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Quality family time: The opportunities are endless

By Nikki Ackerman
Staff Writer

In the age of social networking, texting, video games and jam-packed schedules, face-to-face communication and quality time with loved ones often gets pushed aside for digital relationships – a change that has put a chasm between parents and their children.

However, while the distractions are certainly plentiful, there is no lack of fun and educational – and often free or reasonably priced – activities for families, nor is there a shortage of community resources that help facilitate this quality time.

The Family Center of Washington County in West Bend – which offers a wide variety of free programming to families with children ages 0-12 – is an ideal example of one of these local organizations.

Shirley Kraft, the Center’s coordinator of educational programming, said she has had a front-row view of the positives that come from regular parent-child interaction.



Parents and their children enjoy a recent performance by a local children’s performer at the Menomonee Falls Public Library.

“We offer so many options for families, whether it’s sitting down and sharing a book for our storytimes, dads spending time with their kids for our Dad Nights or families experiencing new adventures through our Family Fun Nights,” she said.

Kraft added that the long-term benefits of family togetherness are powerful.

“A child who is cared for in a nurturing family can learn to care for him or herself and can transfer their caring to others and the environment,” she said.

Libraries are another go-to destination for families looking for something to do, especially in tough economic times. From storytimes to crafts to movie nights to performances by children’s artists, libraries are a deep well from which families can draw.

“We offer a lot of family programs which provide people with

Continued on Page 7

“We’re spending the day together exploring downtown!”

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Financial Literacy Lessons: A Family Affair

(NewsUSA) - Studies have shown that parents have the greatest influence on their children's financial habits, and now, more than ever, mothers and fathers are taking the primary role in educating kids about healthy money management.

"Most financial experts agree there is a need for financial discussions among families to avoid or soften potential future economic upheavals," says Suzanne Poole, executive vice president, retail sales strategy, TD Bank. "According to a recent financial literacy poll by TD Bank, only 50 percent of families report having weekly conversations with their children, even though there are easy ways to incorporate tips about money in everyday conversation."

The bank surveyed 1,637 consumers, and with a little more than half of families having weekly conversations with their children about money matters, it's important to keep it simple, be honest, and make it fun. Now, let the lessons begin:

Be Open: According to the survey, a majority of parents agree that honesty is the best policy when talking to children about household finances. Perhaps as a result of the recent economic struggles, the survey found that 55 percent of families say they are talking with their children more often about money.

Set Savings Goals: The survey showed that teaching children to save with a piggy bank is one of the most popular money-related activities. That being said, only one in three parents reports setting a savings goal. If your child is saving, help them set goals and define the steps needed to reach them.

Establish a Family Budget: Despite the evidence that better budgeting can lead to saving, the survey shows that 47 percent of families are still not following or creating a monthly budget.

Enroll in Financial Literacy Programs: Financial literacy can be a daunting task for parents, but there are educational tools and programs that can help with this process.

Be Smart About Your Family's Brain Health

(Family Features) You may be taking care of your body, but are you taking care of your brain? The brain is vital for everyday functions, yet few pay close attention to it.

According to Shara Aaron, M.S., R.D. and author of "The Baby Fat Diet," you can keep family brain health top of mind through simple daily actions.

- Consuming omega-3 fatty acids may support your brain's processing power and help fight mental health decline.

- Eat lots of fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables. Include leafy greens, broccoli and cauliflower.

- Increase daily intake of DHA, which accounts for up to 97 percent of the omega-3 fats in the brain.

Exercise can increase heart rate and help produce new brain cells.

- Do physical activities at least 30 minutes a day. Get the family to walk; play sports; have fun outdoors.

- Maintain a healthy weight to minimize risk of diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension.

Keeping the brain active helps generate new cells and makes new connections within the brain.

- Try new activities; learn a new language; stimulate curiosity.

- Look for creative ways to use multiple parts of the brain. Play music; draw; write; arrange flowers; take photos.

- Strong social connections are a vital element in overall health, wellness and longevity.

- Volunteer for a cause you're passionate about.

- Join group activities such as a card group, book club or hobby group.



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The ABC'S for Keeping the Home Healthier for Children

(Family Features) Children often come into closer contact with their environment than adults. They put their fingers in their mouths, crawl on the floor, and touch, taste and breathe things without knowing if they are harmful. Because their organs and respiratory, immune and neurological systems are still developing, children can be more sensitive to harmful substances such as certain chemicals, particles and allergens, according to the Greenguard Environmental Institute.

Dr. Alanna Levine, Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP), reminds parents that allergy symptoms typically begin during childhood. In fact, the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America warns that allergies are the most frequently reported chronic condition in children, limiting activities for more than 40 percent of them.

Dr. Levine recommends following the ABC's — Avoid, Balance and Change — to help maintain a healthier home environment for children.

A is for Avoid: Whenever possible, avoid irritants that often trigger allergies, such as products made of feathers or down. Use hypoallergenic pillows on your child's bed, and limit exposure to perfume, talcum powder, hair spray, air fresheners, fabric softeners or other strong odors or sprays. Strong fragrances and odors may aggravate allergy symptoms, so be sure that children prone to allergies are not in the house when spraying fragrances or using strong cleaning products.

B is for Balance: Maintain a consistent balance in the home to help minimize allergens. Keep the windows shut and use central air conditioning during high pollen seasons to help protect children from pollen particles that trees, grasses and weeds release into the air. These particles can harbor in the eyes, nose, and airways, causing allergy symptoms to flair for those allergic to pollen. Also, give children washable,

non-allergenic stuffed toys when possible, and be sure to wash the ones played with the most on a weekly basis, in hot water at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit.

C is for Change: Change items that are easy to neglect but are important for maintaining a healthier home, such as leaky faucets, pipes and other high moisture areas that are common places for mold growth. Don't neglect their air in the home either. Change your filter every three months, and use a high performance filter. For those with carpet in the home, vacuum it often and thoroughly, and change the vacuum cleaner bag on a monthly basis.

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Sharpen Up Good Health Habits

(Family Features) When it comes to your kids, pencils aren't the only thing that families can take time to sharpen. While parents work to establish routines for the school year and for school breaks, they can also help the younger members of the household sharpen up good health habits to last a lifetime.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, students' academic achievement and their health are directly correlated. Use these tips to teach new healthy habits that can become a way of life for the whole family.

Germ-Free Hands. One of the most significant — and simple — health habits to teach is washing hands. Kidshealth.org, a website filled with family-friendly health tips, calls hand washing the first line of defense to keep germs at bay.

To help youngsters learn the habit, enforce rules for the entire family. Insist on washing hands before every meal, after using the bathroom, after handling pets, after cleaning chores, after playing outside, and, of course, after blowing noses, sneezing and coughing. Several brands have created kid-friendly soap dispensers that are both fun and functional to inspire little ones to participate.

Food as Fuel. Mornings may be hectic, but avoid the temptation to take shortcuts on breakfast. Kids need fuel to power through the day. Making breakfast part of the daily routine is also important for weight management. A nutritious morning meal helps fire up the metabolism, and it helps prevent over-eating to compensate for a hungry tummy later in the day.

The experts at kidshealth.org recommend selecting foods that contain whole grains, fiber and protein with little added sugar in order to improve kids' attention span, concentration and memory.

Sound Slumber. Although naptimes gradually diminish as children grow older, adequate sleep is still critically important. Too little sleep translates into irritability and other behavior problems, as well as difficulty paying attention in school. While the specific needs of each child will vary to some degree, school-age children and preteens should get between 10 and 12 hours of sleep each night. Implementing a consistent bedtime, especially on school nights, can help ensure your child's sleep needs are consistently met. Be sure to build in time for children to unwind before bed to help keep that nightly target on track with less stress for all involved.

Balanced Immune System. Believe it or not, 70 percent of your immune system is in your digestive tract. The immune cells in the digestive tract share their space with a community of over 500 species of naturally-occurring bacteria. Keeping these bacteria in balance is what's important to boosting digestive and immune health. Taking a daily probiotic helps boost your immune system by keeping these bacteria in balance.

Probiotics are "friendly" bacteria that help balance the digestive system. Yogurt is a common source of probiotics, but many varieties contain a significant amount of sugar that may be off-putting, especially if you are aiming for a daily dose. However, there are products available, such as Sustenex Probiotic Gummy Bears and Soft Chews, which offer a lower calorie alternative for a daily dose of probiotics while also appealing to picky eaters and lactose intolerant youngsters.

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Internet Safety 101: How to Protect Your Kids Online

(NewsUSA) - It is no mystery that technology allows kids to gain 24-hour access to the media, but a recent study by the Kaiser Foundation discovered the average kid spends 7.5 hours a day using entertainment media. Through using multiple media at one time such as music, TV, movies, the Internet, video games and texting, kids can actually pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes.

Although these ways of socializing and communicating can be enriching, they do come with certain risks. Kids can become victims of online bullies, predators, hackers and scammers.

"The Internet has great potential for kids in terms of knowledge and resources, but we take seriously the job of teaching our youth how to navigate it safely and properly," said Dan Rauzi, senior director, technology programs at Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA).

BGCA has partnered with Sprint to address these issues and help better prepare young people to navigate their world — both real and virtual. BGCA's website for teens — www.myclub-mylife.com — includes a special Media Safety section that has information and teen-friendly resources to further promote Internet safety.

It's important that your child be aware that the fundamentals — what we say, how we say it, and why we say it — are the same online and off. Here are some tips for discussing Internet safety with your family:

- Create an honest, open environment. Kids look to their parents to help guide them. You may not have all the answers, and being honest about that can go a long way.
- Initiate conversations. Even if your kids are comfortable

approaching you, don't wait for them to start the conversation. Use everyday opportunities to talk to your kids about being online.

- Communicate your values. Be up front about your values and how they apply in an online context. Communicating your values clearly can help your kids make smarter and more thoughtful decisions when they face tricky situations.

- Be patient. Most kids need to hear information repeated, in small doses, for it to sink in. If you keep talking with your kids, your patience and persistence will pay off in the long run.

Ready, Set, Play!

Family time is good for everyone

(Family Features) Playtime for kids is more than just fun and games. It's essential to their development and overall family well-being. And playing with parents and adult caregivers is a critical part of that healthy development.

The Family Togetherness Study, commissioned in January 2011 by Foresters, a life insurance provider, and conducted by Harris Interactive, measured the relationships between family well-being, family time at a community playground and family time in general.

- Parents who engage in 12 activities per week with their child have a 20 percent higher family well-being score than those who do not engage in any activities.

- Parents who visit a playground with their child daily have a 14 percent higher sense of family well-being score than those who never visit.

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...Quality family time

Continued from Page 2

the opportunity for fun, recreational activities at no cost to them," said Kris Stabo, youth librarian at the Menomonee Falls Library. "The parents love it and of course the kids love it, too."

Jane Schall, director for the Falls Library, expressed similar sentiments.

"Right now, given the current economic climate, the library has become a more important place for families," she said. "People are looking to take their families places that are free; they enjoy spending time together in an enjoyable and learning environment."

According to Laura Ramirez, author of the award-winning parenting book "Keepers of the Children," spending time as a family should not be viewed as "doing time," but as a privilege.

"We speak in terms of quality time because we live in a society where money and things have come to rule our lives," she writes in an article titled "Giving Your Children the Gift of Time." "The solution to this is simple: make a decision that family matters. Once you've made family your priority, it's fairly easy to weed out the activities that take up too much time and create parenting plans that serve the interests of the entire family."

As intentional family time decreases, Recreation Departments nationwide are making an effort to add more family activities and classes to their booklets, said Germantown Parks and Recreation Department Director Brett Altergott.

"There's been a move nationally to include more activities that families can do together," he said. "We're always striving for more

(options), looking for that next niche."

Naming everything from exercise classes to special events like camp outs and scavenger hunts to organized sports such as dodgeball, kickball and disc golf, Altergott said there are myriad opportunities the village recreation center offers to the public at any given time.

"These are the types of things that don't cost anything, or very little, and we're always looking for things wacky and fun like that," he said.

Bottom line: families don't have to drop a ton of cash or go far – or even leave their own home – to enjoy each other's company.

Author Melanie Cooper's piece "101 Family Home Evening Activities" offers a variety of free and inexpensive activity options for families.

Some of these ideas include: visit the park; go bird watching; bake cookies or bread; fly a kite; plant flowers or a tree; hike an area nature trail; make crafts; have a backyard camp out; go swimming at the beach; visit the zoo or museum; play board games; look through old photographs; set up a lemonade stand; take a bike ride; go rollerblading; have a picnic; visit a shut in; have a bubble-blowing contest; watch an old movie; and have a family treasure hunt.

Perhaps Altergott put it best: "Families are busy so it's important to slow down and spend time together. There's always something fun to do as a family."

To find a list of family activities in your area, start with your local library, recreation department or chamber of commerce.

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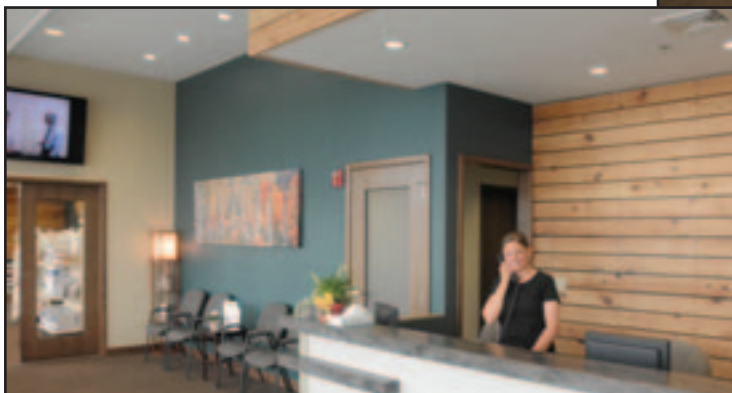
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