

## Make Time for Family During the School Year

By Mandy H. Gross

Spending quality time with the family often gets placed on the back burner when summer comes to a close, the school year begins and schedules get busy.

Elaine Wilson, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension parenting specialist, offers some advice on how to gain more family time during the school year as well as enhance children's educational experiences. Parents can direct their families into participating in programs that include the entire family such as church, 4-H activities, health, sports or fitness clubs and library sponsored literature reading or information workshops, Wilson said.

"While it may not be possible for parents to be in the classroom everyday, most teachers welcome parents' contributions and involvement. Your child's music teacher may appreciate your help with recitals or sales and exchanges of sheet music and instruments," Wilson said. "Classroom teachers welcome parent volunteers to come into the classroom and to share their occupation, hobbies or cultural background."

Wilson said parents could also use the time in the car to ask children about their daily activities, what books they are reading or to implement other conversation about family, community and political events. Radio, television, newspaper and Internet stories can be used to stimulate informative discussions, when shared as a part of quality family time.

"When you hear your child complain that a topic is too difficult to understand or that they are going to fail a class or test, ask them to explain the problem," Wilson said. "Be very strict about not allowing the child to say, 'I'm not smart,' or 'I'll never get this,'" Wilson said. Insist that your child is capable and offer your help.

She also stressed the importance of praising children for displaying habits which lead to good grades such as reading, doing homework, getting plenty of sleep, eating a good breakfast or listening at school.



"Get the focus off the grades and test scores," Wilson said. "Stress good habits, cooperation and enjoying learning."

Another way to both spend quality time with family and to expand a child's educational experience is to take a field trip to a museum or to interview a specialist on a topic that your child is studying.

"Family field trips tell a child that he or she is important enough to be the parental focus for part or all of a day's activities," Wilson said. "Combine that with an educational effort and kids will get the message."

One of the most commonly overlooked aspects of parent-child educational efforts is teaching children how to learn from their mistakes. This positive activity educates and builds self-esteem, Wilson said.

"Help them figure out what went wrong," Wilson said. "Research shows that when students understand their mistakes, they generally understand the process of getting the right answer and are more likely to do so in the future."

"Let your child see you looking up answers to your own questions in books or on the Internet," she said. "One of the most effective forms of promoting desired behavior is to lead by example." Wilson said parents should try to be role models of life-long learning.

# What you Can Do to Protect Your Child

Recent cases of abductions and abuse across the country have brought terrifying fear to the minds of parents, but it's important to remember that the majority of children will pass through childhood safely. One of the challenges of being a parent is to teach your children to be cautious without instilling too much fear or anxiety.

Every home and school should teach children about safety and protection measures. And, most importantly, make your home a place of trust and support that fulfills your child's needs.

## When should you begin talking to your child about safety?

- Now. There is no perfect age. Young children as well as older children and teens need information appropriate to their age. A child's ability to comprehend and practice safety skills is affected by age, educational, and developmental levels.

## Listen to your children

- Know your children's daily activities and habits.
- Listen to what they like and what they don't like.
- Encourage open communication. Let your children know they can talk to you about any situation and if they feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- Reassure your children that their safety is your #1 concern.

## Teach your children

- Set boundaries about places they may go, people they may see, and things they may do.
- Reinforce the importance of the "buddy system"- always take a friend or stay in a group. It's safer and more fun to be with your friends.
- It's OK to say NO – tell your children to trust their instincts if someone tries to touch them or treat them in a way that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- If someone follows your child or tries to take them somewhere, instruct them on how to get away from him or her as quickly as they can, yell or scream to get attention, and to always be sure to tell you or a trusted adult what happened.

## Get involved

- Know where your children are at all times.
- Your children should check in with you if there is a change in plans.

- There is no substitute for your attention and supervision.
- Practice safety skills with your child.

## Safety at Home

- Children should know their full name, home phone number and how to use the phone. Post your contact information where they will see it – your office phone number, cell phone, pager, etc.
- Children should have a trusted adult to call if they're scared or have an emergency.
- Choose babysitters with care. Obtain references. Drop in unexpectedly. Ask your children about what they experienced and listen carefully.
- If your child goes home alone after school, teach them to check and see that everything is OK before they go in and lock the door after entering. Once inside, they should call and let you know that they are fine.
- Instruct your child to never tell callers their parents aren't home. Also, don't open the door for or talk to anyone who comes to your home unless that person is a trusted family friend, relative, or someone you have given permission to enter.

## Safety in the Neighborhood

- Make a list with your children of their neighborhood boundaries, choosing significant landmarks.
- Interact regularly with your neighbors. Tell your children whose homes they are allowed to visit.
- Don't drop off your children alone at malls, movie theaters, video arcades, or parks.
- Teach your children that adults should not approach children for help, directions, or to offer them a gift. If they are, they should stay alert because this may be a "trick".
- Never leave children unattended in an automobile. Children should never hitchhike or approach a car when they don't know and trust the driver.
- Children should never go anywhere with anyone without getting your permission first.

## Safety at School

- Be careful when putting your child's name on clothing, backpacks, lunch boxes or bicycle license plates. If a child's name is visible, it may put them on a "first name" basis with an abductor.
- Walk the route to and from school with your children, pointing out landmarks and safe places to go

if they're being followed or need help. Make a map with your children showing acceptable routes to school, using main roads and avoiding shortcuts or isolated areas. If your child takes the bus, visit the bus stop with them and make sure they know which bus to take and what to do if they miss it.

- If your child wants to change their plans after school, they should always check first with you.

### **What to Do in Case of Emergency**

- Immediately call the police or local law enforcement agency. Also make sure your child knows how to call 911 or the local police and for what situations.

- Keep a complete description of your child, a recent color photograph (update every six months), fingerprints, medical records, etc. Keep documents handy for situations of custody orders or arrangements.

*Internet Resources:* [kidshealth.org](http://kidshealth.org)  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)  
[www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)  
[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)  
[mcgruff-safe-kids.com](http://mcgruff-safe-kids.com)

Adapted from: *Personal Safety for Children: A Guide for Parents*, U.S. Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, and Education, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

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## **Talking with Kids about the News**

As adults, we depend on “the news” as our primary source of information about the world we live in. It is now delivered in our homes 24 hours a day. The coverage can be overwhelming for adults, and it can be especially confusing and frightening for younger children.

Consider the opportunities children have to be exposed to the news. Maybe you listen to news radio in the morning when you drive the kids to school. Perhaps you read the newspaper at home...while you are reading an inside article, your child may be staring at the front headlines. The evening news may be on the TV while they are doing their homework. There may be a “newsflash” during their favorite sit-com. News stories are all over the Internet.

Used properly, the news can teach children many positive things about the world. Knowledge and understanding can teach kids a sense of belonging and social responsibility. Reading the newspaper can develop language skills and healthy reading habits.

At the same time, the daily news can promote stereotypes, confuse, anger, and even frighten children. By talking with our kids early and often about the stories and images they are exposed to by the news and other media, we can help them better understand the world around them. This communication can be especially valuable when kids are exposed to tough issues like violence, sex, drugs and alcohol, death, disasters, and divorce. Stories of kids as victims can be the most disturbing. That is why it is so important to monitor the news your kids are exposed to.

### **10 Tips for Talking with Kids About the News**

1. Explore the age appropriateness of the news you allow your children to see.
2. Watch or read the news with your kids.
3. Talk with them about what they see and hear.
4. Share your feelings about the news you see.
5. Discuss the difference between news and reality.
6. Acknowledge your child's fears and reassure them.
7. Explore the facts with your child.
8. Acknowledge that the news and world are very complex and some things are hard to understand.
9. Select kid-friendly news sources for your child (such as Nick News on Nickelodeon or a local station committed to “family friendly” newscasts).
10. Balance your child's news diet by setting clear limits.

### *Internet*

*Resources:* [www.talkingwithkids.org](http://www.talkingwithkids.org)  
[www.childrennow.org/media](http://www.childrennow.org/media)  
[www.nick.com](http://www.nick.com)  
[www.nytimes.com/learning](http://www.nytimes.com/learning)  
[www.yahooligans.com/content/news](http://www.yahooligans.com/content/news)  
[teacher.scholastic.com/newszone/index.asp](http://teacher.scholastic.com/newszone/index.asp)  
[www.cbc4kids.ca](http://www.cbc4kids.ca)  
[www.msnbc.com/local/pencilnews/default.asp](http://www.msnbc.com/local/pencilnews/default.asp)  
[www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)  
[www.timeforkids.com](http://www.timeforkids.com)  
[www.sikids.com/index.html](http://www.sikids.com/index.html)

Adapted from: *Talking with Kids About Tough Issues*, Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation

# Family Activities that Support Learning

## Rent a Video

Choose a video based on what your child is studying in school: classic or current literature, a biography of a famous person in history, art, or science, geography, history, and culture of a city, state, or country. As a family watch and discuss part of the movie each night for 2 or 3 nights. Compare the movie to the book, text book. And what the child learned at school.

## Parent Teacher Conferences

Invite your child to join you in the parent teacher conference and discuss ways to extend learning at home. Ask the teacher for suggestions. Describe the things your family enjoys. Agree to help with homework, but avoid doing more of the same drill, memory work, and reading that is required at school. Try to make at home activities fun and meaningful.

## Useful Arithmetic

When your child is studying fractions, do some cooking together. Let your child calculate how to double or halve a recipe. Note the different sizes of measuring cups and spoons. When it is time to divide the portions evenly, most children will amaze you with the accuracy and speed of their mental processes. Ask your child to help with the family budget, bill paying, taxes, saving and investments. If you use a computer program to do this work, your child will probably be very helpful. If you are home building, remodeling, or decorating, ask your child to make measurements for purchase and draw some plans to scale.

## Map Reading

Whether you are traveling across the country or across town, get out a map or find one on the internet and ask your child to find the best route. The child can be your navigator as you

drive. Also your child can calculate arrival times, gas mileage and plan needed refueling and rest stops.

## Shopping

When you shop for groceries, school supplies, clothing, or major purchases such as a car or appliance, ask your child to make comparisons. Preschoolers can locate the items in the store. Elementary school children can compare prices. Junior high and high school students can be your personal shoppers – just give them the list and a limit of how much to spend.

## Civics

Follow a new event for several days. Compare what is on television and radio with what is in the newspaper and on the internet. Discuss the event at mealtime or while riding in the car.

## Sociology

Volunteer as a family to do community service in your neighborhood or in another part of your city. Go with a church or club group to another part of the state, country, or world to provide a service and learn about another culture. Help your child to understand, respect, and value diversity.

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