



# Family Ties

Family and Consumer Science

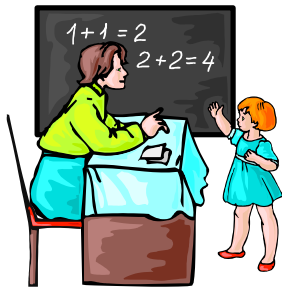
Human Development

## What American's Teachers Wish Parents Knew

### I wish that parents . . .

Would believe only half of what their child tells them about the teacher!! I only believe half of what their child tells me about them.

*1<sup>st</sup> Grade Teacher*



Would never tell their children, "I was never any good at math when I was in school." The mountain that I climb as a math teacher is much steeper when self-confidence begins to erode years before my work begins.

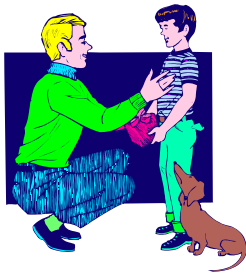
*High School Math Teacher*

Would help their children feel important and invincible. The child who thinks he can climb a mountain will most likely do it.

*Kindergarten Teacher*

Would realize that they themselves, are the real heroes. . . the vivid role models for their adolescent children. One only has to read writing assignments I have given high school students throughout my 18 years of teaching to understand how significant parents are to their teens.

*High School English Teacher*



Would remember that public school is not a "substitute parent." If parents do not do their part first, many students just never catch up.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher*

Would remember that school does not become important to the child until he/she knows it is important to his/her parents.

*5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher*

Would talk to me. Don't think twice-a-year conferences are your only opportunity to communicate with your child's teacher. "If a poor grade comes home, call. If there's a change at home, such as a divorce, death of a pet or birth of a sibling, mention it. It could affect your child's performance at school. Many teachers now have voice mail and e-mail, making it easier to keep the channels of communication open. Just be sure to ask the teacher first how she prefers to be contacted.

*6<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher*

By: Judy Berryhill, MS  
Extension Specialist - Adolescent Development

Source: Family Issues: Parents as Learning Partners. University of Maine Cooperative Extension

# Making the Best of the School Year

Children who are given the basics. . . love, healthy food, enough sleep, clothing, and a safe home. . . have a natural head start at school. These children are ready to learn. However, parents can encourage learning and help children make the most of their educational experience.

These 12 questions can help you can determine whether you are providing an environment that will lead to good school learning. Check the boxes that best describe your home life.

- ☐ Everyone in my family has at least one chore that must be done on time.
- ☐ We have regular times for members of the family to eat, sleep, play, and study.
- ☐ Schoolwork and reading comes before play, TV or other work.
- ☐ I praise my child for good school work, sometimes in front of other people.
- ☐ My child has a quiet place to study, a desk or table at which to work, and books, including a dictionary or other reference books.
- ☐ Members of my family talk about hobbies, games, news, the books we're reading, and movies and TV programs we've seen.
- ☐ The family visits museums, libraries, zoos, historical sites and other places of interest.
- ☐ I encourage good speech habits, helping my child to use the correct words and phrases and to learn new ones.
- ☐ At dinner or some other daily occasion, our family talks about the day's events with a chance for everyone to speak and be listened to.
- ☐ I know my child's current teacher, what my child is doing in school, and which learning materials are being used.
- ☐ I expect quality work and good grades. I know my child's strengths and weaknesses and give encouragement and special help when they are needed.
- ☐ I talk to my child about the future, about planning for high school and college, and about aiming for a high level of education.



If you scored 10 or more, your home ranks in the top one-fourth in terms of the support and encouragement you give you child for school learning. If you scored six or lower, your home is in the bottom one-fourth. If you scored somewhere in between, you're average in the support you give your child for school learning.

Source: Family Issues: Literacy and Reading for School. University of Maine Cooperative Extension

# Communicating with Your Teen on the Move



With family schedules so busy, it is sometime hard to find time to communicate with your teenagers. Driving the car with your teenager and a few of his/her friends is one of the best places to catch up on what's going on in his life. This is when you learn about future and past parties; about arguments with teachers and coaches; about major term papers due the next day; and yes, about budding romances, too. But if you are not alert to the vast potential of car rides, you may miss this opportunity. That is, it takes a little patience and a lot of discipline to get the most out of these backseat conversations.

At first, your teenager and her friends get into the car, pile into the backseat, and jabber on about nothing. All you know for sure is that they are loud and energetic. Evidentially, they'll begin to talk about all the interesting things happening in their lives—the ones they don't normally share with you. . . and they'll act as if you weren't there and can't hear what they are saying. Your job now, more than ever, is to drive well and stay quiet. This is your teenager's way of catching you up on some of the details of her life. Don't ruin the moment by asking lots of questions. Let her friends ask the questions and make the points. You just listen and take it all in.

In one car ride, she has managed to update you on some of the more pertinent details of her life without having to answer twenty questions about the details. You now know enough about what is happening in her life so that if something goes wrong—her best friend starts dating the guy she had planned to ask to the dance, she isn't invited to the party this weekend, her teacher won't let her make up the test she missed because of an away volleyball game—she can count on you for support. That is, when she is in her room crying and you ask what is wrong, she'll tell you because you have enough background information to make sense of the bits and pieces of information she'll throw your way: *Matthew is going out with Sarah*. Now she counts on you to remember what was said during that car ride so

that you can put two and two together and realize that Matthew was the guy she had a crush on. And Sarah was her best friend. In other words, your daughter is in a crisis.

Imagine you had not overheard that conversation in the car; now when you enter her room and ask why she is crying, instead of letting you support her there's a good chance she'll either turn her head away in dismissal or attack you for asking the question. The reason is that without the background information you can't possibly understand what she is going through, and she doesn't have the energy or patience to catch you up on the history of the crisis. In short, she is angry with you for not understanding what she never told you.

Savvy parents recognize the carpool as the opportunity it really is: the chance for your teenagers to update you safely on the vulnerable areas of their lives on the long shot that things will go haywire and they will need your support. Put another way, driving the carpool and staying quiet as they discusses their lives allows you, when the crisis hits, to transform yourself into the caring, compassionate, and good parent your son/daughter needs. During these car rides, your teenagers tosses you gems; it's up to you to catch them and to recognize their value in strengthening your relationship with each other.

By: Judy Berryhill, MS  
Extension Specialist - Adolescent Development

**Contact Your Local Extension Office  
For Additional Information**

# Teaching Your Kids to Be Sexually Healthy



Talking with children about sexuality is uncomfortable for most parents. However, if you don't teach your children about sexuality, someone else will. That person may not have the correct information or share your values.

Here are some tips for raising sexually healthy children from Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee.

- , Respond to your child's questions instead of brushing them off or worrying about why they are asking.
- , Don't wait for your child to start the conversation. Take advantage of everyday opportunities to talk about sexuality such as something on TV, a friend's or family member's pregnancy, births of pets, etc.
- , Look for teachable moments. In addition to the situations mentioned above, make sure your child is prepared for times when he or she may be around older youth who may be more physically developed or have more sexual knowledge than your child. For example, when children go to a mixed-age summer camp or start to middle-school, they may be around children who are two to three years older and who may be going through puberty. Your children need to be prepared with correct information about that stage of development.
- , It's okay if you don't have an answer to your child's questions. Look up the answers together.
- , It's okay to feel uncomfortable. Talk about it anyway. You can tell your child that this is uncomfortable for you, but you think it is important that you talk about it. This will help your child to

see you as someone he or she can approach with hard questions.

- , Listen, listen, and listen to your children. Pay attention to what they are feeling, wondering, or curious about. Listen to see what they already know.
- , Facts are not enough. Just knowing the physical aspects of sexual development and reproduction are not enough to keep your child sexually healthy. Teach your child about your values, the importance of treating others with respect, and that healthy relationships are about much more than sex.
- , Teach both your sons and daughters about healthy sexuality. Healthy sexuality includes taking care of one's body, making thoughtful and responsible choices, and being aware of and acting on your personal values.
- , Involve both parents in sexuality conversations when possible. Children and adolescents need to hear the adult viewpoint from both men and women. When only one gender of parent is available, involve other family members or close friends of the opposite sex to help provide the other perspective.
- , Talk about the joys of sexuality. Children need to see that sex is a wonderful way to share intimacy when it is in the context of a healthy and committed relationship. When children only hear the negative aspects of sexuality such as abuse, STDs and unwanted pregnancies, they may develop a distorted view of sex.

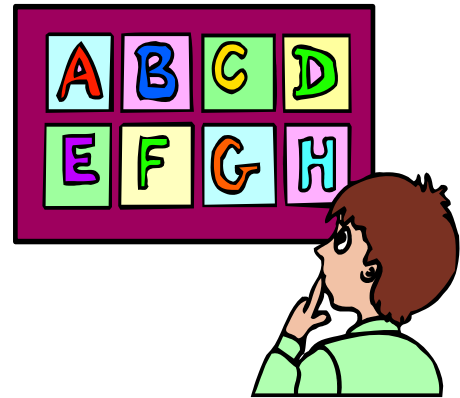
By following these suggestions, you will be able to teach your child about sexuality when your child is ready, and you won't have to dread the "BIG" conversation. It will be happening as your child grows and learns.

By: Denise J. Brandon, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist - Family Relations

For more information go to *Talking With Kids About Sex and Relationships* at <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/sex.html>.

# What Do Kindergarten Teachers Really Expect?

Early childhood professionals hear a wide range of what schools expect children to know before they come to kindergarten. Pre-K teachers have heard such things as the children must know their colors, or the alphabet, or how to write their name, etc. Much of what is heard is really a myth, passed on from person to person. In most states the only requirements are that the child be five years old by a certain date and that they have their immunizations up to date.



In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement funded a study to look at public school kindergarten teachers' views on children's readiness for school. Kindergarten teachers said the most important quality for kindergarten readiness is for a child to be physically healthy, rested, and well nourished. A substantial number of teachers also felt that children should be able to verbally communicate their needs and that they be enthusiastic and curious about approaching new activities.

The following is an excerpt from an article in Tallahassee's Family Forum magazine from 2002. When asked about readiness and the skills necessary for kindergarten entry, Dr. Lucia French, a professor at the Warner School of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester stated, "Some parents fear that they have somehow failed to prepare their child if he doesn't already have substantial academic skills under his belt before he enters school. In the year before kindergarten, it may be possible for children to learn to count and to learn letter names and some letter sounds," says Dr. French, "but these are not really the important skills for kindergarten readiness. Children can learn numbers and letters easily once they enter kindergarten or first grade. There are much more important things to learn during the preschool years, things that will provide a more important foundation for school success."

## **The Action Alliance for Children states that a child is ready when his . . .**

- < Approach to learning is confident, curious, and excited, and when he is familiar with books and print, and able to pay attention.
- < Knowledge and skills are at an appropriate level. For example, he is learning to count, can identify similarities and differences, is learning to write his own name, understands the basic idea that writing represents speech.
- < General health is being cared for. He gets enough rest and a balanced, nutritious diet and has had necessary immunizations and regular medical and dental care.
- < Physical skills have matured enough. He has small-muscle skills like holding a pencil and can control his own body (move, run, sit still).
- < Emotional abilities are progressing. He can work alone, cooperate with others, express his own needs, listen to others, follow simple instructions and handle impulses and negative emotions.

**So how does this information affect us in our positions as pre-K teachers? We see that what really matters is that we present children with a variety of experiences and materials which allow children the time and opportunities to grow and develop at their own individual rate**

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist - Early Childhood

# ***Did You Know . . . .***



**Children and teens who have positive relationships with their parents tend to have better academic outcomes.**

**Good relations between parents and adolescents lessen the likelihood that teens will exhibit problem behaviors.**

**High quality parent-adolescent relationships have been linked repeatedly to mental, social and emotional well-being in adolescents and youth.**

**Growing evidence shows that the apparently strong influence of the parent-child relationship on child and adolescent outcomes extend into adulthood.**



# Checklist for Transition to Kindergarten

**As a teacher of four-year-olds, there are many things you can do to help children and families prepare for the coming school year.**

## **For the Child**

- Identify birth dates of the children to determine who will be eligible for kindergarten in the coming year.
- Continue planning lessons to include activities to develop emerging skills.
- Provide activities to expose children to kindergarten readiness skills.
- Plan a visit to a kindergarten classroom where children from your classroom might be attending the following year.
- Discuss similarities and differences between preschool and kindergarten.
- Read and discuss books about starting school.
- Encourage children to ask questions and to express their fears.
- As the year progresses, gradually increase children's responsibilities.
- Create a scrapbook of the schools that the children will be going to. Have pictures of the buildings, the kindergarten staff, the administrators, etc. Place the scrapbook(s) in the reading center so that children have ample opportunities to look through them.

## **For the Family**

- Encourage parents to attend kindergarten registration (with their child).
- Have a parent conference early in the year and discuss what parents can do at home to help their child with kindergarten readiness skills.
- Find out what school each child will attend and provide parents with contact information for that school, including school address, principal's name, and phone number of the school.
- At the last parent conference, give parents a copy of the book "All About Me" found in the **download section**. Explain how to complete the book and what to do with the completed version.
- Invite school personnel or PTA representative to talk with parents.
- Create and distribute a "Buddy List" of children who will be attending the same school. Encourage parents to arrange playtime with these buddies before the new school year begins.
- Distribute flyers about kindergarten registration.

## **For the Preschool Staff**

- Participate in cross-program visits, classroom observations, and/or in-service trainings.
- Become pen pals with a kindergarten class, periodically sending notes that the children dictate, along with photos and children's art work.
- Become an active member of either the community-level or school-level transition team. If a team does not currently exist, suggest forming one.
- Remember that transition is "everybody's job." Communicate with all concerned parties.
- Invite and welcome elementary school staff to visit.
- Develop a transition folder to go with the child to his new school. Include samples of his work, a list of his strengths and needs, a list of his likes and dislikes, and a note dictated by the child about something special he did during the year. Attach the child's photograph to the folder.
- Plan with parents and kindergarten teachers to provide some common routines.
- Become educated about how a family's culture can affect a child transitions to school

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist - Early Childhood



## ***How Can I Tell if a Child Has Been Sexually Abused?***

When parents or caregivers of children hear reports about sexual abuse of children in the media, they may worry about whether or not their children or the children in their care may have been abused. They may wonder about the signs that a child has been sexually abused. Children who have been sexually abused often exhibit unusual sexual behavior. Before you can know if behavior is unusual, you need to know about normal sexual development.

### **Children Ages Two to Six Years Exhibit the Following Normal Sexual Behaviors:**

- , They are not very modest, and they enjoy being naked;
- , They talk with their peers about elimination—use potty language;
- , They are curious about and may explore the physical differences between boys and girls;
- , They are curious about their own genital parts and touch them, even in public;
- , They play doctor or other types of sex play with their peers.

### **Children Ages Seven to Twelve Exhibit the Following Normal Sexual Behaviors:**

- , They are interested in sexual content of media such as TV, movies, music, and games;
- , They may touch their genital parts at home in private;
- , They may look at nude pictures;
- , They are interested in the opposite sex;
- , They are shy about undressing in front of others;
- , They are shy around strangers, especially strange men.



## **Sex Play May Be a Cause for Concern When the Following Behaviors are Displayed:**

When normal sexual behavior, such as masturbation, is frequent or compulsive, or interferes with normal childhood activities;  
When it occurs between children who do not know each other well;  
When it is between children of different ages, sizes, and developmental levels;  
When it is aggressive, forced, or coerced;

## **The Following Behaviors May Be Signs that a Child Has Been Sexually Abused:**

- Sudden reluctance to go someplace or be with someone;
- Inappropriate displays of affection;
- Sudden use of sexual terms or new names for body parts;
- Discomfort with or rejection of typical family affection;
- Sleep problems including insomnia or nightmares;
- Refusal to sleep alone or suddenly insisting on a night light;
- Reverting to immature or dependent behaviors such as thumb-sucking, or bedwetting;
- Sudden personality change;
- Problems in school;
- Unwillingness to change clothes for gym;
- Running away from home;
- Unusual knowledge of sexual behavior and/or sexual acting out;
- Report of sexual assault by an adult.

If you suspect that a child has been sexually abused, call the Department of Children's Services at 877-237-0004, and provide as much information about the situation as you can. Protecting our youngest citizens is everyone's job.

By: Denise Brandon, PH.D  
Extension Specialist - Family Relations

For more information about how to report suspected abuse, check out the child safety website at <http://www.tennessee.gov/youth/childsafety/callcentralintake.htm>

For information on how to help prevent child abuse, check out the Child Abuse Prevention Month materials at <http://www.pcat.org/Assets/docs/2007-Child-Abuse-Prevention-Packet.pdf>