, they all moved somewhere else... and then somewhere else again.

There are so many different activity stations in the Discovery Room and each area was large enough to handle all five children. I think all the kids had the most fun burying each other under the pillows in the reading area. They got a little rowdy and the attendants had to ask them to calm down. Still, the kids found other things to do. Sagan and Anna looked at the different shells and bones on display. Sammy and Ben sat down at a listening station and tried to guess which animal was making the noise on the tape, and then Sammy explored the coral reef.

I asked Sammy what his favorite part was and he couldn't give me just one answer. He enjoyed everything. Ben's answer was much simpler – the puzzles. All the kids enjoyed every part of the Discovery Room. Not once did I hear an "I'm bored" or "Can we go home now?"

After a couple of hours, the whole troupe walked around the museum until we decided it was time to go home. The boys spent the entire ride home talking about the museum and the Discovery Room. This was definitely a great way to spend the morning.

For More Information:

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

Phone: 352-846-2000

Web site: www.flmnh.ufl.edu/education/discovery.htm

Cost: Free, but donations accepted. Some museum exhibits have an admission price.

Rating: ☺☺☺☺☺ / ☺☺☺☺☺





Talking to your Child

“The birds and the bees” have long been regarded as a pleasant euphemism for parents to discreetly educate their children on the subject of sex and dating. Although adolescents and teenagers often dread “the talk,” many parents overlook the importance of speaking with their children at a younger, more impressionable age. Many parents avoid or postpone the discussion, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Because of this, about one million teenage girls become pregnant in the United States each year and three million teens contract a sexually transmitted disease.

While “the talk” has often been geared toward pre-teens and adolescents, due to the media and other sources bombarding our children in recent years, Carolyn Wyatt, an extension agent for the Hardee County Extension Service, says parents should target their younger children when beginning to discuss these issues.

“The middle school-aged child or the older elementary-aged child seem to be the most vulnerable to making poor choices,” Wyatt

says. “That’s when they are in the process of making a lot of decisions and setting goals for their future.”

Suggestive television programs and movies that are inappropriate to watch are likely making our children feel more pressure about relationships and dating than in generations past, Wyatt says.

Even music that is appealing to youth often has disrespectful lyrics that are degrading to different genders. Children gather often inaccurate or inappropriate information from the Internet as well, according to the AACAP. Subtle messages such as these plant a seed in young minds that can reappear in later years.

“If you are seeing aggression in a child toward their peers, siblings or adults, that might be a time when you can talk about respectful behavior,” Wyatt says.

Respect in language, physical touch and manners are all important to a child’s development, she says. If parents don’t pay attention

“The result of not approaching any of these issues with your child carries a heavy weight.”

- Carolyn Wyatt, Hardee County Extension Service



Children about Sex

By Jessica Warshaver

to their children's inappropriate behavior, they may be allowing a dangerous pattern to emerge.

"Of course it spills over into dating and relationships," Wyatt says. "When a person who has never learned to appreciate and respect others, particularly those of the opposite sex, enters into a relationship, those behaviors are probably going to surface and be exhibited in undesirable ways."

When talking to children, parents should respond to the specific needs and questions voiced by their individual child, the AACAP says. It is also helpful to get advice from a health professional or books that use illustrations and diagrams.

Talking with your children allows for open lines of communication that are important to have while growing up, Wyatt says. During October, which is national "let's talk" month, the Hardee County Extension Service distributed 10,000 placemats to families in the county with printed information about talking to children about "risky behaviors" they may face. By not approaching their children about these issues, parents could be putting their children at the risk of their peers, Wyatt says.

"The result of not approaching any of these issues with your child carries a heavy weight," she says.

Tips for Talking with Your Child

1. Encourage your child to ask questions and talk to you.
2. Keep a calm and non-critical atmosphere for discussions.
3. Use words your child would understand and be comfortable with.
4. Keep a sense of humor and don't be afraid to talk about your own discomfort.
5. Relate sex to love, intimacy, caring and respect for oneself and one's partner.
6. Openly share your values and concerns.
7. Discuss the importance of responsibility for decisions and choices.
8. Help guide your child to consider the pros and cons of choices.

Source: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, www.aacap.org

Did you Know...?

Changing Seasons

By Jessica Warshaver

It's true that no one can predict the weather – many would agree that even the weatherman is wrong on occasion. However, it is common knowledge that our planet Earth goes through four seasons in a year: summer, fall, winter and spring. Modern science explains these changes, but long ago, many civilizations believed that gods and goddesses controlled the forces of our planet. The ancient Greeks followed the myth of Persephone as their explanation for the changing of the seasons.

According to the myth, Persephone was playing on a lush green hillside, picking flowers and basking in their heavenly scents, when a strange, unfamiliar bush caught her eye. It was a dark, prickly plant with buds as red as the setting sun. Persephone couldn't help but pick this strange flower before returning home to her mother Demeter, the goddess of grain and growth.

The instant Persephone's graceful fingers plucked the flower off its bush, a giant hole appeared before her. A chariot drawn by black horses emerged and Hades, the god of the underworld, towered over the young girl. Hades grabbed Persephone's arm and pulled her into the carriage before she had a chance to take a breath, and they flew down to the underworld.

When Persephone didn't return home, Demeter was incredibly worried. During the weeks of her daughter's absence, the goddess of the entire planet's life began to deny her heavenly duties. Every tree, flower and bush withered and died. The people of Earth prayed to Zeus, god of Olympus, who decided something had to be done.

Zeus summoned Demeter and told her he would send Hermes, the messenger god, to retrieve Persephone from Hades on one condition: if she hadn't eaten any food while in the depths of the underworld, as that was the law of Olympians.

Meanwhile, in the underworld, Persephone missed frolicking in wide-open fields and dancing in flowerbeds. While Hades showered her with gifts and savory meals, Persephone refused

to eat a bite. Secretly, she enjoyed having control over such a powerful god, but it was becoming harder to refuse the delicious foods he tempted her with. Even still, she starved herself, hoping someone would return her to her rightful place above ground.

One day, Persephone saw a little boy eating a pomegranate, her favorite fruit. When the boy offered her some, she looked around, making sure the coast was clear, and ate six large pomegranate seeds. Just then, Hermes stormed into the underworld, grabbed Persephone's arm and pulled her away. As she was ascending, Persephone looked down and saw the little boy run to a disgruntled Hades, pomegranate in hand.

Sure enough, by the time Hermes and Persephone returned to Olympus, Hades was waiting by Zeus's side. The god made a final decision on the matter: for each seed Persephone ate in the underworld, she was required to live for a month with Hades as his bride. For the remaining months of the year, she was allowed to live with her mother. Thus, for six months, Demeter grieves for her daughter and fails to provide Earth with the rich and green growth it thrives on. The ancient Greeks believed this is why half the year is desolate and cold, while the other half is fruitful and warm upon her daughter's return.

Greek Gods and Goddesses and their Domains

God/Goddess	Domain
Aphrodite	Love and Beauty
Apollo	Sun and Music
Artemis	Moon and Hunting
Athena	Wisdom and Warfare
Hera	Marriage
Poseidon	The sea
Zeus	The sky and thunder
Dionysis	Wine

Source: www.crystalinks.com/olympians.html



Traces of lead have recently been found in children's toys and lunchboxes. Read on to learn more about PVC and what you can do to protect your child.

IS YOUR CHILD'S LUNCHBOX SAFE

By Megan Heron

Those greasy potato chips packed inside your child's lunchbox may not be the only health issue that is drawing attention. Depending on what time of carrier your children uses when bringing lunch to school, they could be at risk for lead poisoning. But before you go throwing out their beloved Superman lunchbox, read on to learn a few quick facts about polyvinyl chloride.

THIS IS QUITE A JUMP INTO THE STORY, CAN YOU LENGTHEN THE LEDE SOME?

If your child uses a soft vinyl bag with their favorite cartoon character decorating the cover, they might be carrying around a potentially hazardous bag. Lead is not a natural component of the polymer, **WHAT POLYMER?** but it can be added through modifiers. In simpler terms, polyvinyl chloride isn't naturally toxic. During the manufacturing process lead can be mixed with polyvinyl chloride, which explains why traces of lead have been found in products like toys and lunchboxes.





I GOT CONFUSED WHEN I WAS READING THIS PARAGRAPH, CAN YOU PUT IT INTO MORE LAYMAN'S TERMS?

Lead is used because it's cheap, but it is also the most toxic, says Matthew Jeletic, an organic chemistry graduate student at the University of Florida. However, unless your child is chewing on their lunchbox, the harm is minimal.

"If you use it as intended, then there shouldn't be any danger," Jeletic says.

Parents who are worried about their children's health and take safety precautions by simply wiping down the products before using them, Jeletic says. The lead found on lunchboxes is residual lead, which doesn't typically leach out **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**, he says.

There are also tests that can grade the amount of lead found on the lunchbox. Testing kits like Homax can be bought online and in some hardware stores. Parents can test the carrier before wiping it out, and then retest the item to see if there is any remaining residue. Parents who are still worried about lead can turn to alternative carriers like paper or cloth bags.

One organization that has been working to put parents at ease is the Center for Environment Health. This group has tested more than 200 lunchboxes and compelled several companies to alter their products so they are lead-free. According to their Web site, big companies like Lisa Frank, InGear and Big Dogs have changed their products.

Stores like Toys 'R' Us are also working to protect customers. According to their Web site, all manufacturers that work with the Toys R Us have been informed that products sold in the U.S. must be created without adding phthalates. Phthalates have been correlated with infant safety. The site also states that stores have begun replacing products that have had traces of PVC and phthalates.

Though Jeletic doesn't have children yet, he said he won't worry about lead unless there is a large recall on products he uses.

"We all grew up with lunchboxes and we're all right."



I was hoping this would be longer, do you think you could add some of the following features into the article?

- If it's not a big deal, then why are people worried about PVC in lunch boxes?
- When did this become a problem?
- Any statistics?
- Expand on the study that was done on the lunchboxes
- Have any other organizations voiced concern over it?
- Any parents' thoughts on it?
- What do the people who produce the lunchboxes say about the safety?
- Can you get someone from Toys 'R' Us to talk about the problems they've dealt with PVC and what they've done about it?

Where to buy lead testing kits online

Online

1. Testyourlunchbox.com. This Web site offers a kit to buy, along with visual instructions on how to properly use the product.
2. Amazon.com. Amazon sells several different tester kits.
3. Ceh.org. The Center for environmental health Web site offers pictures of bags that have been tested and showed high and low traces of lead.

In Gainesville

1. Lowe's: SW Archer Road and NW 13th Street locations
2. Home Depot: NW 13th Street and NW 4th Blvd. locations
3. Ace Hardware: SW State Rd 45, SE 221st Street, Main Street locations

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Video Games

What parents should know about their kids' game playing

By: Megan Heron

It's six in the evening and you're trying to prepare dinner. Your son said he'd finish his homework after one game of Grand Theft Auto, but that was nearly two hours ago. When you walk in his room, he's inches away from the television screen, eyes focused and fierce. When you ask if his homework is finished, there's no response. The only way to get him to stop playing is raising your voice and turning off the game system yourself.

So maybe you haven't experienced this type of problem, but many parents have. As technology advances on a daily basis and children at younger ages grow more and more computer-savvy, parents face a controversial issue: are video games harmful for children?

"Just like with diet and exercise, it should be done in moderation," says Jeff Boyer, an educational technology lecturer at UF. "The reality is if parents are being watchful, then there shouldn't be an issue."



While there is no set limit to the best amount of time to allow children to play, Boyer recommends less than an hour a day. Usually after a child returns home from school and activities, there's dinner and homework time. Boyer says a half hour or 45 minutes of playing to decompress should be healthy.

According to a survey by the National Institute on Media and the Family, 92 percent of children ages 2 to 17 play video games, and they average 20 to 33 minutes of game playing a day. Though this seems like a reasonable amount of time to play daily, there are still side effects to consider.

Dr. Richard E. Ferdig, associate professor of educational technology at UF's College of Education, says too much videogame playing can deprive children of sleep, interaction with others and participation in outdoor activities and school work. Time that should be spent outdoors or with others is instead spent isolated in a room in front of a television screen.

Both Ferdig and Boyer agree that the best way for parents to monitor their children's game playing is by participating.

"It is critical that parents get involved," Ferdig says. "I would definitely recommend that parents play a game or two with their children as it can help bridge generational gaps."

Not only can parents interact with their children, but they can monitor what their children are playing, and whether or not they're benefiting from the game. Some parents might be surprised by what a little supervision can unveil.

"Most adults struggle when they sit down to play the games with their kids, but kids have developed these sophisticated strategies to meet the objective of the game," Boyer said.

For parents who don't have the time, or have trouble playing successfully, they can and should research what types of games and game systems their children have. This is particularly important for multiplayer online games where parents might not be certain who their children are interacting with, Ferdig says. He also recommends parents research games before purchasing them. By reviewing games, parents can determine if they are age-appropriate and beneficial.

Lashandra Robinson, a daycare worker and mother of four, allows her children to only play games on weekends and sorts through the games before letting them play. Although she's tried playing the games with her kids, she admits she can't play as well as them.

Her 10-year-old son Jashawn is allowed to play more aggressive games than his younger siblings if he sets a good example. When he turns 12 or 13, Robinson says she will give him a little more leniency with games.

"I don't mind games where they shout, but I don't like too much blood or any adult language," she says.

For now, the Robinson children can play sports games like Madden NFL and NASCAR, and combat games like Torak and Tomb Raider.

Boyer and Ferdig agree that video games can also be educational and that there are games specifically made for education purposes. Ferdig said games like *Civilizations*, a history game about building civilizations, integrates education into entertainment.

"I believe that almost every game, educational or not, can be turned into an educational experience with the addition of a supportive and interested parent," Ferdig says.

One of the most popular and beneficial game systems is Nintendo Wii, Boyer says. Multiple players can compete against one another while exercising, since players are required to move to play. Games vary from sports like soccer and boxing, to popular character games like *Harry Potter* and *Mario*. For parents who are not technologically savvy, joining their kids in athletic games can incorporate exercise into their schedule, as well as improve interaction.

A 25-year-old in Philadelphia lost nine pounds in six weeks from playing 21 hours of *Wii Sports*. Mickey DeLorenzo played tennis, bowling, boxing or baseball for 30 minutes every day. Wii systems are also being used in nursing and rehabilitation centers to help residents become more physically active. Boyer says his grandparents will be receiving one at their retirement home to increase exercise.

However, players can still succeed in the game by sitting down and simply moving their wrist, Boyer says.

"It's amazing the amount of energy you can exert when playing," Boyer says. "But the caveat of course is that you can play without being physical."

For those who cannot afford a Wii system, Ferdig recommends searching the internet for free online games. By simply typing in key words like "math" and "game" into Google, more than one million hits appear.

Ferdig emphasizes that moderation in video-game playing is the key to balancing entertainment and education.

"Whenever a major incident occurs, there are always people who immediately come out and blame video game play," he says. "However, there is very little research to suggest such a connection. Like all things in life, video games can be helpful if parents or caregivers get involved in their children's life and help them moderate their daily activities."

Find Out More

Learn more about your child's video games, recommended by Dr. Ferdig:

1. What They Play (<http://www.whattheyplay.com/>) Parents can investigate what their children are playing, what their children want to play, and what are considered 'good games.'
2. Parent's Choice (<http://www.parents-choice.org/>) This site covers all aspects of children's media, and keeps updates on the current popular and safe games.
3. www.gamedaily.com and www.gamerankings.com These sites allow users to search for movies and read reviews of specific games.

Fun online educational game Web sites

4. DimensionM (<http://www.dimensionm.com/>) by Tabula Digita uses a 3-D environment to teach math
5. Social Impact Games (<http://www.socialimpactgames.com/>) contains games on issues ranging from public health to famine in third world countries
6. Scratch (<http://scratch.mit.edu>) and Game Maker (<http://www.yoyogames.com/make>) allow children to build their own game for free.



Ask a Nurse

The Value of Children Volunteering

Karen Reed
MSN, RN, DHSc

Dr. Reed is a Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Florida College of Nursing.

A volunteering spirit is something that is best cultivated throughout a person's life, just as you foster manners, appreciation and consideration for others. It is almost impossible to start too soon and while it is never too late to develop that caring spirit, opportunities to impact and shape a child's life have been missed when you wait until adolescence and the volunteer hours are needed for a college application.

There is tremendous value to children volunteering. Some are:

1. Learning the skills as a member of a team.

We often focus on teaching children leadership skills but it is as important to learn what it means to be an effective team member. It definitely takes skill to communicate and work with different personalities, take direction from someone and learn to divide up tasks as a group.

2. Learning skills that are not taught at home or in the classroom settings and can be documented on an employment application.

Teenagers have learned to effectively use general office equipment, how to schedule volunteers and how to map out route directions when they volunteered with a local Meals on Wheels program.

3. An appreciation for what they have

A young teenage volunteer at a local rehabilitation hospital once volunteered to keep a teenager with a traumatic brain injury company by painting fingernails and watching a video. The volunteer was greatly impacted with the realization that our lives and bodies are fragile and we should never take our abilities for granted. This young volunteer now works with other teens and community groups through the police Explorers organization working to stop violence and promote positive community relations.

4. Opportunity for socialization with other people/ age groups

Volunteers come from many different backgrounds and age groups. Children helping with the Meals on Wheels program often work side by side with adults who are senior citizens themselves and retired. It provides an excellent example of how service to others doesn't end at any given age. It also gives the young volunteers the opportunity to chat with homebound elderly who were often lonely and look forward to the conversations as we all need "food for the souls" as much as we need physical nutrition.

5. An opportunity to watch YOU be a hero

How many times do we look at our planners and lament that we have no time to volunteer? What better way to spend time with our children than to work with them side by side on a project. It demonstrates to them the value you place on volunteerism and it allows for quality parent-child time and interaction. The opportunities for life lesson applications abound in volunteer opportunities.

Our family has "adopted" an elderly neighbor's yard. It is much more than she can handle on her own and to pay someone would be expensive. So, together, as a family, we mow and rake the yard and sweep the street front. She is thrilled with the company and was overwhelmed that someone cares. It does mean our own yard gets neglected now and again, but the sacrifice is small and well worth it.

6. Development and validation of positive values

Children are besieged with negative and unhealthy information and messages. Volunteering is a wonderful way to combat the negative and cultivate positive value development. It places positive role models in the lives of our children and fosters the self-esteem and self-confidence they need to weather the turbulent times of adolescence.



Always consider your child's area of interest, their attention span and their energy level when selecting a volunteer opportunity. You are not always going to have a perfect experience. Learn from each opportunity and make future selections based upon the experiences. Do not give up! Contacting the local United Way is a great way to see what the various agencies need at any given time.

There are certainly benefits to volunteer hours on college applications and scholarships; however, the greater benefit is not captured in mere numbers on a form, but is evident from the light of giving and greater understanding that exist within the individual that volunteers. Help your child to shine!

According to experts, attachment to security items is a normal part of child development.

By: Stacy Fournier

Sunscreen: check. Stroller: check. And most importantly, blankie: check. Cheryl Tyrone, her daughter Katie and the rest of the family were ready to spend the day at Hollywood Studios in Orlando. They snapped some photos with The Little Mermaid, ate lunch with the characters and saw the Playhouse Disney show.

As Tyrone was about to put 18-month-old Katie back in her stroller to visit the next attraction, she realized blankie was missing. The blankie Katie had since she was 1 month old. The blankie she dragged to the store, around the house, on every trip. The blankie she cannot sleep without. The blankie she had to have on her lap as the family walked the park.

“I freaked out,” Tyrone says. “I didn’t know how I was going to handle the rest of the day with her.”

She left Katie with her grandma and began a desperate search. She knew she must find blankie before Katie realized. She retraced her steps, back to

the character meet-and-greet, over to the restaurant.

Having failed in her search, Tyrone headed back to her daughter. She knew she’d have to search every Target until she found another blankie.

When Tyrone arrived back to her family, she pulled the stroller canopy over Katie to block the afternoon sun. And there it was – Katie’s pink and tattered blankie.

“It’s part of your family,” Tyrone says. “We were reunited.”

Addressing Attachments

“An attachment to an item is considered to be a normal part of development,” says Dr. Suzanna Smith, an associate professor of human development and family relations at UF and a mother. The attachment starts around 8 to 12 months and can last for years, she says.



Cami, 4, and Katie, 7, enjoy their blankies



Cassandra Bruey's attachment to her blankies started at birth, says her mom, Julie. Because the blankies were always with Cassandra – under her pillow, at the store, in the car, on family trips – it was only natural the blankies made the trip to college. Bruey, a 20-year-old psychology major at UF, continues to keep her blankies in her bed. She's still undecided if she'll sleep with them when she gets married one day.

Tyrone says her daughters, Katie, now 7, and Cami, 4, became attached to their blankies almost instantly, during their first couple months of life. When she gave her daughters their blankies, both girls would pop their thumb right in their mouth. While Katie recently stopped sucking her thumb, it's still an automatic reaction for Cami: blankie in hand, thumb in mouth. For Tyrone, the blankie attachment and thumb-sucking was a blessing since the pacifier just wasn't working for the two.

It wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s, following research, that attachment items gained acceptance, Smith says. Before this time, society viewed children's attachments as a sign of insecurity. Now, over 60 percent of American children use a security object, Smith says.

While more American children use attachment items than not, studies find cultural backgrounds can affect these rates, Smith says. Typically, American children from white, middle-class families and those from Western Europe have a higher rate of attachment. Children from Korea, Japan, Africa, South India and those from African-American families usually have a lower rate of object attachment, Smith says.

Possible reasons for this disproportion include a lack of resources or knowledge about the benefits of an attachment item, Smith says. She also points to co-sleeping. Transitional items are less important for other cultures because children find comfort in sleeping with their parents. Transitioning from a busy day to bedtime can be extremely difficult and scary, Smith says.

"An attachment item is a way of reassuring a child," she says.

"Some pediatricians actually recommend that you introduce the opportunity for a child to become attached to an item."

While Smith says it may be helpful to give children an item if they are scared, she feels it is best for parents to let them pick and become attached to their own special item.

Dr. Stephen Giunta, a family counselor in Pinellas County and father of three, agrees. If a child isn't already attached to an item, parents should try meeting a child's needs rather than substituting an item, especially for infants, he says. While attachment items don't indicate a lack of emotional bonding between parents and children, parents should regularly hug and comfort their children.

Sometimes a child's attachment to an item can represent their strong attachment to their mother, Smith says. The comfort item may smell like mommy or remind the child of her as they fall asleep.

Parents should always show respect for the attachment item, Smith says. While the child's attachment is not a sign of insecurity, a parent can make a child feel insecure by belittling the item's importance, she says.

When to Wean

A natural transition time for children is about 6 to 8 years old, Smith says, or when they start to have sleepovers. While children will probably notice if their peers do not use a blankie or stuffed animal, parents can talk to their children about it. However, parents must avoid making their child feel like a baby because of their attachment, she says.



For the Tyrone family, this natural weaning process became evident when Katie started to have sleepovers. The first few times she left home, Katie would take her blankie. But a few months ago, Tyrone asked Katie if she wanted her blankie. “No,” she answered.

“You could tell it was closed for discussion,” Tyrone says.

To gently encourage the weaning process, Giunta says the family can discuss and decide rules for where a child can and can’t take his or her attachment item. Cami, 4, can drag her blankie around the house, use it for nap and bedtime, take it in the car and put it in

her cubby at school. No stores. Katie, 7, must leave the blankie in her bedroom at all times.

“What you don’t want to do is just take it away,” Giunta says. “I think it’s important that you always give children a reason.”

To help her children through the process, Tyrone says she tells her daughters the blankies can get lost in the store and allows them take other items such as purses or baby dolls – things they aren’t very loyal to.



How to Gently Wean From an Attachment Item

1. Involve your child in the process. Talk about what is going to happen, and come up with a plan together.
2. Try leaving the attachment item in a “special corner” so the child will know it is nearby.
3. Allow the child to put a picture of their attachment item beside the bed.
4. Move the attachment item to a special shelf where it can watch over the child.
5. Pick one night a week when the child can try sleeping without his or her attachment item, and slowly increase the number of nights without it.
6. If the child’s item lies on his or her bed, simply try removing it and not bringing it up if no questions are asked.
7. Gently ask if a child’s peers are still carrying attachment items

CRAFTS FOR KIDS

By Stacy Fournier

Supplies

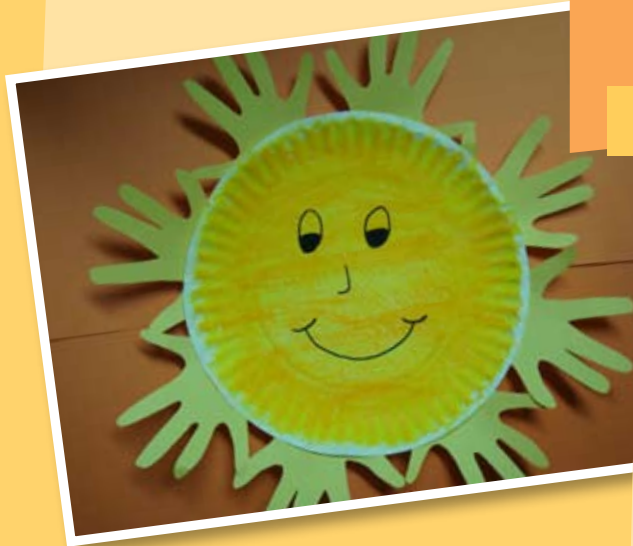
1. One paper plate
2. Non-toxic orange and yellow paint (for less mess, use crayons or markers)
3. Paint brushes
4. Three pieces of yellow construction paper
5. Black marker
6. Glue
7. Scissors



Mr. Sun

Directions

1. Trace your child's hand, down to the wrist, on the yellow construction paper.
2. Carefully cut out the traced hand. You will need enough hands to surround the edge of the paper plate. (Try folding the construction paper before you cut to save time!)
3. While you are cutting, let your child paint or color the paper plate with yellow and orange paint, marker or crayons.
4. Allow the plate to dry, if needed.
5. Once the plate is dry, flip it over and let your child glue the cut-out hands around the edge of the plate. These are the sun's "rays."
6. For the finishing touch, let your child draw a happy face on the front of the plate.
7. Now you have a sunny homemade keepsake to brighten up your summer days!





Ask a Nurse

Childhood Anxiety

Teresa Bruney
MSN, ARNP

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

"I'm scared." "I've been counting lots of things." "I was worried about it." "My stomach (or head) hurts." "I don't like school." "Wait, I can't go to bed until all my action figures are lined up just right." "No, I don't want to go play at Joe's house unless you come with me."

How do we know our child has normal worries or if it represents something more serious? All children worry at one time or another about various things and there are life events that can cause an increase in worries, as well. Things such as moving, changing schools, the illness or death of a relative or close friend, natural disasters and the like can make even the most secure child feel uneasy.

Children have trouble telling us they are worried. We may have no idea until we notice changes in their behavior, such as sleep problems, wanting to stay home from school, clinginess, or body complaints such as headaches and stomachaches. Sometimes, worry and anxiety consume so much of the child's mental energy that there is a drop in their ability to concentrate, pay attention in school or get their schoolwork done. These children may look like they have ADHD. Other children develop sudden worries associated with strep bacteria infections or exposures.

The National Institute of Mental Health has lots of information on anxiety disorders, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder and panic attacks in childhood (www.health.nih.gov). We'll discuss some of the common symptoms below.

Many fears during childhood are normal, and children outgrow them. The best way to decide if your child's worry or anxiety needs further treatment is to determine if the worry or fear prevents them from living a normal life. Do they miss school or spend time in the nurse's office? Do they have very few friends? Do they have trouble separating from you? Can they go to other people's homes and stay there without you? Can they speak to others, especially in school, or in public, like in a restaurant or store? Can they sleep in their own bed? Do they have body complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, a racing heart or sweaty palms? Are they doing well academically in school?

If your child has worry or anxiety that interferes with their life, then treatment is needed. The best treatment includes a type of psychological therapy called cognitive behavioral

therapy. This usually works fairly quickly and the child and family learn specific skills for changing fearful thoughts, anxious or tense feelings and avoidant behaviors. A child psychologist skilled in providing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the best choice for providing this type of therapy. CBT usually requires 10 to 16 weekly sessions with some "tune-up" sessions off and on after this.

There also may be non-psychological reasons. If your child has a sudden onset of a new fear or phobia, compulsive behavior (checking or ordering things, having to have lengthy rituals before doing certain things such as going to sleep, leaving the house, etc.) or obsessive thought (counting, worry about germs, etc), the culprit may be the strep germ. The same germ that causes "strep throat" can cause a sudden onset of anxious behaviors in some susceptible children, as well as tics. Treatment involves antibiotics, certain nutritional supplements and close follow-up.

No matter what the cause, if you are concerned about your child's level of worry – or think that they are experiencing symptoms that may be from anxiety – contact your pediatric nurse practitioner or pediatrician and schedule your child for a visit to discuss your concerns. Anxieties in children can be difficult to deal with, but there is great hope with several types of treatments. More information can be obtained through the NIH Web site as well as a Web site designed to offer current, evidence-based healthcare information to consumers called MedlinePlus at www.medlineplus.gov.



911 Column: The Sun

By: Jessica Warshaver

Sun exposure is important for adults and children; it's our primary source of vitamin D, which helps us grow strong and healthy bones. But like most things in life, too much of a good thing can be unhealthy. Unprotected exposure to the sun's ultra-violet rays can cause skin cancer and every year more than one million Americans are diagnosed with the deadly disease. However, it's easy to protect our children from the damaging rays of the sun, and Suzanna Smith, associate professor of Human Development and Family Relations at the University of Florida, details some of the important ways parents can employ these protection strategies.

Babies can't tell their parents if they are too hot and can't move out of the sunlight, so parents should make sure they keep an eye on their child at all times, Smith says. Children under 1 year old should not be exposed to the sun at all and should be kept in the shade, she says.

"Dress infants in clothing that covers them, such as lightweight long pants, long-sleeved shirts and wide-brimmed hats," Smith says.

Even just a few serious sunburns can increase a child's risk of skin cancer later in life, and one sunburn may increase a child's risk for developing the most deadly form of skin cancer, melanoma.

"Even as skin cancer is becoming more common in children, only about one-third to one-half of children and their parents are taking even basic steps to prevent sun damage," Smith says.

Smith recommends parents abide by the following tips to keep their children healthy this summer:

1. The sun is brightest during the afternoon, particularly from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Make sure you keep children out of the sun between these hours.

2. Dress children in clothing that covers their skin. In hotter areas like Florida, children will be safe in a t-shirt and long shorts, provided they are covered with ample sunscreen. Special sun protection clothing is also available that shields the skin from UV rays.

3. UV rays attack the eyes as well as skin, so sunglasses are important. Look for wrap-around shades with "broad spectrum" protection that absorbs UV light.

4. Sunscreen should be at least SPF-15 and applied about a half hour before going outside, even on cloudy days. Don't forget to apply on the face, neck, scalp and the back of the knees.

5. If your child looks even a little pink, take him or her out of the sun to prevent serious sunburn. It can take up to 12 hours for skin to reflect the harm done by the sun's rays.

Smith encourages parents to remember these tips when protecting their own skin, as even adults can be victims to skin cancer.

"Parents, you are a role model for your child, so protect your own skin as well," Smith says. "Your children learn basic health habits from you, including sun safety."



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The Final Thought

Dog Walking – and Other Life Ambitions

By Jacki Donaldson

Danny wants to be a dog walker when he grows up. He's had a bit of practice walking his Nana's dogs and is pretty sure this career path suits him well. If it doesn't pan out, he has another option.

"When I grow up, I want to be a football guy," 5-year-old Danny told his daddy the other day.

If he ever asks me for guidance, I'll push him in the doggie direction. It may not be as glamorous a job as football, but it's got to be easier on the body. Should Danny opt for football, though, and end up needing medical attention, his brother Joey can respond.

Joey wants to be a doctor. He sprang his decision on me one day while we were walking through the parking deck at North Florida Regional Medical Center. We happened to be on the level where doctors park their cars, and we were admiring all the fancy vehicles when it clicked for 7-year-old Joey: If doctors have nice cars and nice cars cost lots of money, then doctors must be rich. On the spot, he named his future profession. He will be a doctor – or, a "blogger."

"I don't want a job," Joey declared recently while strolling around the yard. "I want to be a blogger, like mommy."

I guess blogging – and all the other writing I do – doesn't seem like much of a job to a kid who just knows his mom is with him all the time. That's precisely why it's such an ideal endeavor for me. I get to stay home with my kiddos, write when they are in school and then seem completely unemployed when they return home. Still, I have a job. Joey will realize this some day, when he figures out the ways of the world. For now, I'll let him bask in the simplicity of life, until his lease on this gift runs out.

There's something so innocent and basic about how children approach life, something that makes it easy to dream of

walking dogs and fixing bodies one minute and playing football and blogging the next. Wouldn't it be grand if adult minds could arrive, if only for a moment, at the very place where kids' imaginations run wild – the place where everything seems to make perfect sense.

Just before a school drop-off one morning and after Joey announced his plans to become a doctor, I noticed a slick, sporty little car driving next to our worn and tattered mini-van.

"Look at that nice car," I commented to my boys.

Looking in the direction of the woman driving this cool ride, Joey said with absolute certainty: "She's a doctor."

Yep, life is simple for little ones. And how fun it is to be the mom of two of the greatest dreamers around – and to have a job that allows me the time to marvel at the wonder of my glorious guys.



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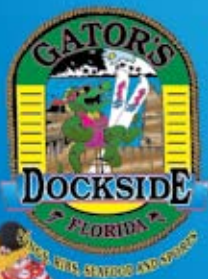
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