

Bullying

Some may say that bullying is part of growing up, but the fact is bullying is a serious issue. Bullying is not a normal part of childhood. Research on bullying finds that both boys and girls bully and are victims of bullying. Boys who bully are often physically aggressive. Girls are more likely to use name calling, spread rumors, exclude someone and target other girls. Regardless if the bullying is physical or emotional, the harm to a child can be equally hurtful.

Children who are bullied are often those who stand out in one way or another. They may stand out because of their size or the clothes they wear. Some victims are very shy and quiet. Others do not know how to act socially with other children.

Bullying can start as early as preschool. There appears to be more bullying during middle school. This is a time when children are trying to find out where they “fit in” with others. Their bodies are changing and they are making changes in schools and activities.

If your child is experiences bullying, take action. Reach out to a teacher, counselor, or other professional for help on how to handle the problem. Talk with your child to see if she knows why she is a target of bullying. Help her problem solve the issue.

The MSU Extension Montguide *Children and Bullying: A Guide for Parents* (MT200307HR) has more information on bullying. For a copy contact your County Extension Agent, the Montana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project, or go on line to <http://www.montana.edu/wwwpb/pubs/mt200307.html> .

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Protecting Our Children from Commercialism

The following article has been reprinted with permission from a 32-page booklet from New American Dream. To download the full booklet containing great information to safeguard children against the negative affects of commercialism, go to www.newdream.org or call 1-877-68-DREAM.

Our children remind us that the world is full of wonder and possibility. They make us laugh, exhaust us with their endless questions, and evoke indescribable feelings of love. We dedicate ourselves to meeting their needs, while endeavoring to foster wholesome values, independent thinking, respect for self and others, and a dedication to the common good. It goes without saying that raising kids in today's noisy, fast-paced culture can be difficult. For good or ill, modern kids are exposed to a wider world. The voices of home and community have been joined by a chorus of voices from around the globe clamoring for their attention. Unfortunately, an increasing number of those voices view your child not as a young citizen to be nurtured and encouraged, but as a target — a unit in an underdeveloped market to be exploited for gain. Over the past two decades, the degree to which marketers have scaled up efforts to reach children is staggering. In 1983, they spent \$100 million on television advertising to kids. Today, they pour roughly 150 times that amount into a variety of mediums that seek to infiltrate every corner of children's worlds. The results of this onslaught are striking. New research suggests that aggressive marketing to kids contributes not only to excessive materialism, but also to a host of psychological and behavioral problems, including depression, anxiety, low self esteem, childhood obesity, eating disorders, increased violence, and family stress. The purpose of this booklet is to give adults a greater understanding of what children face today, and to offer resources to help parents and caregivers band together to protect children from intrusive and harmful advertising. We believe it's important to help children reclaim valuable noncommercial space in their lives — space to be children, not merely consumers.

Television commercials have long been the most popular method for marketers to reach children. The average American child today is exposed to an estimated 40,000 television commercials a year — over 100 a day. But the pitches don't stop when the commercial breaks end. Ads bleed into the shows themselves via product placements, which also seep into movies, video games, even children's books. Licensing has become big business. Movies and children's shows spin off toys based on popular characters and cross promote with fast-food chains in an effort to ensure that all forms of entertainment are tied up neatly in a coordinated commercial package.

Research shows that children under the age of eight are unable to critically comprehend televised advertising messages and are prone to accept advertiser messages as truthful, accurate and unbiased. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits as evidenced by today's youth obesity epidemic. For these reasons, a task force of the American Psychological Association (APA) is recommending that advertising targeting children under the age of eight be restricted.

**** From a February, 2004 American Psychological Association press release***

Teach your children about...

Advertising. Poke holes in ad puffery and deconstruct marketing messages you encounter. Make a game out of it with your children—helping them discern what's being sold and how the advertiser is trying to manipulate their desires. For older kids, the book *Made You Look* by Shari Graydon offers a visually fun, lighthearted, but substantive look behind the curtain of advertising, and will help kids feel more savvy about marketing spin.

Stuff. Teach your kids to be conscious consumers. Talk about where things come from, who made them, what they are made of, and what happens when they are thrown away. Seek out products that are made in a more environmentally and socially responsible manner. Teach them that it is sometimes better not to buy. To learn more about being a conscious consumer, visit www.newdream.org/consumer. **Money.** National surveys reveal that kids are leaving high school without a basic understanding of issues relating to savings and credit card debt. No surprise, then, that over the past decade, credit card debt among 18-24 year olds more than doubled. It's important for parents to teach kids about where the money goes. In *Prodigal Sons and Material Girls*, author Nathan Dungan discusses ways to help children achieve financial literacy and become "savvy consumers who make decisions based on their values."

To learn more about other sources of commercialization and ways you can fight the effects, download the full, free booklet at www.newdream.org.

Project Update

The GRG Project co-sponsored the first Montana Family Policy Impact Seminar in September. The seminar provided nonpartisan information for policy-makers, judges and agency officials on grandparents raising grandchildren and raised awareness of the issues they face.

The nationally known speakers who were invited to present included Steve Christian from the National Conference of State Legislatures, Rutledge Hutson from Center for Law and Social Policy, Brent Elrod from Generations United, and Maylin Smith from the Indian Law Clinic at University of Montana. The speakers presented research data on the demographics and the current status of kinship caregivers, the Indian Child Welfare Act, resources, policies, as well as thoughts on future legislative proposals.

The seminar was the first in a series that will be presented yearly on a variety of family issues.

The 2006 annual statewide partners' meeting was held the same day. This gathering brings together social service personnel and other interested professionals from across the state to discuss the current needs and trends for grandparents rearing their grandchildren. By coming together once a year, and comparing notes on new services and ideas for the future, the GRG Project can become more flexible. In addition, the partners' that attend can learn from each other, share resources, and compare solutions.

New ideas for next year's GRG conferences were brainstormed by the group. In addition, members discussed the challenges and needs of creating a legal guide for grandparents raising grandchildren. Many partners in attendance offered their technical assistance for this guide. The GRG Project is hoping to have this basic legal guide completed soon to help explain some of the basic legal issues that arise for grandparents raising grandchildren.



(Above) Grandparents listen to Hank Hudson and other service providers from the Dept. of Public Health and Human Services discuss services at the 2006 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren conference last June. (Right) Representative Bill Warden informs conference attendees of upcoming GRG state legislation he has been instrumental in bringing forward.



Computers: How to keep up with the grandkids!

Do you feel as if your grandchild knows more about computers than you do? If so, you are not alone. Many people feel intimidated by the thought of learning computer skills.

Computers can offer a variety of uses. For example they can be an almost endless source of information, a cheap form of communication, or an easy way to store family photos. For children, computer skills are a must since many school assignments now require the use of a computer. In addition, it is more important than ever to understand how to monitor what the children in your life are accessing on the internet.

Computers can be both a handy tool, or a lesson in humility and frustration. Anyone who has ever used a computer, can surely relate to both. Fortunately, the AARP web-site has some great information to help you either learn the basics about using a computer or learn more in depth computer skills. The technical help on the AARP web-site lists a wide range of topics. Here are just a few of the

headings to give you an idea: “Getting started with a new computer”, “Get to Know the Windows Desktop”, “How to Recognize a Virus”, and “How to Clean the Hard Disk”. If you have never used a computer before, and are unsure how to access the AARP web-site, most public libraries have computers for public use, and friendly librarians that can help you find the internet. The How to Guides can be found at www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/howto/ The column of topics on the left hand side are especially useful.

A few senior citizen centers and adult education offices have classes teaching computer literacy. Check your local office for availability.

The internet also has several good web-sites offering specific tips to keep your kids safe while on the internet. A parent resource center is located at ikeepSAFE.org with either a video or a downloadable document you can access free. Kids can also read important rules they can follow for online safety at SafeKids.com **Good luck, and happy surfing!**

Helping children deal with death and loss

Everyone experiences grief in a different way, and children are no exception. According to the organization Parents as Teachers, children often grieve in “spurts” meaning they have times of extreme sadness mixed with times of normal play. As a caregiver, the most important thing you can do for a grieving child, is to be a good listener, and let them know how loved they are. Honestly answer questions without providing overwhelming information. Remember that children usually take words literally and words like “gone to a better place” and “resting” can be confusing to a child. Allow the child to come to you at any time to share their feelings, and take the time to listen in a non-judgmental manner. If children feel they have been “shut down” in the past when sharing feelings, they may not continue trying to share.

Younger children may have a hard time understanding that death is permanent. Grief may be delayed because the child may not understand that the person will not be coming back, or cannot imagine their life without that person.

Feelings of loss can occur for many reasons, not just the death of someone close. The loss of pets, special toys or stuffed animals, or watching someone close to them move away can also cause feelings of intense sadness for children. You can help them by honoring those feelings, even if the loss doesn't seem important to you.

According to research, children usually have the following three questions at the back of their mind when processing the death of a loved one. 1) Did I cause this to happen? 2) Will this happen to me? 3) Who will care for me now?

Whatever the loss, memories are a good way to help your child work through their grief. Making a scrap book to honor and remember the person, or talking about the loved one can reassure the child that the memories of the loved one will go on.

If you would like more information, the MSU Extension Service Montguide *Understanding Grief* is available at the GRG web-site at <http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/grg/index.htm> or we can mail it to you. Much of the information for this article was found at parentsasteachers.org and has additional information.

HELP! Please send us your ideas!

We are beginning to plan for next year's Grandparents Raising Grandchildren conferences. We would love to hear what topics you are interested in. If you have any topic ideas, or know of a guest speaker you would like to hear, please give us a call, drop a note in the mail, or send us an e-mail. We would also like to know what topics you would like to see in the newsletter. We always love to hear from grandparents raising grandchildren!

Family Attorney Alert

The GRG Project would like to make a list of attorneys that practice in the state of Montana that are familiar with cases pertaining to grandparents raising grandchildren and similar custody cases. If you know of a good family law attorney that you can suggest, please call us at (406) 994-3395 or send us an e-mail with their name and contact information at grg@montana.edu.

Mental Health Resource

The MSU Grandparents Raising Grandchildren project has received some funding from the Brookdale Foundation to assist grandfamilies in addressing mental health needs. In Bozeman, Helena, and West Yellowstone we have been able to offer 8-week therapeutic support groups with trained mental health facilitators. For support groups in our other areas of the state, we are offering limited funds for you to bring a local mental health professional to your group. These funds will be based on a first come, first serve basis. For example, your group may want to have a therapist come to your support group once or twice to discuss a particular issue. If the therapist charges a fee, you can apply for funding to cover that cost. Or your group may want to have a therapist come for several weeks to work with specific grandparents and you may apply for funding to cover that cost.

For more information, please contact our office at 994-3395.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana

Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) offers free mentoring programs across the state for children between the ages of 6 and 18. A child (referred to as a "little") is matched with a same gender adult (referred to as a "big") who provides a one-on-one mentoring relationship. Match commitments are made for one year, but often these friendships last much longer. Bigs and littles usually visit with each other once a week for about an hour.

The BBBS staff are very supportive of their matches, and provide lots of ideas for inexpensive and fun activities. They are also available to help matches work through any issues that come up. In addition, local businesses are great about providing discounts or 2 for 1 deals for BBBS matches. These include things like tickets to plays, or sports events, or 2 for 1 ice creams.

My daughter has been matched with a big, and really enjoys spending time with her. Having another caring adult to talk to is important since kids don't always want to share their feelings with family members. Sometimes, just knowing that one more adult cares can make an important difference in a child's life. As a parent, I enjoy getting one more hour of free time, while my daughter is having fun and improving her social skills.

BBBS will need permission from the child's legal guardian to provide services, so if you do not have a legal relationship with the child, you will need a signature from the child's parent or legal guardian.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Montana has nine service areas across the state, in addition some have satellite offices. For more information and to find a Big Brothers Big Sisters office in your area, you can call the state BBBS office at (406) 442-1982 or visit their web-site at www.bbbsmontana.org.

Written by Aimee Kissel

Traveling with Children: Tips for a less stressful journey

With the winter holidays right around the corner, many of us will be traveling by car this season. As we all know, traveling with children can be especially challenging. Fortunately, there are ways to make the trip more enjoyable for you and the kids. Here are some things that have worked for me over the years as well as some new tips I found on various web-sites.

- * Pack an activities bag or box for each child. Plastic boxes with flat lids work nice, because the lid can be used as a desk or snack table. Include age appropriate toys that are easy to handle, and don't have a lot of little parts. Don't forget their favorite blanket, stuffed animal and a small pillow for napping. For school age children their box could include, paper, pens, pencils, crayons, workbooks, and a deck of cards.
- * Travel games can be lots of fun. Don't forget about tic-tac-toe, "I spy", and the license plate game. If you don't know how to play them, or want ideas for more travel games, there are lots of ideas on the web.
- * Packing a water tight, plastic box of supplies for the whole family is also useful. This box could contain things like Kleenex, baby wipes (for those unavoidable snack messes!), adult and child Tylenol or Advil, or other medicines, band-aids, Ziploc bags (for food storage, collecting things along the way, etc.), plastic grocery bags (can be used as garbage bags, wet and dirty clothes, etc.), sunscreen, bug spray, a camera and extra film. If anyone in the family is prone to car sickness, medicines like Dramamine can help. A few snacks and water bottles for the road is always a necessity and supplies from home are usually much cheaper than buying snacks at the gas station.
- * Keep an extra set of clothes and shoes easily accessible if the suitcases are hard to access. This way, if anyone has a spill or gets wet during a rest stop, it doesn't become a huge hassle to change.
- * You might want to keep a Frisbee or other outdoor toys in the car for a quick, fun, rest area activity that can help the kids expend some extra energy during the trip.
- * Don't forget to take plenty of breaks. Be sure to stretch well at every stop. Stay hydrated with plenty of water. You might have to make more stops, but you'll be less likely to spend your vacation recovering from the drive.
- * Don't forget to listen to your body. More fatalities are caused each year from drivers falling asleep at the wheel, than from drinking and driving accidents.
- * It is always a good idea to keep a box of emergency supplies in your trunk in case of a winter emergency. Handy items to include are blankets, rain gear, boots and gloves, a fat candle in a coffee can (for light and heat), matches/lighter (stored in the coffee can with a lid to keep out moisture), a flash-light with extra batteries, high energy snack bars, water bottles, and an emergency flair. A bag of kitty litter is also helpful to spread in front of tires if you get stuck in ice or snow. Don't forget to check your spare tire and make sure your jack is still in the car.
- * If you are driving at night, and the roads are messy with snow or mud, bring along some window cleaner and paper towels and wash off your headlights when you stop for a break. You'll be amazed how much better you can see. I know I was!
- * Be sure to check all of the fluids in your car before you leave, and check the air pressure in the tires. If your tires are at the correct pressure, your car will grip the road better and you'll get better gas mileage.

HAPPY TRAVELS!

Written by Aimee Kissel

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Jerri Paulk 266-4249

Hug O' War by Shel Silverstein

I will not play tug o' war, I would rather play hug o' war.
Where everyone hugs instead of tugs,
where everyone giggles and rolls on the rug.
Where everyone kisses, and everyone grins, and
everyone cuddles, and everyone wins.

Tell Me by Shel Silverstein

Tell me I'm clever,
Tell me I'm kind,
Tell me I'm talented,
Tell me I'm cute,
Tell me I'm sensitive,
Graceful and wise,
Tell me I'm perfect-
But tell me the truth.
