

# TIP

## Tips on parenting



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## Documenting Young Children's Accomplishments

by Dr. Michelle Fazio-Brunson

As parents, we often eagerly document the first year of our children's lives. We pick out just the right baby book and pour over the pages, spending hours detailing our babies' birth weight, length, hair color, and eye color. As our babies grow, we continue to document height and weight changes. We record dates relating to when they begin crawling, utter their first words, take their first steps, and get their first hair cut. As the early days pass, many parents lose interest in the documentation process. However, the increasing popularity of scrapbooking has nurtured a rebirth of this activity.

While there are a multitude of scrapbooking materials available to consumers, many of these materials focus on cutesy sayings relating to popular holidays, such as Halloween. Rather than creating pages that simply showcase children in cute poses, parents can use these materials to document their children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth in scrapbooks that can be cherished for a lifetime.

### GATHERING AND ORGANIZING MATERIALS

A trip down the scrapbooking aisle can be overwhelming at first, but this can be eased by making a list of items you need ahead of time. Look for materials that are acid and lignin free; this will increase the life of your photographs and child's artifacts. Look for paper in solid colors, including white. You will also need an acid free glue stick, adhesive photo corners, plastic page protectors, colored pens and/or markers, scissors, and a three-ring binder or scrapbook. Scrapbooks come in a variety of sizes; decide which size best fits your and your child's needs. You will likely be bombarded with cute papers, stickers, and other embellishments—skip these. They can be expensive, and they will detract from the purpose of your project—to document your child's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. When you get home, organize your materials so that they are easily accessible.

*"organize your materials so that they are easily accessible"*

### BEGINNING TO DOCUMENT

When you begin to document, think baby steps. You might want to begin with a favorite photograph of your child. Select a photo that documents a memorable experience: first steps, playing catch, playing peek-a-boo, or playing with pots and pans. If your child is old enough, let him or her help you select photographs. Next, select a color for a photo mat that complements, but does not compete with, the photo. Cut the mat so that it is slightly larger than the picture. If you want to be able to remove the photo later, attach it to the mat using adhesive photo corners. Attach the mat to a piece of white paper with a glue stick.

Photographs alone only tell part of the story (Helm, Beneke & Steinhammer, 1998). The documentation becomes much richer when you add a narrative that includes the five

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## Documenting Young Children's Accomplishments

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W's (who, what, where, when, and why) and which attempt it is. For example, if you select a photograph of your child building a block tower, a detailed narrative for the photograph might read: Calli tried several times to stack the blocks end-on-end on our living room floor, and each time, the second block tumbled, causing the first block to fall. After the third time this happened, I asked, "Calli, what do you think would happen if you stacked the blocks in a different way?" Calli pondered this and laid the first block flat on the floor. She then laid a second block on top of it. She continued this process until her tower was eight blocks high. She looked at the tower and said, "I made our apartment building." She then pointed to the middle of the tower and explained, "This is where we live." This was Calli's first successful attempt at stacking blocks to make a tower, July 4, 2006, Age 3 years, 2 months.

### ADDING CHILDREN'S ARTIFACTS

Not only can photographs document your child's knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but you can also include artifacts your child creates. Many parents cover their refrigerator with their children's artwork. This not only celebrates children's abilities, it also communicates to them that you think their work is important enough to share with others. As you hang new artwork on your refrigerator, pull old pieces, and put them in your child's scrapbook. Just as with photographs, it is important to include a narrative that documents the experience. Always include dates in your narratives so you can document growth over time.

### RECORDING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

Remember that children learn through play (Wellhousen & Crowther, 2004). Record your child playing house, reading a book, or fixing something that is broken. Such recordings preserve precious memories for years to come, but they also serve as documentation of children's growth. For example, when your child is playing house, you can document his or her social, emotional, and language skills. Recording your child reading a book can help you determine if your child explores books from front to back, reads from left to right and top to bottom, or uses pictures to aid decoding. Recording your child fixing something that is broken documents his or her use of creative and critical thinking skills. These real-world activities document what your child knows, loves, and is able to do more authentically than pencil-paper type assessments.

### JOURNALING WITH CHILDREN

You can also include journal entries in your child's scrapbook. Children love to record their thoughts on paper. They begin by scribbling, then move to writing letter-like forms and using letter-sound relationships, and finally use inventive spelling and standard spelling (MacDonald, 1997). You can document the stage of writing your child is in simply by examining his or her writing samples, and as you add entries, growth in literacy skills will become evident over time.

Provide ample materials for your child to journal. He or she should have access to pencils, erasers, pens, markers, scissors, various types and colors of paper, and envelopes. Journal writing should be open-ended. Let your child write about something that is important to him or her—a significant event, a close friend, a family pet, or something meaningful he or she learned that day. Remember that children document what they know by drawing, so encourage your child to draw as well as write/scribble. Rather than focusing on forming letters properly and spelling words correctly, the focus of early writing should be on content. You can also have your child dictate text to you, and you write it exactly as it is dictated. Spend this time writing in your own journal, too. Children are more likely to value writing if their parents value writing.

There are numerous benefits of documenting your child's knowledge, skills, and dispositions in scrapbooks (Curtis & Carter, 2000). It communicates to your child that you are vested in his or her academic career and that you value his or her work (Curtis & Carter, 1996). Further, documenting your child's experiences can strengthen the bond you share with him or her as you spend quality time together. It can also be used as a vehicle to enrich parent-teacher conferences. Finally, it provides a permanent keepsake of how your child will grow and change over time.

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## activity corner

### Music and Maracas

This activity provides children with the opportunity to create their own musical instruments. Children will have fun using the instruments as they develop their musical abilities and listening skills.

#### Materials

- 1/2 cup sand
- 1/2 cup dried corn
- 1/2 cup dried beans
- 1/2 cup of water and a drop of food coloring
- 4 small plastic water or soda bottles



#### Directions

Use four clean plastic bottles. Fill each bottle with a different substance dried corn, dried beans, or sand. Put the 1/2 cup of water in the last bottle with a drop of food coloring. Glue or tape the tops shut. Each bottle will produce a different sound. Put on some music and allow the children to experiment with the different sounds in rhythm to the music.

## science corner

### Connecting Young Children with Nature

by Darius Kalvaitis

After a long cold winter, spring is a great time to get outside with young children. There are numerous reasons to head outdoors that are both refreshing and educational. The natural world provides a perfect venue to introduce early science exploration to young children.

Young children are innately fascinated with nature and the potential for inquiry it holds. Backyard and local explorations as young naturalists often lead children to further academic "science" pursuits later in life. Many of us recoil from anything scientific because we believe we do not have "stuff" scientists are made of. However, science is something which is continually surrounding us. Rachel Carson wrote about this issue in her book, *The Sense of Wonder*, stating "The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists, but are available to anyone who

will place himself under the influence of earth, sea, and sky and their amazing life" (Carson, 1988, p. 56).

Young children struggle to create meaning out of the world which begins at infancy. Exploring, questioning, communicating, and problem solving characteristics of early childhood. These are also the processes of scientific inquiry. Young children who go outside begin to notice the patterns and cycles of nature, the routine of animal life, and the splendor of the world surrounding them. Learning from regular outdoor experience builds on children's intrinsic inquisitiveness and their developmental desire to interact with real objects.

Through nature study, children can learn how they affect the environment and how the environment affects them. By having

rich and varied opportunities to experience nature, children can begin to value and appreciate their immediate world at a very young age. Researchers suggest that young children should begin learning about nature before they start school (Phenice & Griffore, 2003; Wilson, 1993).

Because young children learn about the environment by interacting with it, caring adults should make frequent child environment encounters during the early years. It is up to the adults and caregivers whether a child has access to nature. As Rachel Carson put it, "If a child is to keep alive his one sense of wonder ... he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in" (Carson, 1988, p. 45).



## Science Corner

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Unfortunately, many children, regardless of where they live, spend much of their time in activities that keep them isolated from direct contact with nature (Louv, 2005). Many parents and educators have observed a cultural shift away from nature and towards electronic games, television and the latest electronic gadgets. This may not be the healthiest path for children's physical, emotional and intellectual development. Bringing young children outside regularly can support many of their developmental needs.

Here are some tips to make outdoor experiences with children rewarding.

1. Begin with simple experiences in your backyard or local park. Young children learn best through experiences that relate to what is already familiar and comfortable.
2. Demonstrate a personal interest and enjoyment of nature.
3. Model caring and respect for nature.
4. Ensure that children are safe in their explorations by keeping a close eye on them at all times.

A few things to do with children ages 0-5:

- While the baby is in a bassinet place them under a tree and let the child experience the sights, sounds, and feel of the wind and sun.
- When taking children outdoors in a stroller or for walks be willing to stop and enjoy interesting sights that they are interested in, and allow the time for them to experience the sounds, sights, and smells.
- In the park, allow the children to explore more than the equipment provided for them. Exploring bushes, trees, waterways, flowers, or following animal tracks may look mundane to you, but can serve as a great adventure for young children.
- These types of experiences may seem trivial, yet during childhood there is a window of opportunity for children to make a connection



with the natural environment that will last a lifetime (Sobel, 1996; Wells & Lekies, 2006).

Taking children outdoors this spring will invigorate their curiosity and strengthen their bond with the natural world. Children seem to have an innate need to identify with the flora and fauna surrounding them. Children are imprinted positively by the places they explore. To feel the cool air brush the skin, listen to the rush of the stream, and watch the setting sun, are just a few reasons to take children outdoors. They also love it. It is healthy, and it supports their development. It allows children the opportunity to develop into young scientists while touching them with the wonder, excitement, and the freshness of the world they live in.

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## SEWING THE SEEDS OF SPRING

by Dr. Anne Tapp

Spring has sprung, and our planting season is upon us. As you head to your garden this year, remember to take a child along. The best thing you might grow this season is a gardener.

Kids are born naturalists. Witness a child gathering flowers or checking out a worm's path, and you will see the potential learning opportunities they may have with gardens. Gardens are kid-friendly places where the thought of a seed yielding a vine-full of tomatoes is magical and dirt and water are on the OK list of things to investigate.

Although not required, a handful of tools will add to the experience. These include a magnifying glass to get an up-close view, a ruler and tape measure to check out the growth, and a journal to record this growth as well as other observations. A child can also discover some simple pleasures like observing the birds or butterflies coming to visit your garden.

We know that having a green thumb is a term associated with successful gardening. When asking Jeeves ([www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com)) about this term, a few different answers were provided. One theory was that King Edward I of England loved green peas, so he required several of his serfs to shell them all season. He awarded a prize to the one with the greenest thumb. Others include the green residue that clings to fingers from algae growing on earthenware pots and the color left

on one's thumb after pinching back plants.

Whichever is correct, may your family's thumbs be green this summer. Not only will you have fun and make lasting memories, you may nurture a naturalist and feed a growing mind along the way.

### Explore Gardens in Your Area

<http://www.gardenvisit.com/m/gardenfinder-index/America.htm>

<http://www.botanique.com/tours/usa-map.htm>

### Accompanying Literature

*The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart

*Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots: Gardening Together with Children* by Sharon Lovejoy

*Green Thumbs: A Kid's Activity Guide to Indoor and Outdoor Gardening* by Laurie Carlson

*Gardening Wizardry for Kids* by L. Patricia Kite, Yvette Santiago Banek

*Life Cycle of a Sunflower* by Angela Royston

*Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert

*Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert

*Grow Your Own Pizza* by Constance Hardesty

~Dr. Anne Tapp is an associate professor at Saginaw Valley State University. She specializes in curriculum, technology, and science education at the early childhood and elementary levels. She is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences and has authored several professional articles.





## Words, Words, Words: Children's Books Featuring Words

by Sylvia Read

Winnie the Pooh once said, "I am a Bear of Very Little Brain, and long words bother me." But children are delighted by words of all kinds. They love to learn and use new and unusual words. When we read them books that feature words, we build their speaking vocabulary—the words they feel comfortable using when they talk. They may also use these words when they write, making their writing more colorful and precise. Enjoy these celebrations of words:

***The Boy Who Loved Words*** by Roni Schotter, illustrated by Giselle Potter Selig is a boy who collects words because he likes how they sound, how they feel in his heart, and the way they make him think.



For a while he keeps his words to himself, but when a poet finds some of the words he's collected and uses them to write a beautiful poem, he figures out that his mission is to spread the love of words to everyone. Indeed, when he is near, people seem to find the words they need. Inside the back cover is a useful glossary.

***Miss Alaineus: A Vocabulary Disaster***, written and illustrated by Debra Frasier  
When Sage misses school on vocabulary day, she calls her friend Starr for the list of vocabulary

words they're learning. The 15th word is "miscellaneous," but Sage writes it down as Miss Alaineus. She does her homework while sick in bed, writes down her own definitions for each of the words, but when she gets to Miss Alaineus, she's stumped. This leads to an embarrassing moment at school the next day when Sage volunteers to read aloud her definition of "miscellaneous." But all ends well when Sage dresses up as Miss Alaineus for her school's Vocabulary Parade.

***Mom and Dad are Palindromes*** by Mark Shulman. Illustrated by Adam McCauley.  
Bob's teacher points out that his name is a palindrome and Bob begins to see palindromes everywhere: Mom, Dad, his sisters Anna and Nan. Dozens of palindromes are included in the story and in the illustrations. The sheer silliness of it all will make your child want to pay close attention to the way the palindromes are spelled the same, forwards and backwards.

***Do Not Open This Book!*** by Michaela Muntean. Illustrated by Pascal Lemaître.  
The main character, a pig, is trying to write a story, but he's having trouble getting started. He tells the reader not



to interrupt him when he's writing because it makes the words blow around and get out of order. Indeed, the words do blow around when we turn the page and so he decides to write about the person whose reading the book. It's very clever how he gets the reader to insert his or her name in his story. Children will be amused by the way the pig talks to them throughout the book.

***Max's Words*** by Kate Banks. Illustrated by Boris Kulikov.  
Max's brother collects stamps and coins, but they won't let him have any of them, so Max decides to collect words. Then he realizes he can put the words together and make stories, which gets his brothers interested. They finish one story and tell Max they want another, but he wants one of their stamps and coins in return. They get some of Max's words, Max gets a stamp and coin and keeps the rest of the words for himself. The story ends with Max beginning a new story, which children will naturally want to finish for themselves with the words they've collected!



~Sylvia Read is a former 1st and 2nd grade teacher who now teaches language arts and children's literature classes to preservice and inservice teachers at Utah State University.



## question corner

"My 20-month-old does not want to get dressed in the morning. She throws a temper tantrum almost everyday. What can I do?"

— Tracy in Minnesota



Dressing young children can be a challenge, especially if you are in a hurry to get to work in the morning. The child may use this time as an opportunity to scream, squirm, kick, run away, or just plain refuse to put their clothes on for the day. It can become a battle for control between you and your child.

Typically, a toddler may behave this way to assert his or her independence. A child may also use a tantrum as a way to procrastinate, particularly if they know that getting dressed means their parent will soon be going off to work. There are also a few children who are very sensitive to the textures of certain clothing. They may not be able to stand any fabric that feels scratchy.

There are a few things you can do to help prevent the morning tantrum. First, allow plenty of time in the morning for dressing. The more the child senses your need to hurry, the more likely they are to respond with protest. It may also help to allow the child who is struggling with independence or sensitivity to certain fabrics to have some choice in the outfit for the day. In addition, telling the child what fun activity you have planned for them after they get dressed may motivate them into action. For example, "If you get dressed now, we can go outside and play for a few minutes before mommy goes to work." With young toddlers and infants, try telling them a story or singing a song while you get them dressed. Finally, allow the child to dress themselves as much as possible, so they feel like they are part of the process. "You put that arm in all by yourself!" Using these little tips, may create better mornings for both you and your child.

For more information, check out the book *A to Z Guide to Your Child's Behavior: A Parent's Easy and Authoritative Reference to Hundreds of Everyday Problems and Concerns from Birth to 12 Years* compiled by the faculty of the Children's National Medical Center under the direction of David Mrazek, M.D. and William Garrison, Ph.D., with Laura Elliot.

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

**question corner** features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to [eejcenter@cc.usu.edu](mailto:eejcenter@cc.usu.edu) or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education, Utah State University,



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