

Family Support NEWS BRIEF

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CENTER FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



Young Children and Pets

Many children have a natural affection toward animals. Animals may provide love and companionship to children. Having pets in the home can be rewarding and beneficial to the entire family but owning a pet is a major responsibility. It is important for parents/caregivers to select the appropriate pet for the child, understand pet care requirements and keep the child's health and safety in mind. Parents/caregivers can also learn of the many benefits of pet ownership with younger children. If asked, family support professionals can support parents/caregivers as they learn and embrace the dynamics of parenting and pet ownership.

When parents/caregivers mention the possibility of getting a pet, family support professionals can help parents/caregivers set goals and manageable action plans and partner with them to establish small incremental steps to reach the main goal. For example, encourage parents/caregivers to have a clear idea of pet care requirements; create a list of what is needed for pet ownership; determine the best age of the child to get a pet; and gather resources, information and materials on pet ownership. These steps assess the families' readiness for change. Co-developing goals helps parents/caregivers build self-confidence and supports family well-being.

Before selecting a pet, parents/caregivers should keep their child's age, health condition and developmental stage in mind. According to pediatric experts, parents/caregivers with children under 5 should wait until a child turns 5 before selecting a high-maintenance pet such as a dog or cat. Research shows that children younger than 5 are more likely to get sick from germs animals carry due to constantly touching the animal. Younger children may think of an animal as a toy and may tease or mistreat the animal resulting in a bite. Help parents/caregivers research and learn about a pet with gentle disposition for younger children. Minimal care animals such

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as fish or a guinea pig may be more appropriate for children 3 to 4. Review the child's developmental milestones and encourage parents/caregivers to talk to their child's healthcare provider regarding pets. As parents/caregivers increase their understanding of their child's development and health concerns, they will be able to make informed decisions regarding pet care.

Once parents/caregivers make the final decision to be a pet owner, encourage and co-plan parent/caregiver-child activities that focus on pet ownership. Help parents/caregivers gather books and resources and formulate questions for the discussion. Form a list of questions for parents/caregivers to ask their children. Make sure they provide the opportunity for their children to ask questions and ask their child's feelings toward having pets. Help

parents/caregivers build upon their social supports by suggesting they visit and network with other responsible, safe families who have young children and pets, and/or talk to a veterinarian. Families may also plan trips to the breeder, shelter or local library to learn more about pets then have a follow-up parent-child activity.

There are many tips for being a responsible pet owner. If requested, professionals may provide guidance and support to parents/caregivers as they become pet owners. Experts recommend purchasing pets from reputable breeders, shelters or businesses to decrease the chance of getting a sick or diseased animal. Assist parents/caregivers in locating reputable businesses. Remind parents/caregivers that they are the primary manager for pet care and should

always supervise children around animals. Do not allow children to kiss animals or put their hands into their mouths after touching animals. Keep children away from animals while they or the animals are eating to prevent bites and injuries. Parents/caregivers should utilize their concrete supports in time of need such as the veterinarian and healthcare professionals.

There are many benefits of parenting/caring for younger children and being a pet owner. Research suggests that social, emotional and cognitive development is enhanced when a family has a pet. Having a pet can increase a child's self-esteem and confidence and help them develop compassion and non-verbal communication. Some studies found that pet ownership can encourage language and communication skills. Reading aloud to animals can boost a child's literacy skills. Help parents/caregivers create a pet responsibility chart for themselves, and create and model small tasks for their child. For example, their child may be responsible for getting the fish food or leash to parents/caregivers at the proper time. This provides a sense of pride and responsibility and promotes family well-being.

The luxury of owning a pet can positively impact family well-being, social and emotional wellness and more. With guidance and support, families with pets can have many positive, safe and fun experiences for a long time.

Sources

Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. (2014). Four Legged Friends. Parents as Teachers.org, Retrieved from: https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/parentsasteachers/3yearsthroughkindergarten_foundational2/index.php#/p/1221

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). Tips for Choosing the Right Pet for your Family. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Before-Choosing-a-Pet.aspx>

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PENNSYLVANIA Parents as Teachers®

Welcome to our monthly article to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Pennsylvania PAT. This month we will focus our efforts on literacy.

Did you know that March is National Reading Month?

Here is a research article that you may find helpful in understanding how PAT can help families center literacy in their lives.

Results of the Innovative Approaches to Literacy Project

Summary: Supporting parents in the promotion of their child's language and literacy development has long been a hallmark of Parents as Teachers.

Participating families, the majority of whom had two or more risk characteristics, were offered bi-weekly literacy-focused personal visits

and monthly literacy related group connections. Children received an Imagination Library book monthly, and the PAT affiliates distributed additional books to families on visits and at group connections. Parent educators also connected parents with community libraries and other literacy resources. Results indicated that the literacy-enriched PAT personal visits combined with Imagination Library improved the overall literacy environment in the home and increased the oral language skills of participating 4-year-old children.

[View report](#)

Reading Lists

[The Best Children's Books for Family Literacy](#)

[Best Picture Books 2021](#)

2022 Webinar Series on Serving Families Who Are Experiencing Domestic Violence and Communities of Practice on Domestic Violence

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) is partnering with the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) on a webinar series to provide family support workers and home visitors with information and resources on important topics relating to domestic violence and your work.

NEW Community of Practice on Domestic Violence

PCADV and OCDEL are excited to announce that we have developed a new Community of Practice focusing on domestic violence.

Community of Practice sessions are open to anyone who wants to share ideas, ask questions, provide feedback and receive support related to the crucial role you play in screening for, responding to, and empowering people affected by domestic violence.

Both sessions will be held on select Wednesdays throughout the year.

[View information and registration.](#)





Ready Set Go! Innovations for Working with Families

May 3-5, 2022

Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Conference

REGISTER NOW!



[Visit conference website >>](#)

Parents as Teachers Online Courses

Foundational 2: 3 Years Through Kindergarten

Monday, March 14 – Friday, March 18, 2022

Monday, April 25 – Friday, April 29, 2022

Monday, May 23 – Friday, May 27, 2022

Foundational and Model Implementation

For new parent educators and new supervisors of affiliate programs

Monday, March 28 – Friday, April 8, 2022

Monday, May 9 – Friday, May 20, 2022

Register for courses at the National Parents as Teachers' [training website](#).

If you have any questions regarding registration for PAT trainings, please contact [Jennifer Esposito](#).

Family Support April 2022 Webinar

Poverty and Its Impact on Pennsylvania Families

Wednesday, April 6, 10–11:15 a.m. ET

Participants will gain a framework for understanding poverty and the connection to the health of child and families. This presentation will provide an overview/basics about poverty, some local qualitative data gathered from families in Lancaster during Summer 2021, and talk about the connection of poverty and toxic stress to ACEs and the overall public health implications.

Presenters: Megan Leaman Heinly, MSW, Director of Economic Justice and Rhiannon Giberson, MNA, Director of Navigation, Community Action Partnership Lancaster

[Register >>](#)

Share Your Story

Do you have some success stories or program news that you would like to share in future News Briefs? If so, please email [the Family Support team](#) or join us online at the [Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers Facebook](#) page or at the [Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Facebook](#) page.

Resource Corner

Prevention Resource Guide

The 2021/2022 Prevention Resource Guide highlights innovative ways that communities around the country are doing purposeful prevention work to help children and families thrive. A protective factors approach focuses on positive ways to engage families by emphasizing their strengths in addition to identifying areas where they have room to grow, with support.

[Download Prevention Resource Guide](#)

Hiring Guide for Increasing Black Home Visiting Staff

The guide is meant to be a living document that is edited regularly to reflect new findings and lived best practices. While the guide is focused on Los Angeles County, California, it is applicable to the field of home visiting.

[Download hiring guide](#)

Advocacy Micro-Learning

Crafting original content, such as opinion editorials or op-eds, can increase awareness of home visiting, earn media coverage and influence lawmakers. In this pre-recorded micro-learning session, attendees will get insider tips on how to identify the elements that make a memorable op-ed, including who should write the content and what information should be included.

[View micro-learning session](#)



Family Support Team

Family Support at Center for Schools and Communities provides training and technical assistance to Parents as Teachers providers, Children's Trust Fund grantees and the Strengthening Families Leadership Team.

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Safe Kids Corner



National Poison Prevention Week is March 21-25

Let's face it, sometimes kids get into things that they probably shouldn't. Everyday household items such as cleaning products and personal care products can be harmful to kids. Here are a few poison prevention tips to keep little explorers from finding their way into household items that could be dangerous.

The Hard Facts about Poisoning

- Poisoning is the third leading cause of unintentional injury death among children ages 1 to 19.
- There were 1,319,044 calls made to poison control centers in 2015 after a child got into a potential poison. That's over 3,600 calls a day, 150 each hour.

Top Tips

1. **Store household products safely to prevent poisoning.** Young kids are often eye level with items under the kitchen and bathroom sinks, so make sure household cleaning products and personal care products are up and away, out of children's reach and sight.
2. **Keep all household cleaning products in their original containers.** Also, when buying products, look for child-resistant containers to help prevent poisoning to children.
3. **Read and follow product labels.** Check for ingredients that can be harmful to kids and make sure you use and store products according to the label. Kids can get into things quickly, so remember not to leave cleaning products or personal care products unattended while you are using them.
4. **Remember products that might be harmful to kids.** Check your home for products like cleaning supplies, liquid laundry packets, personal care products, plants, pesticides, alcohol and medicine.
5. **Save the Poison Control help number in your phone and post it visibly at home:** 1-800-222-1222. Specialists at poison control centers provide free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day. They can answer questions and help with poison emergencies.

Sources

[Health Resources & Services Administration](#) and [Safe Kids Worldwide](#)