



Family and Consumer Sciences

Family Ties

Creating Strong Families

Making Marriage Work

February 7-14, 2005, is National Marriage Week. Researchers have noted the benefits of marriage to couples, children, and society. Married men and women score higher on measures of emotional well-being, report greater emotional sexual satisfaction, and have better health than do single, widowed, or divorced men and women. Also, on average, married couples are better off financially than unmarried couples, single parents, or divorced persons.

Overall, children living with both birth parents do better academically, socially, emotionally, and financially, than those from single-parent homes, step families, or unmarried parent families.

Children who grow up in homes with both of their parents are nearly half as likely as children of single parents to drop out of school, to have trouble finding a job, or to become a teen parent. Thus, they cost the government less money in benefits paid to low-income families, pay more taxes, and have lower crime rates. So, marriage benefits society as well.

If marriage is so great, then why do so many marriages fail? That question is a hard one to answer, but there are some things a married couple can do to improve the chances that their marriage will last.

- **Honor your vows.** Most couples promise to stay together through the bad times as well as the good when they get married. However, they often find it easier to get out of the marriage than to try to make things work when problems come up. It takes a strong commitment to marriage and to your mate to make a marriage last through the hard times.
- **Show your love every day.** Do things for your partner that will show him or her that you care, even when you don't feel like it.
- **Say "I love you" in lots of different ways.** The words are really nice to hear, but hugs, kisses, a loving look, or just listening to your partner can also say "I love you."
- **Make time to be alone together.** Talk with your spouse about your feelings, concerns, goals, joys, and challenges. Listen, and try to understand your partner's feelings.
- **Do things together.** Find things that both of you like to do and make time to do those things. Laugh together. Get out of your rut and do something different together. Celebrate special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries.
- **Keep the romance alive.** Surprise your spouse with a small gift or a note on her pillow. Put a card or your picture in his lunch box or brief case. Make time to make love.
- **Do things as a team.** Share chores at home. Make parenting a team effort. Manage your money together. Have family meetings to make decisions together.
- **Manage your personal stress.** Find ways to work out your frustrations so you don't take them out on your family—exercise, take the long way home to let yourself unwind before diving into home and family issues, make some time for yourself every day.
- **Say "I'm sorry" and forgive your spouse.** Love means being willing to say "I'm sorry." It also means that you will forgive your spouse when he or she does something to hurt you. This isn't easy, but it is important to keeping your relationship honest and trusting.
- **Learn how to fight fair.** Every marriage has its disagreements. Learning how to handle them will help you to have a strong marriage. Take a marriage education course to learn how to communicate effectively and fight fairly.



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



One Child – Two Homes: How to Make Transitions Easier

For children, one of the hardest things about having divorced parents is having to move between two houses. Depending on the parenting schedule, children may move between homes once or twice a week, every other week, or once per month or less. No matter how often they move, making the transition between homes can be difficult. What can parents do to make this easier for children?

First, parents need to protect their children's emotions. Saying things like, "I am going to be so lonely without you," or "I don't know what I am going to do while you are gone," makes children feel responsible for your well-being. It makes your child feel like he or she is abandoning you for the other parent. Instead, make plans to do something you will enjoy while your children are away. For example, plan to go to a movie or play golf with a friend, read a book you have been wanting to read, or attend a special event. Let your children know that you will be happy when they return but that you will be okay while they are gone.

Second, help your children look forward to their time with the other parent. Talk about how good it is that they are getting to spend time with that parent. Help them to think of things they might do or ways they might spend time together while they are there. Work with the other parent to try to have similar schedules and rules in each home, if possible. Make sure you pack some toys or games that your children can enjoy while they are away.

Third, reduce the stress of packing for these moves by having some things on hand at both places. For example, children should have their own toiletry items such as toothbrush, comb, deodorant, etc. at each home. Also, it will be helpful to keep pajamas, underwear, and at least one or two changes of clothes at each house so that they won't have to pack everything every time they go back and forth. Make sure there are some toys, books, or games at each house that can stay at that house instead of being taken back and forth. Have a place in each home for children to keep their things. This will make them feel more like they belong there.

Finally, it is important for both parents to stay in the role of parent with their children. That means both parents help with or encourage homework. Both parents have chores that the children do in their homes. Both parents

enforce limits and rules that you have agreed on, if possible. This will provide a greater feeling of security for your children and make moving from house-to-house less difficult for them.

If you and the other parent are unable to control your conflicts, make arrangements to have the children picked up at a neutral location. This may be a fast food restaurant or a school ball game. Or have someone else, such as a grandparent or family friend take them to the other parent. It is important for your children to spend time with their other parent unless it is unsafe for them. If you fear for their safety, you need to tell your attorney, law enforcement, or the Department of Children's Services.

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

For More Information
Contact Your County Extension Office

Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development,
family and consumer sciences, and resource development.
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture
and county governments cooperating.
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Let's Celebrate the Week of the Young Child

The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest early childhood education association and will be celebrated April 3-9, 2005. The theme for the Week of the Young Child 2005 is Children's Opportunities—Our Responsibilities.



The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

Today we know more than ever before about the importance of children's earliest years in shaping their learning and development. Yet, never before have the needs of young children and their families been more pressing.

The Week of the Young Child is a time to recognize that children's opportunities are our responsibilities, and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that each and every child experiences the type of early environment--at home, at child care, at school, and in the community--that will promote their early learning.

So, what can you do to help support or involve yourself or your community during the Week of the Young Child? Here is one example from a local community:

"Our activities included: the Governor reading the WOYC Proclamation; a nutrition training for child care providers; and a literacy training for parents. Finally, we offered a full day Spring Conference at a local elementary school. We offered 36 classes and an opportunity for six credit hours toward state licensing requirements. 250 child care providers attended. It was a wonderful experience that introduced the community to our providers and our providers to the community."

From a parent's perspective make a point during this week to spend more time with your children, read them an extra book at night, plan a family outing to the zoo or somewhere special the children love to go visit – be creative with your ideas.

From an agency perspective try some of these ideas:

Organize festivals, fairs, or exhibitions at a community park, shopping mall, bank, or community center. Invite schools, agencies, and local businesses that serve children and their families to provide information about their programs and services.

Honor those who have significantly contributed to the quality of services for young children and their families in your program, school, or community.

Launch a Child Watch Visitation Program. This initiative of the Children's Defense Fund moves executives, clergy, legislators, and other community leaders out of their offices, boardrooms, and legislative chambers and into the real world of children and families.

There are several other things individuals or agencies can do to promote the Week of the Young Child. Let's promote the importance of early childhood and give the children what they deserve – our attention and our recognition. For more information go to www.naeyc.org and click on Week of the Young Child. You will also find a ready made Communications Kit for delivering a PSA and other media material.

By: Matt Devereaux, Ph.D., Extension Specialist-Child Development



Talking With Kids About Sex and Relationships

Most parents want to do their best in talking with their kids about sex and sexuality, but we're often not sure how to begin. Here's some basic advice:

Explore your own attitudes

Studies show that kids who feel they can talk with their parents about sex -- because their moms and dads speak openly and listen carefully to them -- are less likely to engage in high-risk behavior as teens than kids who do not feel they can talk with their parents about the subject. So explore your feelings about sex. If you are very uncomfortable with the subject, read some books and discuss your feelings with a trusted friend, relative, physician, or clergy member. The more you examine the subject, the more confident you'll feel discussing it.

Start early

Teaching your children about sex demands a gentle, continuous flow of information that should begin as early as possible -- for instance, when teaching your toddler where his nose and toes are, include "this is your penis" or "this is your vagina" in your talks. As your child grows, you can continue her education by adding more materials gradually until she understands the subject well.

Take the initiative

If your child hasn't started asking questions about sex, look for a good opportunity to bring it up. Say, for instance, the mother of an 8-year-old's best friend is pregnant. You can say, "Did you notice that David's mommy's tummy is getting bigger? That's because she's going to have a baby and she's carrying it inside her. Do you know how the baby got inside her?" then let the conversation move from there.

Talk about more than the "Birds and the Bees"

While our children need to know the biological facts about sex, they also need to understand that sexual relationships involve caring, concern and responsibility. By discussing the emotional aspect of a sexual relationship with your child, she will be better informed to make decisions later on and to resist peer pressure. If your child is a pre-teen, you need to include some message about the responsibilities and consequences of sexual activity. Conversations with 11 and 12-year-olds, for example, should include talks about unwanted pregnancy and how they can protect themselves.

Give accurate, age-appropriate information

Talk about sex in a way that fits the age and stage of your child. If your 8-year-old asks why boys and girls change so much physically as they grow, you can say something like, "The body has special chemicals called hormones that tell it whether to become a boy or a girl. A boy has a penis and testicles, and when he grows older his voice gets lower and he gets more hair on his body. A girl has a vulva and vagina, and when she gets older she grows breasts and her hips grow rounder."

Anticipate the next stage of development

Children can get frightened and confused by the sudden changes their bodies begin to go through as they reach puberty. To help stop any anxiety, talk with your kids not only about their current stage of development but about the next stage, too. An 8-year-old girl is old enough to learn about menstruation, just as a boy that age is ready to learn how his body will change.

Communicate your values

It's our responsibility to let our children know our values about sex. Although they may not adopt these values as they mature, at least they'll be aware of them as they struggle to figure out how they feel and want to behave.

Talk with your child of the opposite sex

Some parents feel uncomfortable talking with their child about topics like sex if the youngster is of the opposite gender. While that's certainly understandable, don't let it become an excuse to close off conversation. If you're a single mother of a son, for example, you can turn to books to help guide you or ask your doctor for some advice on how to bring up the topic with your child. You could also recruit an uncle or other close male friend or relative to discuss the subject with your child, provided there is already good, open communication between them. If there are two parents in the household, it might feel less awkward to have the dad talk with the boy and the mom with the girl. That's not a hard and fast rule, though. If you're comfortable talking with either sons or daughters, go right ahead. Just make sure that gender differences don't make subjects like sex taboo.

Relax

Don't worry about knowing all the answers to your children's questions; what you know is a lot less important than how you respond. If you can convey the message that no subject, including sex, is forbidden in your home, you'll be doing just fine.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill
Area Specialist - Adolescent Development



Be My Neighbor!

Forming Neighborhood “Safety Nets”

You live near them. You may see them almost every day. But how well do you know them?

They are your neighbors. Sometimes, people’s lives are so busy that they rarely speak to their neighbors, let alone get to know them. But finding time to build relationships with the people who live close to you and your family can help your child in many ways.

What To Know

Research shows that a feeling of community with neighbors is an important step in reducing risky behaviors and mental health problems among children. For example, children who have positive relationships with adults may be at lower risk for delinquency and substance use.

Since you and your neighbors may send your children to the same schools and activities, you may share the same concerns about neighborhood safety. They may be willing to join you in helping to protect children from drug use and other risky behaviors.

What To Do

Kids Can Get Involved...

Kids can benefit from having a “safety net” - neighbors who care, listen, monitor them, and guide them toward safe choices. The three protective processes listed below can help your child bond with other adults.

- C Opportunities for involvement. Urge your child to join in fun, substance-free activities offered by youth centers such as 4-H, faith organizations, and schools. Strong bonds can be made when children take part in meaningful activities and feel valued for their input.
- C Skills for successful involvement. Help your child build the right skills - social, academic, or behavioral - to participate in neighborhood activities.
- C Recognition for involvement. Young people need to be recognized and valued for their work. Praise your child’s efforts regularly and urge neighbors to show their appreciation as well.

Parents Can Get Involved...

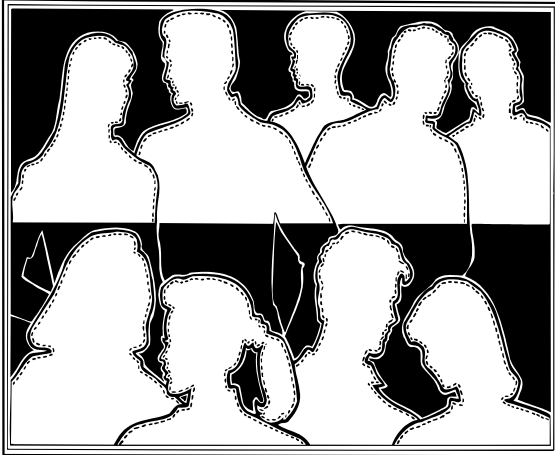
If you and your child have trouble finding healthy and fun ways to get involved, or if you’ve simply had a stroke of creativity, you can start your own neighborhood activity. Plan a mural painting with an antidrug theme, start a 4-H project group/community club, or form a service group to volunteer at a local organization (such as an animal shelter or a retirement center). Make sure both kids and adults can take part, keeping in mind that activities planned between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. give kids something to do after school.

Healthy after-school activities can help keep your child safe and also can be a great time for you to chat with other parents. Together, you can make your neighborhood a safer place for children.

You want to protect your child from unsafe behavior, and living in a place that supports you increases this protection. Forming a “safety net” in your area can start with making a simple, friendly gesture toward a neighbor. So make a point to introduce yourself and your family to your neighbors. Wave at the neighbor driving by on his way home. Stop to chat with the neighbor working in her front yard. Smile at the neighbor waiting at the bus stop. These small gestures can make a real difference when it comes to keeping your child drug free.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill, Area Specialist - Adolescent Development

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse. Preventing Drug Abuse Among Children and Adolescents



Preparing Youth for Peer Pressure

Peer pressure - it's more than just a phase that young people go through. Whether it leads to pink hair or body piercing, peer pressure is a powerful reality and many adults do not realize its effects. It can be a negative force in the lives of children and adolescents, often resulting in their experimentation with tobacco, alcohol, and illegal drugs.

Parents often believe that their children do not value their opinions. In reality, studies suggest that parents have tremendous influence over their children, especially teenagers. No matter the age of their children, parents and caregivers should never feel helpless about countering the negative effects of peer pressure. Here's what parents and caregivers can do:

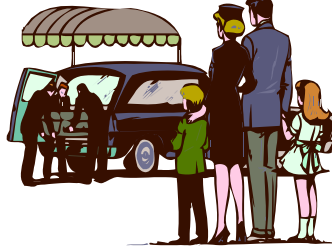
- C **Teach young people how to refuse offers for cigarettes, alcohol and drugs.** Making children comfortable with what they can say goes a long way. For instance, shy children and adolescents might be more comfortable saying, "no thanks," or "I have to go," while those who are more outgoing might say something like, "forget it!" or "no way!" No matter what approach parents choose, it is important for them to role-play peer-pressure situations with their children.
- C **Talk to young people about how to avoid undesirable situations or people who break the rules.** Children and adolescents who are not in situations where they feel pressure to do negative actions are far less likely to do them. Likewise, those who choose friends who do not smoke, drink, use drugs, steal, and lie to their parents are far less likely to do these things as well.
- C **Remind children that there is strength in numbers.** When young people can anticipate stressful peer pressure situations, it might be helpful if they bring friends for support.
- C **Let young people know that it is okay to seek an adult's advice.** While it would be ideal if children sought the advice of their parents, other trusted adults can usually help them avoid most difficult situations, such as offers to smoke, drink, or use drugs.
- C **Nurture strong self-esteem.** Strong self-esteem helps children and adolescents make decisions and follow them, even if their friends do not think some choices are "cool." Some ways parents can do this include being generous with praise, teaching children how to perceive themselves in positive ways, and avoiding criticism of children that takes the form of ridicule or shame.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill, Area Specialist - Adolescent Development

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Dealing With Death

The death of a loved one is never easy, but it can be especially hard for your child to lose a close friend or a family member. Even the death of the family pet-which is often the first time a child has to deal with death-can be a confusing and scary experience for a child.



As a parent or caring adult, your first thought may be to shelter your child from the painful reality of death. You may even have trouble dealing with death yourself, and may not know how best to support your child. But not dealing with death or holding back the grieving process - for either yourself or your child - can lead to problems in the long run. Your child may think that it's wrong to show sadness, or he may develop extreme fear and worry about death. He may even start to show his grief in unhealthy ways, such as turning to alcohol or illegal drugs for comfort. So, it's important for children to know that they can share their feelings and get honest answers from their parents about death.

What To Know . .

Your child's understanding of death depends on her age and experience. By the age of 8 or 9, children usually have a basic adult concept of death-that it is a permanent end of life and that it happens to everyone. However, they may wonder about the physical details of death ("Does it hurt when you die?") or about what happens after you die. A child may be afraid that he or his parents will die. You can tell him that you will do everything you can to keep him and your family safe, and that there will always be someone to take care of him.

Teenagers often feel that they are "immortal" - that death will not affect them. When someone dies, teens sometimes react with defiance or denial, and they may not want to talk about it. You can let your teen know that you are open to talking, without pushing her to talk. But be on the lookout for unhealthy outlets for your teen's grief, such as substance use.

What To Do . .

No matter how old your child is, he needs honesty and emotional support from you when someone dies. Here are some ways you can support your child through the grieving process.

- C Tell the truth. Gentle but truthful language is best: "Grandpa died. He's not coming back, but we will always remember him." Don't tell your child that her grandfather "went away" or "is asleep." Even phrases like "passed away" or "is no longer with us" may be confusing for young children.
- C Share your grief. Express your feelings and allow your child to express her feelings so that they aren't expressed in other, unhealthy ways. Hiding your own grief from your child will send the message that it's not okay to cry or get upset.
- C Comfort your child. Explaining that death is "a part of life" may help ease your child's fears of the unknown. If you are religious or spiritual, sharing your beliefs-for example, a belief in an afterlife-also may help your child feel better.
- C Help your child deal with difficult emotions-including anger, guilt, shame, or confusion. These emotions sometimes stem from false ideas that your child has about someone's death. For example, a child may feel guilty because she thinks she did something to cause the death, or that she could have prevented the death, but failed to. Correct these thoughts as soon as possible.
- C Encourage your child to attend the funeral or memorial services, but don't force her. Many children prefer to be close to their families in times of grief. If your child chooses not to attend memorial services, you can allow him to say goodbye at a later time. For example, you can take him to visit the grave site.

If you were close to the person who died, take care of your own emotional well-being, too. Get help if you need it, especially if your own grief is keeping you from supporting your child. Talk to a friend, a faith community leader, a doctor, or a mental health professional.

By: Judy Cloud Berryhill
Area Specialist - Adolescent Development

Sources:
HospiceNet.org Talking to Children About Death
Scholastic.com The Child's Loss: Death, Grief, and Mourning

Do I Need to Call the Doctor?



Young children are exposed to so many germs in their environments that it is no wonder that they always seem to have some kind of illness. On a daily basis they are around viruses and bacteria that even the strongest of immune systems cannot always battle. Knowing when to call the doctor is not always easy, but a few helpful hints could save you a trip to the doctor's office and some money out of your pocket.

The first suggestion is to keep a log of your child's illness. Write down any symptoms as they happen and the date they occur. Many illnesses seem to last longer than they actually do. Examination of the log can keep you realistic about the time span of the illness. When it is obvious that symptoms are getting better then the call to the doctor can be avoided. On the other hand, if symptoms are worsening over several days, around 3-5, it is a good idea to get in contact with your doctor. When you call, have your log available so you will be prepared to give dates and symptoms accurately. A visit to the office may not be needed but letting them know of illness and duration will help the staff make that decision.

Secondly, keep some basic over-the-counter (OTC) medications available at home. If your child gets sick at 1 A.M. it is nice to have these medicines available to get you through to the next morning. Many times the illness will be much milder and manageable the next morning. Many illnesses symptoms get worse at night. When parents are not prepared they may panic and make midnight calls to the doctor unnecessarily. Many symptoms can be controlled with OTC medicines, such as Tylenol or ibuprofen for fever or age-appropriate cough medicine for coughing. Talk with your doctor about which meds you should keep available. Watching the child the next day will most likely give you a better idea of the illness and if a call or visit is required.

Lastly, have resources readily available. In the event of an illness many parents do not have any information except that

which is obtained by calling the doctor. Having some easy to understand medical references, which are in a convenient place, can make a difference in the medical path that you will take. Many illnesses can be treated with treatments that are readily available in the home. Being prepared before the illness occurs is a positive step to solving the situation. Ask your medical provider what books he recommends. Another good reference is reliable websites, such as WebMD or the American Academy of Pediatrics. Having previously explored the sites and knowing how to access what you need will save time in most situations. Medical providers, again, can give you several reliable sites to visit and become familiar with. When symptoms start to develop use the references, either books or the Web, to decide what steps need to be taken. Of course, if the child is in a life-threatening situation, you always want to call the emergency medical service.

Having a sick child is hard and making medical judgments can be difficult. By using the three tips described you can feel more confident in making decisions. It is not always obvious what needs to be done, even by those who are highly trained. The best thing to do in that situation is to call your doctor and let him/her help make the decision. These tips are only given as suggestions and should never replace the medical knowledge of healthcare providers. Start small and use just one of the tips. After a few tries the decisions will get easier and you will feel more at ease caring for your child's illness.

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