

To submit questions to *Healthy Children*, send an e-mail to healthychildren@aap.org or write to American Academy of Pediatrics
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Ask the Pediatrician

Solving the Riddles of Parenthood

1. Parents Gone Wild

Q: Over the past few years, my daughter's friends have invited her to very elaborate and expensive birthday parties. I feel these are inappropriate and instill materialistic values, but my daughter thinks I am punishing her if I don't allow her to join the "party circuit." How can we celebrate my daughter's birthday without going to such extremes?

A: Many parents share your frustration, but with a little creativity, a child's birthday party can be great fun without great expense. A few ideas that parents have shared include gift-free parties, parties that don't have a theme, cooking or craft parties, and activities such as hosting a treasure hunt or doing community service work. For more ideas, there are organizations such as Birthdays Without Pressure (www.birthdayswithoutpressure.org) that offer helpful, creative alternatives to such overindulgent occasions.

2. Cancer Wise

Q: My daughter just turned 13, and our doctor recently suggested she be vaccinated against the human papillomavirus (HPV). Is she too young?

A: Your 13-year-old daughter is not too young to get the HPV vaccine. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that girls 11 years and older receive the vaccine, which is given in a series of three injections.

According to the CDC, there are more than 100 different types of HPV. More than 30 of these viruses are sexually transmitted. At least 50 percent of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. While most HPV infections don't cause any symptoms and go away on their own, in some cases HPV can cause cervical cancer in women. Cervical cancer claims the lives of some 4,000 American women each year. That is why it is so important for preteenage girls to get vaccinated before becoming sexually active and being exposed to HPV.



3. Time Out

Q: What is the best way to discipline my 3-year-old son? Is spanking more effective than other methods?

A: While it is important to establish effective methods of disciplining your three-year-old, spanking is not the way to do it. According to Dr. Paul Frick, a psychologist at the University of New Orleans, it would be much more beneficial to put your little guy in "time out" rather than breaking out the hickory switch. And he certainly is not alone in his belief that there is an association between spanking and behavioral and emotional problems in children. This is especially true in children who experienced high levels of physical punishment and who didn't live in a warm and supportive environment.

In an article published in the November-December issue of the

Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, Frick suggests parents use other types of discipline, such as time out, extra chores, and loss of privileges.

Frick reached this conclusion after recently completing a study of 98 children who all showed negative effects from physical punishment — and didn't learn what their parents were trying to teach.

"It is better to use other types of discipline and focus on the consistency," Frick told Reutershealth.com. "The key is to have a lot of different forms of punishment depending on the age of the child." Of course, giving positive reinforcement for good behavior can be just as effective in helping a child learn what you expect of his behavior.

4. Made in the Shade

Q: My family is planning a vacation to the coast this summer. Do I need to protect my children from the sun? What are the best ways?

A: In addition to making your kids — and you — miserable from sunburn on your vacation, too much sun can cause skin cancer later in life. (Covering up also helps prevent mosquito bites, which reduces your risk of getting West Nile virus.) Children are particularly at risk from the dangers of the sun's ultraviolet rays because a child's skin is thinner than an adult's. In fact, a child's skin can burn within only a few minutes of exposure to the sun. To keep your children from too much exposure to the sun, make sure they wear hats or sit under a shade, put on sunglasses, and apply generous amounts of strong sunscreen (at least a sun protection level of 15). It's important to cover up infants under 6 months of age as much as possible, but a good idea to apply sunscreen on their exposed areas. It's also best to stay in the shade when the sun is at its strongest — 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Finally, encourage your kids to drink water or other liquids frequently to keep them from becoming dehydrated.

5. Fast Doesn't Mean Fattening

Q: I have three children in elementary school who are always going in different directions. To keep up with them, unfortunately, I often don't have time to prepare nutritious meals and rely on dinner

from a local fast-food place. How can I make their drive-through meals healthier?

A: The American Heart Association offers the following tips to keep fast food from becoming a "biggie" nutritional disaster:

- Resist combination or "value size" meals.
- Skip mayonnaise and other fattening condiments or dressings.
- Avoid double burgers and sandwiches with bacon.
- Drink water, diet sodas, or low-fat milk instead of regular cola or milkshakes.
- Order healthy side dishes, such as fruit.

6. Hard as Nails

Q: How do I trim my baby's fingernails without cutting her fingers?

A: Many parents have a difficult time trimming their baby's nails because they are so small and soft, and babies don't sit still for a manicure. But it's important to trim your baby's nails regularly — perhaps once or twice a week — to keep your baby from scratching herself. Here are some helpful hints:

- Use small nail clippers; parents can buy clippers specifically for babies at the local drugstore.
- Trim your baby's nails after her bath because they are softer after being in the water.
- If your baby is a wiggle worm (and most are while someone is trying to cut their nails), have someone play with her to distract her while you are trimming.
- You can also try trimming them while your baby is asleep.
- If your baby's nails have rough edges, use a small emery board or file to smooth them.
- When trimming, hold her finger, press the skin under the nail down, and trim straight across.
- Do not bite your baby's nails; this can cause nails to break off unevenly, and the germs from your mouth will get on her hands, which can cause infection.

7. Cycling Safety

Q: My son received his first bicycle this spring. It's been a long time since I have ridden a bike; will you refresh my memory about bike safety?

A: According to Safe Kids USA, more than 130 children die from bicycle-related injuries

each year, and more than 280,000 are treated in emergency rooms. Here are a few precautions that will help keep your son safe while riding:

- First and foremost, a bike helmet is essential safety gear. Safe Kids reports that helmets could prevent an estimated 75 percent of fatal head injuries to child cyclists. When buying a helmet:
 - Make sure it meets the standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.
 - Let your son pick out his helmet, because if he likes it, he will be much more likely to wear it.
 - Check to make sure the helmet fits securely and your son knows how to wear it correctly. Safe Kids recommends the "Eyes, Ears, and Mouth" test: The rim of the helmet should be one to two finger-widths above the eyebrows, the straps should form a "V" just below the ear lobe, the buckle should be flat against the skin, and the strap should feel snug when the rider's mouth is open.
 - Replace a helmet that has been in a crash. It may not protect your child properly if he crashes again.

Additional tips from Safe Kids includes:

- Familiarize yourself with the laws in your state. Many states now require that children younger than 16 wear a helmet while cycling, but people of all ages should use bike helmets, even if not required by law.
- Set a good example by wearing a helmet when you cycle.
- Teach your son to obey traffic signs and the rules of the road. Cyclists should ride with the traffic, not facing it.
- Make sure the bike itself is the right size for the child. There should be 2 to 4 inches of clearance between the bike frame and the child's groin when the child's feet are flat on the ground. Also, make sure the bike is in good repair — reflectors are secure, brakes work properly, gears shift smoothly, and tires are secured and properly inflated.
- When in doubt, get help. The sales staff at any bicycle shop or outdoor recreation store should be able to provide expert advice on fitting and adjusting bikes and helmets.