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## Family Focus

# Ten Great Things You Can Do For Your Children

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

The title of this column may be misleading, since this isn't about concrete things to do for your child, such as taking him to Disney World or buying him fabulous toys, electronics, or clothes. Rather, these are actions you can take that will enhance your child's life.

**1- Catch your child behaving well.** Be sure to notice and comment frequently. Be specific about what you witness him doing or saying.

**2- When disciplining your child, make a correction quickly without too much fuss, and then go back to being positive.** You want him to think of himself as a good child. For example, if Josh knocks down some cans from the grocery store shelf, ask him to put them back. After he complies, thank him for cooperating.

**3- Express affection for your child verbally, physically, and through your actions.** Actions can include: taking his preferences into consideration, showing him you enjoy his company, and taking him to see an exhibit of lizards and snakes when you really don't like lizards and snakes.

**4- Demonstrate kindness, consideration, and generosity to others.** Be the best role model you can be.

**5- When you spend time with your child, do so willingly and happily.** A child can tell when his parents aren't fully present or if they begrudge giving up their time. (But no need to feel guilty for occasionally skipping pages while reading to your young child at bedtime). On the other hand, be sure to reserve time for yourself and your other interests and relationships to avoid feeling burdened or resentful about sharing time with your child.

**6- Take good physical and emotional care of your child, but also be**

**sure to do the same for yourself.** This is a hard one for parents to find time and energy to do, but it's essential.

**7- Have an encouraging, optimistic outlook with your child as much as possible.** You don't need to be Mary Poppins, but it's important to keep your worries to yourself or share them with other adults. Hearing about too many serious or worrisome issues, directly or indirectly, can burden and inhibit a child. He may become anxious, withdrawn and clingy, and lack confidence in himself.

**8- Avoid excessive behavior – too much spending, cleaning, drinking, anger, working, electronics use, etc.** Try to find balance and demonstrate this to your child. Seek help if necessary. I'm currently seeing one mother of three young children to address her compulsive need for neatness and orderliness in her home. She realizes she has sacrificed relaxed quality time with her husband and children by constantly trying to maintain a perfect house. She has been critical and dissatisfied with herself as well. Our children are happiest and feel most secure when we are able to be happy with ourselves and our lives.

**9- Provide clear, consistent expectations and consequences.** We read this in every child-rearing article – and that's because it's essential! Be sure to implement consequences no matter how convincingly your child pleads his case. Allow increased input about rules and consequences as he gets older. Work together in a cooperative, respectful manner. If your child is not behaving respectfully toward you, others, or himself, seek outside help promptly. If he is under eighteen, do not give him a choice about seeing a therapist. After all, you don't allow him to decide about going to the den-

tist or medical doctor. Be firm and loving in your efforts. Often the way to get your child to see someone is to go in as a family, so that he is not singled out as "the one with problems." But if he absolutely refuses to go, as some children do, don't force the issue. Rather, consult regularly with a professional to get the advice and support you will need.

**10- Be a good listener.** One of the most powerful tools in parenting is being able to provide a calm, reflective, neutral ear for your child. With supportive listening from their parents, children can learn how to make decisions, express their thoughts and feelings, and interact better with others. They develop greater confidence and self-worth. Avoid judging, advising (unless asked), asking questions that have a critical edge, and reacting too emotionally. An excellent guide is *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* by Michael P. Nichols.



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## World Rabies Day

Mona Miller, DVM



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Today is World Rabies Day – September 28, 2011 – a day to increase awareness about the public health problem of rabies infection throughout the world. Each year, about 55,000 people die from rabies disease, mostly in Asia and Africa. An important global source is dog bites in these areas and children are especially at risk.

Rabies virus enters the nerves of the victim from a bite wound or saliva, and ends up infecting brain tissue. The average time between bite and brain penetration is 20-30 days. Once the virus reaches the brain, symptoms occur such as change in behavior, change in voice, larynx (voice box) spasms, and weakness of muscles. Drooling is considered the "classic" sign and is a result of the larynx becoming paralyzed. Once signs appear, there is no standard treatment

for animals. (It is important to note that many other problems can cause drooling, however!)

California is an endemic area for rabies virus, as are most of the other states. In fact, only Hawaii does not have rabies present. There have been only 15 human cases in California since 1980, according to the California Department of Public Health, August 2011. In 2010, 175 cases of rabies found in animals were confirmed. The most common carriers are bats and skunks. Other animals included dogs (two cases), coyote and fox (five combined), cattle (one case). Two bats were found in Contra Costa County. Almost every part of the state was affected, with multiple counties reporting a low incidence.

Part of the mission of World Rabies Day is to spread the word that rabies is 100% preventable. All dogs

and cats in California can be vaccinated at four months old. Keeping your pet current on his/her rabies vaccine not only provides a high-level of protection against rabies disease, but also provides "insurance" against a euthanasia mandate by the County if your pet is bitten by a suspect rabid animal. If a wild animal bites you, promptly wash the wound thoroughly with soap and contact your physician. If a wild animal bites your pet, do not try to handle the wild animal, but contact Animal Control for advice. It is best to avoid contact with unfamiliar domestic animals and wild animals, especially the known common carriers such as bats, skunks and foxes.

Further information can be acquired through websites such as [www.cdph.ca.gov/](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/), [www.veterinary-partner.com](http://www.veterinary-partner.com), and [www.worldrabies-day.org](http://www.worldrabies-day.org).



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## To Buy or Not to Buy? Organic, that is ...

### The Dirty Dozen, Clean Fifteen and Others

By Dr. Theresa Tsingis, DCMS



Organic eggs at the Olivera Egg Ranch booth at the Moraga Farmers' Market  
Photo Andy Scheck

Lamorinda has attracted wonderful food purveyors, and some of the finest grocery shops are available minutes from home. My patients have often inquired if buying organic foods is necessary for good health. There are many opinions about this topic. Mine is that certain foods are healthier when organically grown, and others can safely be purchased as conventionally grown. I'll explain further and then share some lists to help both your budget and health guide you through the grocery aisles.

In 2009 and 2011, The Center for Disease Control released the results of studies on chemical exposure and wrote the Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals. They found that most Americans tested positive for the presence of 212 chemicals and heavy metals. The six most widespread chemicals were: PDE (flame retardant), BPA (food-related plastics), Acrylamide (fried foods), PFDA (nonstick cookware), Mercury (seafood), and MTBE (gasoline). Studies show these toxins to be correlated with allergies, diabetes, infertility, and neurological and autoimmune conditions. Some, for example dioxin, are no longer used but are still found in dairy products, farm-raised fish and beef. (Dioxin is a known contributor to the development of type 2 diabetes – see reference 5).

There are nutritional approaches which aim to decrease the toxin burden on the liver which I think are helpful but are a topic for another article. Regarding future exposure to toxins, I think that the "cleaner" the food eaten, the less the body is burdened over time. Below are lists I have developed and those adopted from other food educators. I dubbed the first list the "Scary Six" because they are highest on the food chain and are high-fat (toxins concentrate in fat tissue). The other lists describe fruits and vegetables according to their average amounts of pesticide and fertilizer residues. Load these lists on your cell phone so you'll have them handy when grocery shopping):

#### THE "SCARY" SIX

\*(Buy Organic)

1. Dairy products
2. Eggs
3. Farm-raised Fish
4. Meat
5. Peanut butter/nuts
6. Poultry

#### THE DIRTY DOZEN

\*(Buy Organic)

1. Apples
2. Bell peppers

3. Blueberries
4. Celery
5. Cherries
6. Grapes
7. Kale/ other greens
8. Nectarines
9. Peaches
10. Potatoes
11. Spinach
12. Strawberries

#### THE CLEAN FIFTEEN

\*(Okay to Buy Conventional)

1. Asparagus
2. Avocado
3. Cabbage
4. Cantaloupe
5. Corn
6. Eggplant
7. Grapefruit
8. Honeydew/ melons
9. Kiwi
10. Mangoes
11. Onions
12. Pineapple
13. Sweet peas
14. Sweet potatoes
15. Watermelon

While these lists aim to consider both budget and health factors, it is true that organic foods are still more expensive. My recommendation: where to spend, is to pay the most attention to the Scary Six (food sources higher on the food chain). As organic and local foods gain in popularity, prices will lower and everyone will benefit. Bon appétit and To Your Health!

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