

PNW 556

Dear Family-Serving Professional,

We've all seen the conflicting demands of work and family, whether in our own lives or in the families we work with. Long working hours, off-hour and changing shifts, problems with child care and transportation, difficulties keeping in touch with school, and challenges of meeting the neighbors with so few hours at home are among the work/family topics of conversation common at workplace break times around the country. Each family must find its own way, navigating among the challenges of work and home life.

However, research on contemporary families can help us make good choices. The work of several investigators is especially helpful for today's families, including John Gottman's studies on emotional development, Lawrence Steinberg's research on youth and adolescence, and the work of the many researchers who identify successful approaches to child guidance and discipline.

The navigating work and family series was developed to support working families in the decisions they face about family life. The series of 10 handouts can be a useful resource for schools, social service and counseling centers, parent information centers, early childhood centers, and work settings.

The series features

- Research-based concepts and ideas for family life
- Practical suggestions for meeting family needs
- English and Spanish versions
- Reading level appropriate for a broad audience

We invite you to copy the handouts and to distribute them to the parents you work with. The handouts are also available for downloading from the web at <http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/pdf/PNW/PNW0556.pdf>

We hope you find the navigating work and family series to be useful in your work with families.

Sincerely,



Harriet Shaklee
Extension Family Development Specialist
University of Idaho Extension





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Caring for Yourself

Parenting is for life. It is a complicated job, and you're on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Research shows that even minor parenting conflicts are an important source of stress in parents' lives. Working parents can be stretched thin as they meet the needs of the worlds of work and family. Parenting can also be isolating when we lose ties with family and friends.

However, research shows that we provide a solid foundation for effective parenting when we take care of ourselves. Parents need to take care of their own needs in order to continue meeting the family's needs. Try any of the following approaches to care for yourself:

Work together. Each adult in the family has his or her own strengths. By working together you can combine those strengths to meet your family's needs. Children also can help with family chores.

Set priorities. Look at your regular tasks and ask yourself if you can drop any. Things that seemed important to do last year may have little value to you today.

Be organized. Prepare backpacks and lunches the night before to reduce morning stress. Cook twice as much and freeze half to use on busy nights.

Establish a family routine. Kids thrive on routine, and parents do, too. Routine makes life predictable and helps reduce stress. Make it a family affair to clean up after dinner, and set a quiet time for homework. Read a book while your children study.

Take some adult time. We love the time we spend with our children, but most of us also need some time for adults. A regular bedtime for your children can free up some of your evening. Exchange babysitting with another parent so each of you has time to spend on your own or with your spouse or friends.

Calm yourself. Learn ways to relax when you're feeling stressed. Think of being in a quiet place, or count to ten backwards. Declare a time-out for yourself if necessary; play soothing music or light a candle. Remaining calm helps you remain in control.

Build a support network. Stay in touch with family members, or build a support system of friends and neighbors to celebrate family events. Compare notes with other parents on the ups and downs of daily family life.

Forgive yourself. Every parent makes mistakes, but that's how we learn. You can be imperfect and still be a good parent.

Be good to yourself so you can keep up with your busy family. These are growing years for you as well as for your children.

Authors—Carol Hampton, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Boundary County, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, UI School of Family and Consumer Sciences



Childcare: Linger and Learn

Your childcare program can be an important resource for your family. Give yourself some extra time when you drop off or pick up your child. What do you see?

Who does your child like to play with? Does your child have any special friends? Does he or she spend more time with girls or with boys? With older children, younger children, or age mates? With talkative children or quiet ones? Does your child like to spend time alone or with others? None of these styles of play is better than others, but we do learn more about our children when we see them in action with others.

What toys does your child like? Active or quiet toys? Books? Games? Dolls? How does this compare with your child's behavior at home?

How does your child respond to the center's rules? Does your child obey them? Challenge them? If your child challenges the rules, what is the teacher's response? Does it work? Do you see new approaches to try at home?

Are you concerned about your child? Maybe he or she has difficulty concentrating, throws tantrums, or rarely shares. Watch other children the same age as your child. Do they act similarly? How does the care provider deal with them? Does the provider's behavior give you any ideas to try at home?

Talk to the care provider. Take time to ask the provider how your child is doing at childcare. If no time is available during center hours, many

providers welcome a call at home to talk about the children in their care. Ask if you can call to talk about your child.

Help while you're there. You can "linger and learn" while helping at the center. Ask the childcare provider if there's anything useful you can do while you spend time with the kids. Read a book? Help with an art project? You'll feel good about making a contribution, and your child will be proud to see you there as well.

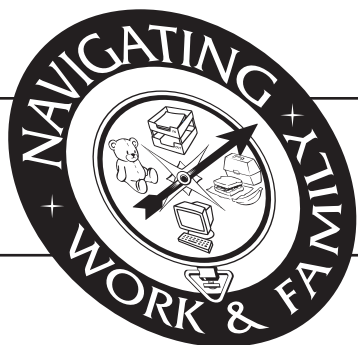
Connect with other families at childcare.

Other families at the childcare program face many of the same challenges you do in family life. They may be a good source of supportive family friends for you and your children.

Parent talk. Talk to other parents about their lives as working parents, about sharing rides, after-care babysitting exchanges, and other shared challenges.

Exchange visits. Do your children have one or two special friends at childcare? Check with those children's parents to see if an after-care visit at your home is possible. Children in your family will get some extra time with their friends, while the parents of the guest children will have some time for themselves. Take turns so all families share the benefits.

Author— Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, University of Idaho Extension



Working Together

Sometimes our lives seem like nothing but work. We work when we get to work, and we keep on working once we come home, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and more. When will we find the time for our most important job: being a parent to our children?

One way to share more time with your children is to involve them in household work. Treat chores as a normal part of life, not as punishment. Children who help with family chores learn competence and feel good about their contributions to family life. And when everyone helps with household chores, there is more time for favorite family activities.

Everyone can help. All family members can help in some way, no matter how young. Toddlers can carry clothes to the laundry. Preschoolers can carry their dishes to the sink after dinner and put their toys up at the end of the day. With a little training from mom or dad, older children and teenagers can manage more complex household tasks. Vary the work assignments to keep your children's interest up. Try one of these strategies:

Kids choose. Chores can be laid out as choices, with kids selecting which they will do. Your children may disagree over who does which chore. This is a good time to learn about turn taking and compromise.

Luck of the draw. Write each chore on a slip of paper and place all the slips in a can or small box (a tissue box is perfect). Have each family member choose one or two slips. This is an easy way for everyone to take turns with the least-liked and most-liked jobs.

10-minute pick-up. Give each family member an area to clean (for example, kitchen, bathroom, or bedroom). Make sure everyone has the cleaning supplies they need to do their jobs. Set the timer for 10 minutes and shout "Go!" When the time is up, allow a few minutes for last minute touch-ups. Then stand back and join in a round of applause for everyone who did so much in such a short time. This is a great lesson in the power of family teamwork.

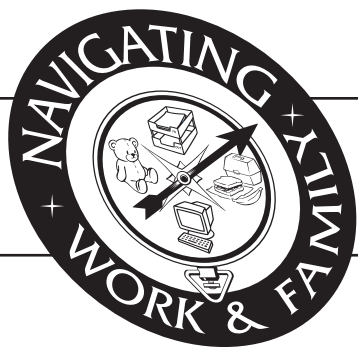
Many chefs. Some families develop favorite meals because they offer a role for everyone. Tacos make a great meal for this reason: even the youngest children can wash and tear lettuce, school-age children can grate cheese and cut tomatoes, and older children and teens can cook beans or meat.

Work-n-talk. Remember the conversations you had as a child with your parent, sister, or brother while you did chores together? Try sharing jobs with your children so you can use work time to share the day's events, or just to joke and laugh together.

Praise and hugs. It's the effort that counts most when kids do family chores. A child's version of a job well done may not be as tidy as an adult's, but it deserves praise and an extra hug.

Follow chores with fun. Help your children keep on task by following chore time with a favorite family activity—a board game, a chapter in the family reading book, a walk with the dog, or a snack and a TV show. Family members can join in the fun once their work is done.

Author— Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, University of Idaho Extension



Limits and Choices

Decision making is a valuable life skill. As your children get older, they'll be making choices with some mighty important consequences. Fortunately, decision making can be learned with practice, by the experience of actually making choices. Begin by offering your children choices when they're young. They'll gain the confidence they will need to make good choices as they become more independent.

Parents who didn't have choices when they were young may worry that they'll give up control if they let their children make choices. But parents keep control on the important issues by setting limits for their children. Think of limits as the rules your family lives by. Consistent rules allow children to learn what is expected of them.

SET LIMITS THAT ARE:

Clear and simple. Be clear on what you expect—for example, children are in bed by 8:00; homework is done before the TV goes on; we do chores on Saturday morning. Different families will have different rules; choose rules that work well for your family.

Reasonable. Set expectations that match your child's age and maturity. The goal should be to challenge your children, not overwhelm them.

Consistent. Your children will accept family limits more readily if you are consistent about what you expect. Children are confused if parents enforce the rules one day, but ignore them the next.

OFFER CHILDREN CHOICES THAT ARE:

Within the limits. Choices should be within the household rules. For example, 8:00 is bedtime, but your child chooses which pajamas to wear or what bedtime story to read.

Acceptable and safe. Offer choices that are safe for your child and acceptable to you. The choice is truly up to your child.

Leaving room to grow. Young children begin with simple choices, such as what kind of cereal to have for breakfast or which story to read at bedtime. As children get older, they can take responsibility for more important choices, such as what clothes to buy for school or which sports to play.

Limits and choices are important to your children. Clear limits let them know that they are safe and secure within firm ground rules. But you can offer children choices within those limits. Parents who give children control over choices allow them to gain experience for the big decisions of later life.

Authors—Diana Christensen, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Gooding County, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, UI Extension



Television and Your Family

Studies show that American children watch a lot of television. Even 9-month-old babies watch 90 minutes of television a day, and preschoolers spend almost four hours a day with the TV. These children will have watched for seven years by the time they turn 18. According to the New York Academy of Medicine, "Children spend more time in front of the television than in school, and nearly as much time as they spend sleeping." It makes you wonder what children are learning from all of this time with the TV.

Television programs—even cartoons—show a lot of violence. Research shows that children get the message: those who watch more TV violence are more aggressive than others their age. Steady viewers are also less creative, don't concentrate well, and get worse grades in school. TV advertising can be a problem, too, feeding children's wants and desires. Meanwhile, children have less time for active play, reading, and homework.

Challenges for working parents. Television can be especially tempting for working parents. The television is a handy babysitter for children home alone and is easy entertainment for parents after a long day at work. Statistics show that TV viewing is the #1 leisure activity for American adults.

Do you want the TV to be in control in your home? A few strategies can put you in charge:

Home alone. Children home alone after school need your direction about how to spend their time. This is a good time for homework, chores, reading, or active play.

Help your child plan activities that are productive and safe.

Out-of-school time. Consider enrolling your children in childcare after school. Call your state referral service for information about school-aged childcare programs in your area (see toll-free numbers below*). Or, maybe your child can spend time with a neighbor or relative when you're at work. Encourage older children to get involved in sports, clubs, volunteering, and other supervised activities.

Family time. When you come home from work, take time for family talk with the television off. Extend family time by cooking and eating dinner together, playing a game, taking a walk, or riding bikes.

You're in control. Bring television into your home under your own terms. Choose a few shows you like and watch them as a family. Talk about the programs with your children. Take control of the remote control and aim it toward successful family time together.

*For childcare information, call 1-800-446-1114 in Washington; 1-800-342-6712 in Oregon; 1-800-926-2588 in Idaho

Authors—Shelley Thorpe, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Latah County, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, UI Extension



Connecting with Kids

Adolescence can be a time of peer influence, but research shows that most teenagers turn first to their parents when they need advice. Young people who have a strong relationship with their parents make more positive choices when they confront the many temptations of the teenage years. To enjoy that closeness during adolescence, start when your children are young.

Keep up with age changes. Children's tastes in food, clothes, music, and television change as they get older. New friends will be important as well. Take the time to keep up with new trends in your child's life.

Talk together regularly. Time spent talking can build a strong relationship as your child grows toward independence. Send a clear message that you are "tuned in" through your words, tone of voice, and body language. Make eye contact to show your child that you are really listening. Turn off the TV and other distractions.

Learn about your children's friends and activities. Working parents may have to miss some of their children's special events. But look for times that do fit with your schedule to join your children's activities. See if your workplace has flextime you can use. Special events are great times to meet your children's friends and teachers. Have your children invite friends to your home when you're there so you can get to know them.

Catch your children being good. We notice when our children make mistakes, but we should also note those many times when they

do well. Compliment your children when they help willingly, complete schoolwork readily, or show special thoughtfulness to others. They will appreciate your encouragement.

Build a positive memory bank. Provide a foundation of good family memories. Fun family activities are like deposits in your child's memory bank, to be drawn upon later. The more deposits in the bank, the more resources your child has available when times get difficult. Photos and mementos help keep positive memories fresh.

Distance parenting. Parents who live away from their children may have to put in extra effort to stay connected with their children. Keep in touch regularly by phone, e-mail, or letter so you can offer the parental support your children will need as they get older. When possible, include your children's friends in the time you spend together. Keep in touch with your children's school to keep up with their progress.

Time spent now to develop a strong relationship helps build the firm foundation your children will need as they begin to spend more time on their own.

Authors—Barbara Petty, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Bonneville County, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, UI Extension



Family Talk

We all want to talk to our children and other family members, but often, time slips by without our communicating. For working parents who spend so many hours a day away from their children, it becomes all the more important to make the most of the time you have together. Here are some ways to make your home a center for family talk:

Reunion. Children may be bursting with information about their day when they first see you. Take advantage of this opportunity. Take some time at reunion to listen to the day's report. Share the story of your day as well. Meals and other chores can wait a bit. Or, prepare your meal together so you can talk and cook at the same time.

Turn off the TV. Conversation works best when distractions are limited. The biggest distraction in most homes is the television set. When the TV is on, family conversation comes to a halt. Family members may try to talk, but find they are ignored or hushed by family members watching the show. Watch a favorite show together, but turn the TV off when the show is over to allow family talk.

Meal times. Meal times are especially good times for family talk, as everyone sits together to enjoy the food and company. This is a great time to ask children about the important events of the day or to report your own news. Some families don't take phone calls during meal times so they're not interrupted. Friends soon learn to call at other times.

Car talk. Working families often find themselves together in the car while shuttling

between work, childcare, school, and home. This is your chance to catch up on what family members are thinking and doing. Car talk can be especially good for private conversations. Take a ride to the store or school with the family member you want to talk to, and you know you'll have his or her attention without "little ears" listening in. Or, take a talking walk together—it works just as well.

Work-n-talk. Involve your children in your household chores, folding laundry or making beds. With the kids helping, you'll get more work done, and you can talk together while you work. This is a great time to share stories about your life as a child and how it compares with life for children today. Maybe you can bring up one of the issues you need to raise with your child. Or just share jokes and laughter.

Distance parenting. It can be especially challenging to keep in touch with your children when you live apart from them. Letters and phone calls are always welcome, but what do you talk about? Some parents read a story over the phone or send a book tape for their child to listen to. Try sending cartoons and jokes through the mail; enclose a stamped, addressed envelope and ask your children to send their favorites to you. Ask your children's school to send you notices and newsletters to help you stay in touch with your children's events and activities. Keep in touch by e-mail if you have access.

Author—Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, University of Idaho Extension



Family Reading Time

Research shows that reading to your children is one of the best ways to ensure their interest in the world of books. Reading to children when they are infants and preschoolers helps them learn new words, increases their ability to concentrate, and makes them want to learn to read. Children will take those strong verbal skills with them to school, where learning to read will be that much easier. Think of all the school lessons that will depend on your child's being a good reader, and you'll see the importance of family reading in your child's success at school.

Parents who work all day may wonder how they can fit reading into the few hours they have with their children. A few suggestions may help:

Anything and everything. Encourage your child to read anything—cereal boxes, trading cards, signs, magazine ads, pictures in newspapers. Or find a favorite recipe and read it with your child as you prepare it together.

Read and ride. Use drive time to read vanity license plates, find plates from different states, and read billboards and interesting road signs. Also, keep a few favorite books or books-on-tape in a book bag for reading on the road.

Better than TV. Read a good action story instead of watching an evening television program. Start an exciting chapter book with your family; they'll be eager to hear what comes next. If you're too tired to read aloud, ask an older child in the family to do the reading, or use a story tape.

Pack a book. When you and your child are going someplace where there might be a long wait—a doctor's office or an airline terminal—bring along a bag of favorite books.

Phone home. Do you work the night shift or find you can't get away from the office? Keep a few children's books at work. Use your coffee break to call home and read to your child.

Book exchange. Find a family whose children are similar in age to yours and exchange books. Wrap the books or have a potluck dinner to make it a special event.

Home language. Some families speak a language other than English when they are at home. Sharing books with children in their home language will also help them become good readers.

Distance parenting. Even if you are separated from your children you can play a role. Try reading a book to your child over the phone, or cut out favorite cartoons and funny articles to send to your child. Make story tapes in your own voice to send. Ask your children to send favorite stories, cartoons, and jokes to you. If you have Internet access you can exchange greetings on e-mail. Make time for reading when the children are with you.

Library time. Make a habit of stopping at the library on your way home from childcare. Pack a snack and stop for a picnic on the way. Linger while you're there: read a book to your children and allow them to explore and choose books of their own. Check the schedule for special events, such as story or activity times.

Authors—Peggy McClendon, Read to Me Co-Coordinator, Idaho State Library, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, University of Idaho Extension



Children's Feelings

We all feel joy and sorrow, but children can be especially vocal about their feelings. Parents often get upset when their children explode in anger, sadness, or fear. Children's feelings may seem like too much to handle at the end of a long working day.

However, studies show that parents can help children learn to understand their feelings. Parents can teach children that emotions are a part of life, but should be expressed in acceptable ways. Research shows that children who learn to manage their emotions get along better with other children. They can also calm themselves and bounce back from conflict and disappointment. They even have better health and more success in school.

You can help your child manage feelings when you

Tune in. Pay attention to how your child looks and behaves when he or she feels angry, sad, or happy. You're better able to respond to your child when you know how he or she feels.

Accept emotions. We all have negative and positive emotions. Let your child know that all of these emotions are normal.

Label emotions. As your children show their feelings, tell them what you hear and see. Giving a name to emotions helps children recognize what they are feeling. When children can talk to others about feelings, they learn that everyone has emotions.

Guide. Help your children learn what to do when they are upset. Look for the early signs of

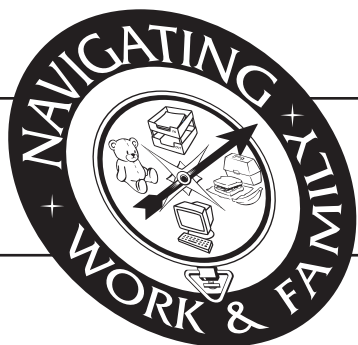
an outburst, when it is easier for children to control their emotions. Then help your children identify why they are upset. Talk about acceptable ways to express anger, frustration, or sadness, such as using words or punching a pillow to let off steam.

Set limits. Be clear about what behaviors you can accept when your child is upset. It's all right to be angry, but behaviors such as hitting or kicking are not OK.

Help problem solve. Talk about how to handle feelings. Ask your child to suggest better ways to express emotion. Support children as they work it out for themselves.

You may wonder if you can show such patience when you're tired from a day at work. But children's feelings demand our attention no matter how we respond. With your help, your children can understand their emotions and learn limits for their behavior. As they learn to manage their feelings, they'll have new skills to grow on.

Authors—Susan Traver, Extension Educator, University of Idaho Extension, Bonner County, and Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist, UI Extension



Keeping in Touch with School

Studies show that children do best in their schoolwork when their parents are involved in the school. Parents who come to school performances, open houses, sporting events, and other activities show their children that school is important to the family and that they are proud to see the work of their children and their friends. But working families often find it difficult to break away for their children's events. What are some ways to handle this situation?

Be there. You may need to miss some school events, but be sure to be there for the most important ones. Trade shifts with a co-worker, take vacation time, or arrange to work longer another day to make up the time. See what options your employer offers for such occasions. Your children's school activities are just too important to miss.

Send a family representative. If you can't attend, can you send someone else to a special event? A well-loved aunt, uncle, or family friend? If your child has a separated parent, this may be a good time for him or her to help out. If you don't attend, be sure to set aside a time to hear a report from those who did go to let your child know you're interested. You may want to send a camera to the event, so you have pictures of the special occasion.

Make sure your child can attend. Even if you can't go, make sure your children can attend school events. Carpool with another family, or ask a relative or friend to drive.

Keep in touch with teachers. Most schools have a special time for parents to talk to their child's teacher about his or her progress. This is your chance to find out how your child is doing in school. It is important to take advantage of this chance for a private conversation about your child's progress. This is also a great time to ask your questions about the school program.

Can't make it to your conference time? Your child's teacher will work with you to find another time. Cancel your appointment if you can't make it, as a courtesy to all.

How about a telephone conference? If you can't get to the school, a phone conversation with the teacher may do just as well.

There's nothing like good news. Don't wait until trouble develops to consult the teacher. A conference when things are going well can bring a good feeling to both you and your child and can help keep your child's schoolwork on a positive course.

What about teenagers? Many parents regularly attend school activities for their elementary school children, but their older children tell them it's not cool to have their parents at school. Don't believe them. Studies show that teenagers, like their younger brothers and sisters, do best at school when their parents attend and support school events.

Author—Harriet Shaklee, Family Development Specialist,
University of Idaho Extension

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