FAMILY TIME
STRENGTHEN YOUR FAMILY
SPRING
PENN STATE

Ages 2–3
Your Child from 2 to 3
• Wants to do things for himself.
• Is self-centered—the “me do” age.
• Talks more, uses more words; needs to be talked with.
• Is full of questions.
• Likes to be read to.
• Needs lots of fresh air and exercise.
• Enjoys lots of large-muscle activities.
• Needs to be hugged and held a lot.
• Likes being with his parents.
• Likes to help.
• Is beginning to “make believe.”
• Expresses feelings openly.

To Do Family Time You Must
• Have a firm desire to help your family grow stronger.
• Make a strong commitment to do Family Time activities regularly.
• Set aside time to do the activities.
• Be determined to involve all family members.

To Get Started
• Pick an activity.
• Before the family gathers, be prepared by getting together any materials that you need to do what you have planned.
• Set aside some time each week when all family members can be together. Turn off the TV, radio, or other distractions.

He or She? Him or Her?
PLEASE NOTE: In this and all Family Time publications, we take turns referring to children as “he” or “she.” When we use “he” or “she,” we include all children.

A Word to Parents of Younger Children
Strong, healthy families don’t just happen. They take planning and work by each member.

Strengthening your family means deepening the relationships or bonds the members have with one another. The effort required pays big dividends—the children and their parents (or parent in a single-parent family) grow closer, each feels good about himself and others in the family, and the family develops a sense of pride in itself.

Family Time will help you strengthen your family. Families that do Family Time faithfully will grow close and will be laying the foundation for a healthy family in future years.

Every parent is busy. Family Time helps busy parents develop the habit of putting their families first by setting aside time to be together.

Parents in strong families plan or “make” the time they spend with their children. By repeatedly spending time with their children, parents send them a powerful message that they believe their family is important. The young child who is forming a belief system will learn to value his family.

The child sees his parents as persons who deeply care about him because they spend their valuable time and energy doing things with him. The child who grows up in a family that spends time together has a good feeling not only about his parents and his family but, very important, he feels better about himself.

You and your family will benefit from doing Family Time. Two-parent families as well as single-parent families can grow stronger. What is needed is your commitment and time to do the activities.

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Let’s Explore...
Our Family

Now’s the time to begin building memories with your family. Spring holidays are a good starting place, but other activities also bring families closer together.

**Holiday Traditions**

Tradition gives a child a sense of continuity, a kinship with his ancestors. Holidays are wonderful times to build family traditions. While you build these you also build memories of a happy childhood.

Some ideas for the spring holidays:

- **St. Patrick’s Day**—Cut out shamrocks together and decorate the house.
- **Easter**—Give your child the thrill of helping to dye eggs. (The bunny can still hide them.)
- **Passover**—Teach your child the reverence for your home service. Give him a plain paper plate and let him color on it the Seder foods.
- **Memorial Day**—Go to a parade together or have a parade at home. Your child can carry a small American flag and lead the parade.

**Acting Out Nursery Rhymes and Favorite Stories**

One member of the family can say a nursery rhyme while someone else acts it out. The simplest is Jack Be Nimble. Try acting out one yourself and see if your child can guess what it is.

Suggestions: Humpty Dumpty, Three Blind Mice, Little Miss Muffet

Acting out stories has great possibilities because more than one person can enter into “the play” at once. Kids do a great job of ad-libbing the lines. Good plays to do might be The Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Three Bears, or The Little Red Hen.
Family Storytelling

Children love stories. You can begin to tell your child stories from early babyhood. Later, tell stories about what she did that day, or stories about other things that have happened to her and the rest of the family. The whole family can get involved in a story by telling one loaded with repetitious sounds or phrases. Examples are The Three Pigs, The Little Red Hen, and the Little Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly. Every member of the family can supply the different sounds or phrases.

If your child has a story to tell, write it down and share it with the whole family.

Looking at Family Pictures

Spend some time as a family looking at your family pictures. Your child might enjoy seeing what you looked like when you were her age. She might like to see how she has grown since she was a baby. If you have moved, showing her the house you used to live in or the pets you used to have could bring back good memories.

Now would be a good time to begin a family picture album if you do not already have one.

• Be sure to label pictures and make note of special days or events.
• Include snapshots you have taken and other pictures from newspapers, friends, or others you have collected.

A Journey in the House

Exploring his own house with you can give your child a sense of discovering his family history. When you can spare fifteen minutes, take your child by the hand and lead him on a tour of discovery. Talk about the pictures on the wall, a cherished vase, the begonia plant, or Grandfather’s chair. Explain what they mean to you and encourage him to ask questions.

Other Family Activities You Can Do:
Let’s Explore...
Our Community

Visiting a Farm
Spring is a busy time of year for the farmer, and there are lots of things going on at the farm for you to see with your child.

Remember:
• Plan for a short visit so your child will not be too tired. Morning is the best time for two- and three-year-olds to go on outings.
• Plan to show her the animals, especially any new calves, lambs, or ducks.
• Show her any field work that is going on.
• Look at the farm equipment. Give her a chance to get on a tractor or a wagon if she wants.

Watching the Pothole/Road Repair Crew
Spring is a good time to watch how your community takes care of its roads as the crews work to repair winter damage. Children love to watch big trucks, bulldozers, and cement mixers and to see the workers in their hard hats.

You might also take your child to a construction site to see bricks being laid, big cranes in operation, or cement being poured.

Watch for telephone or cable repair crews in your neighborhood so you can encourage your child to watch them work.

Talk about what you have seen with your child.
Set up a Play Group in Your Neighborhood

Your child, particularly if he has no brothers or sisters at home to play with, might benefit from a neighborhood play group. A play group can also give you an opportunity to talk with other parents.

• Look around your neighborhood and see if there are other children about your child’s age.

• Call together the parents of these children to see if they would be interested in getting some sort of play group together on a regular basis. For working parents, this can be in the evening or on a weekend.

• You might plan to meet one or more times a week at different homes.

• Decide on the length of the session, the structure of the activities, whether there will be a snack, and any other logistics that may be needed.

• Check your local library and county extension office for information about similar groups and ideas about what to do with the children.

Other Activities to Do in Your Community:

Pretend to Be a Community Helper

There are many community helpers, such as farmers, doctors, nurses, police officers, firefighters, and mail carriers. Your child might like to pretend that she is one of these people. A good time to suggest this activity is shortly after going to the doctor, visiting the farm, or mailing a letter, when the duties of that community helper are fresh in her mind.

• Help your child decide which person she wants to be.

• Talk with her about how that person helps us.

• Help her get together items such as a doctor’s “kit,” a firefighter’s “tricycle,” or a mail carrier’s “pouch of letters.” These will help your child know what the community helper does. And it makes play time more fun.

Taking Flowers to a Neighbor

When spring comes, we often get to see neighbors who seem to have hibernated all winter. Take some of the forsythia, pussy willows, or apple blossoms you have blooming (see Let’s Explore...Plants and Animals) and make a visit to one of your neighbors whom you did not see very much during the winter.

If you do not have flowers, you might like to take something that you have made or baked to share with them.

Your child can carry the flowers or gift and give it to your neighbor to show her what you have done to welcome spring.
Let’s Explore...
The Foods We Eat

A Make-Myself Salad
Your child can design a salad portrait of himself. He can use a peach half for the body, half a hard-cooked egg for the head, cereal flakes, shredded cheese, or grated carrot for hair, cherry for lips, celery for arms and legs, and prunes for shoes. Let him make one for everyone in the family. (Substitute and improvise if you do not have all the ingredients or if your child prefers other things.)

**ALERT:** Infants and young children can choke easily on some foods, such as nuts, popcorn, fruit seeds or pits, pieces of hot dogs or bacon, and some raw vegetables and fruits, such as carrots, celery, apples, and grapes. Using grated or finely chopped foods may reduce the risk of choking. Never leave an infant or young child alone while eating.

Fun with Toast
Toast is more fun to eat when there is a selection of spreads to put on it. Try having a “toast tasting” day when your family can compare the various tastes of these spreads.

**Possibilities include:**
- honey
- jam or jelly or marmalade
- apple butter
- cinnamon sugar
- marshmallow fluff
- cheese
- mashed baked beans
- catsup!
- margarine or butter

Use your imagination!

Be sure to cut the bread into small pieces.
Give your child a spreader and let him spread his choice of toppings.

CAUTION: Do not use honey in beverages and uncooked foods for infants under the age of two years. Honey may contain botulism toxins.

Shake a Pudding

**Ingredients**
- instant pudding mix
- milk (whole or low-fat)

**Equipment**
- jar with screw top

**Directions**
Pour into jar the amount of milk called for on the package. Add the contents of the pudding mix. Put jar lid on very tight. Let child hold jar with two hands and shake. Pour into bowls and eat!
**Hard-cooked Eggs**

Two- and three-year-olds can enjoy being involved in cooking and shelling eggs as well as dyeing and decorating them.

**Equipment**
- large pan
- long-handled spoon
- fork
- knife
- spoon
- paper plate for eggshells

**Ingredients**
- eggs

**Directions**
Have your child put eggs in a pan of water. (You may add food coloring to give the eggs a slight tint so your child can see the difference between the shell and the egg when it is peeled. A small amount of vinegar added to the water helps set the color. If you add coloring, explain why to your child.)

**ADULT:**
Bring water to boiling temperature, cover pan, and turn off burner. Let eggs sit in water for 25 minutes. Cool in cold water. Put an egg on the plate and show your child how to tap it all over before peeling. Other preparations:

**CHILD:**
- Egg slices. Your child can cut the eggs with a blunt knife or egg slicer.
- Deviled eggs. Cut in half with a blunt knife mash the yolks with a fork.
- Egg salad. He can probably stir in the ingredients and mix them together.

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**Cheesy Snack Mix**

**What you need:**
- 1 cup of dry cereal
- ½ cup of small pretzel sticks
- Bowl and mixing spoon
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- Cookie sheet
- Parmesan cheese

**Directions**
Mix the cereal and the pretzel sticks.
Spread on a cookie sheet.
Melt butter or margarine and spread over cereal/pretzel mixture.
Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.
Bake in the oven at 250 degrees for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
Cool, then store in a covered container.

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**Other Food Activities to Do:**
Let’s Explore...

Plants and Animals

The coming of spring brings splendid opportunities to plan family activities around plants and animals. As the snow and ice melt and nature begins bursting forth, chances to enjoy the change of seasons abound. Take a nature walk in your yard or a nearby park with your child and look for signs of spring. If the weather is still too cool to do much outside, celebrate the coming of spring by doing some inside activities. Let’s begin!

Forcing Spring Leaves and Flowers

During the first warm days, bring in a branch from a tree that is just beginning to bud, such as forsythia, pussy willow, or a fruit tree, and place in water. As the branch begins to develop, ask your child why she thinks it is leafing or budding faster inside than the branches outside. Call her attention to the coming change of the seasons.

When the flower dies and must be thrown away, help her think about why it could not keep on living. Pussy willows will root and can be planted outside when the weather warms up.

Onion Plants

There are many indoor plants a child can enjoy. Put three toothpicks into a large onion. Then suspend it over a small glass of water so that only the bottom of the onion is in the water. Let your child keep it watered. Put it on a sunny windowsill. It will send up graceful leaves.

Spring Brings Animal Babies

Be on the lookout for lambs, calves, or chicks as you drive around the countryside. Point out these animal babies to your child. Check for ducklings or other bird babies to watch. Look for baby birds and bunnies in your own yard.

Then look in magazines for pictures of animal babies to cut out and paste, or look for books to read about baby animals.
**How a Plant Drinks**

Fill a glass with water and some red food coloring. Then cut off the bottom of a stalk of celery and let your child put it in the colored water. In several hours, have her cut open the celery with a blunt knife. The celery will be peppermint striped. This “surprise” shows how a plant drinks.

**Let the Vegetable Be Its Own Pot**

Cut the top $\frac{1}{2}$ inch off a carrot or any other root vegetable and hollow out the insides. Fill with water and hang in a window. Watch what happens!

**Planting a Garden**

Whether or not you plan to have a garden, at least save a small patch in the yard for your child’s garden. If you have no sunny spot or live in an apartment, a tomato or pepper plant will grow in a tub or plastic bucket on the patio or front stoop.

Choose seeds that are large enough for a child to handle easily and that are hardy growers. Zinnias and marigolds are good choices. Peas, string beans, and lima beans are good vegetables to choose. Radishes, although small seeded, are always favorites because they grow so fast. Tomatoes and peppers bought as plants are also garden favorites.

Talk about what plants need to grow—dirt, sun, and water (but not too much water!).

Your child will need help with watering and weeding, but when it comes time to pick the vegetables, she can enjoy doing it herself. Let her also shell the peas and break the string beans for cooking.

**Other Activities You Suggest:**
Let’s Explore...
The World of Crafts

Mother’s or Father’s Day Cards
Even the youngest member of the family can make her parent a card for Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. It’s never too soon to encourage your child to do special things for other members of her family.

Get out the paper, crayons, scissors, etc. You can write on the card the message she gives you.

Textures

Fabric Sample Box
Put together a collection of fabrics with interesting textures, at least two samples of each. Include fur, wool, velvet, corduroy, burlap, satin, etc., whatever you might have around, as well as different colors and patterns—stripes, plaids, dots, and prints. Cut them into different shapes. Your child can enjoy matching these by shape, texture, color, and pattern.

Texture Collage
Get together materials that you can paste on a piece of cardboard or paper. Arrange them in groups, such as different types of paper or mixed items like wood, styrofoam, etc. You can talk about the different textures as you work.

Materials
- paste
- paper or cardboard
- tissue, colored construction paper, wallpaper, letter paper, sandpaper, tissues, cotton balls, corduroy, silk, wool, brocade, felt, nylon, velvet

Sponge Painting

Materials
- sponges cut into different shapes
- tempera paint in shallow pans
- water
- brown paper (open up grocery bags)

Directions
Soak sponges in water and wring out. Dip sponge into tempera paint. Use sponge shape as stamp to print on paper.

Reminder
Doing is more important to your child at this age than results on paper. Messiness is part of the doing. Have plenty of newspapers and clean-up supplies on hand for all craft projects!
Eggshell Art

Save the eggshells from your hard-boiled eggs for this fun project. Be sure all the egg is removed from the shell.

**Materials**
- eggshells
- food coloring
- vinegar
- paper
- containers (shallow bowls)
- paste or glue

**Directions**
Make some dye by adding food coloring and vinegar to water. Make one container of red, one of blue, and one of yellow. Let your child dye some of the shells each color. Remove eggshells with a spoon and put them onto paper towels in a warm place to dry.

Now have your child mix the dyes to make a new color, dye some eggshells in it, and let them dry. Talk about the new colors created.

When the shells are dry, let your child break the shells into small pieces. Now you can make designs with the shells by gluing them on a sheet of paper or paper plate.

**CAUTION:** Young children need to be supervised during this activity so they do not put eggshells in their mouths.

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Play Dough

Your child will enjoy the feel of play dough and will poke, roll, pat, squeeze, and play with it. Let him. Don’t tell him what to make. Let him experiment.

Set some simple rules about where he may work with it and about cleaning up so that you all can enjoy it.

**Recipe**
- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup salt
- ½ tsp liquid oil
- water
- food coloring

Mix ingredients, adding water a little at a time until it feels like stiff cookie dough. Add food coloring, if desired, to water before mixing.

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Felt Board

To make a felt board that can be used for telling stories with your child, cover a piece of cardboard with flannel or felt by gluing it to the cardboard. Cut pieces of felt or fabric into different designs and shapes. You and your child can make up a story and use the shapes as part of the story.

You can cut out shapes to use for one of your child’s favorite stories. Seasonal shapes such as flowers, shamrocks, or bunnies can be part of a story about special holidays.

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Other Craft Ideas:
Let’s Explore...
Other Fun Things

Cleaning House
Many jobs around the house are fun for children, and educational too. Your child can be happy and busy while you work. He feels good that he is working by your side.

Your 3-year-old is often a very eager worker. Don’t discourage him. Choose something simple. He will learn to master his trade.

Setting the Table
A child of 3 can learn to set the table with placemats, napkins, and tableware. Use this as an opportunity to teach him counting skills and the names of colors and shapes.

Sorting Wash and Other Things
Your child can help with the wash, collecting and sorting it beforehand.

Sorting isn’t always simple at first, so don’t be surprised if your child finds it puzzling. In the beginning, show your child how by starting the piles with one of each item.

After the wash has dried, your child can also sort towels by color and size (big/little) and can sort towels from washcloths. Socks are good to sort by color and size. Limit the sorting to one concept at a time, either size or color, but not both. Towels and washcloths are good for practice folding.

Soon your child can move to sorting other things. Blocks can be sorted by color and shape. Toy cars and trucks can be sorted by size. Give your child empty plastic containers or egg cartons to use for sorting things.

Old playing cards will also amuse your child. They can be sorted according to color, suit, etc.

Spring Outdoor Fun
If your family likes to ride bikes, ride as a family. Take the youngest family member along on a bike seat. She will enjoy the companionship and learn the importance of regular exercise. Get into the “helmet habit.” Be sure everyone wears properly fitted, approved bicycle helmets when riding bikes.

Other kinds of family exercise could include throwing, catching, or rolling a large ball. Taking walks or running together is fun too.

Include all family members in these activities!
Finger Plays

Finger plays come to us from the same source as folk tales, ballads, and fables. They continue because of the relationships built when parent and child play together. The baby discovers fingers and toes to the rhythm of “This little pig went to market.” Clapping hands provokes childish delight with “Pat a cake, pat a cake, baker’s man.”

Many of the poems provide relaxation and reduce tension during the bedtime story period. Try some of these with your family.

Here We Go Up
Here we go up, up, up. (Stretch up)
Here we come down, down, down. (Bend down)
Here we go forward. (Step forward)
Here we come backward. (Step backward)
Here we go round, round, round. (Turn around)

Jack-in-the-Box
Jack-in-the-box. (Bury thumb in fist)
Sitting so still.
Won’t you come out?
Yes, I will! (Pop thumb out)

Bullfrog
Here’s Mr. Bullfrog. (One hand closed, thumb upright)
Sitting on a rock.
Along comes a little boy.
(Walking motion with other hand)
Mr. Bullfrog jumps, kerplop!
(Thumb makes diving motion)

Making Musical Instruments

Making musical instruments can be an enjoyable activity for the whole family. They can be made from materials found around the home. Form a band or march to records.

Shakers
Empty margarine containers, plastic bottles, and juice cans with lids. Place corn kernels, rice, or dried peas inside. Glue or tape lids on securely.

CAUTION: Be sure to glue or tape the lids on the containers securely to prevent your child from choking on the corn, rice, or dried peas.

Drum
Empty oatmeal box, coffee can, or salt container. Tap with fingers or stick for the beat. Can be painted or covered with colored paper.

Blocks
Tack or glue sandpaper to one side of two wooden blocks.

Other Fun Ideas:
Here is a listing of activities for you to do. Tape this sheet to your refrigerator and check off the activities you do together as a record of your good times. Consider starting a notebook or scrapbook of your Family Time together. Include some artwork, stories, or photographs of your family.

**Let’s Explore...Our Family**
- Holiday traditions
- Acting out nursery rhymes and favorite stories
- Family storytelling
- Looking at family pictures
- A journey in the house

**Let’s Explore...Our Community**
- Visiting a farm
- Watching the pothole/road repair crew
- Taking flowers to a neighbor
- Pretend to be a community helper
- Set up a play group in your neighborhood

**Let’s Explore...The Foods We Eat**
- Shake a pudding
- A make-myself salad
- Fun with toast
- Hard-cooked eggs
- Cheesy snack mix

**Let’s Explore...Plants and Animals**
- Forcing spring leaves and flowers
- Onion plants
- Spring brings animal babies
- How a plant drinks
- Let the vegetable be its own pot
- Planting a garden

**Let’s Explore...The World of Crafts**
- Mother’s and Father’s Day cards
- Textures
- Sponge painting
- Eggshell art
- Play dough
- Felt board

**Let’s Explore...Other Fun Things**
- Cleaning house
- Sorting wash and other things
- Spring outdoor fun
- Making musical instruments
- Finger plays
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Text Illustrations: Patti Arloff, Brass Tacks Studio

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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research, extension, and resident education programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication is available from the Publications Distribution Center; The Pennsylvania State University, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802. For information telephone 814-865-6713.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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Produced by Ag Communications and Marketing

Code # UA014  R2.SM4/09mpo4022