

Parents, Kids & Community

July 2020
A Special Supplement to

The Delaware
Gazette

**Pay It Forward
As a Family**
How families
can volunteer
together

New to the Neighborhood

Simple strategies to
meet your neighbors
after moving

Parenting Pointers

The ideas behind
strength-based
parenting



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How families can volunteer together

Litter cleanups

The National Park Service estimates that plastics account for up to 90 percent of the trash floating in the ocean and littering shores. Many national and local organizations aim to combat plastic pollution via beach cleanups, and these efforts welcome volunteers of all ages, making them ideal ways for families to give back together.

But litter is not just a problem for oceanfront communities. The organization Keep America Beautiful notes that 66 million pounds of litter and recyclables were collected in 2019. KAB hosts various litter cleanup programs in towns and cities across the country and encourages families to join their movement.

Combat homelessness

According to the 2019 “The State of Homelessness in America” report from The Council of Economic Advisers, in January 2018, more than a half a million people were counted as homeless in the United States. Statistics in Canada are not as recent as those in the United States, but estimates suggest as many as 235,000 Canadians are homeless in any given year. Volunteering at a nearby homeless shelter is a great way for families to help this

often underserved segment of the population. Contact a local homeless shelter to learn about specific volunteering opportunities, which may involve preparing and serving meals; tutoring homeless men, women and children; and involvement in other services shelters offer.

Clothing drives

Clothing drives not only benefit the homeless, but they also help people who simply don’t have the means to purchase new clothing. Families can donate their own slightly used clothing to nearby goodwill organizations and organize clothing drives through their schools and places of employment. Encourage neighbors to follow suit and donate their own slightly used items.

Volunteering together is a great way for families to give back to their communities.



The efforts of volunteers often go unnoticed, but the thoughtful men, women and children who give up their free time to support worthy causes do a lot to bolster their communities.

Volunteering also pays dividends for the volunteers, and not just because they’re helping to strengthen the communities they call home. According to the Mayo Clinic, research has shown that volunteering can lower rates of depression and promote better physical health compared to not volunteering. In addition, an analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study of Aging found that individuals who volunteer have lower mortality rates than those who do not.

With so many benefits to volunteering, it’s no wonder that families often seek ways to volunteer together. Such efforts can be a great way to spend time together and give back to a community, all the while affording families a chance to reap the many rewards of volunteering. The following are a handful of potential volunteering opportunities that families can consider.

Simple strategies to meet the neighbors after moving

A lot goes into building safe, strong communities. While no single factor can be highlighted as more important than another in regard to building strong communities, a willingness on the part of residents to connect with their neighbors can greatly benefit local neighborhoods and the people who call those communities home.

According to Mental Health America®, a community-based nonprofit dedicated to promoting the mental health of all Americans, research has shown that social connections increase happiness and lead to improved overall health and even longer lives. Adults may find that establishing a connection with their communities, and maintaining that connection while juggling the responsibilities of work and a family, is not always so easy. That's especially so for adults who have recently



relocated to new areas. Reaching out to neighbors can be a great way for adults to build new relationships that can benefit them as individuals and strengthen their communities.

Don't be shy.

People often want to know who's living next door, so adults who have recently moved need not be shy about introducing themselves to their new neighbors. Introduce yourself and share what inspired you to move to your new neighborhood.

Answer and ask questions.

Neighbors will no doubt ask questions when you introduce yourself, so be ready to answer these questions. Questions may focus on your career and where you grew up. If you grew up in the area where you recently moved, some of your neighbors likely did as well. Sharing stories about your school days and/or local hotspots can be a great way to break the ice. Don't hesitate to ask some questions of your own as well. Asking

questions might reveal some common interests that can serve as strong foundations for budding relationships.

Host a backyard barbecue.

Backyard barbecues are laid back affairs, and that pressure-free atmosphere is perfect for meeting new neighbors. Once you have settled in, invite a handful of your neighbors over for the barbecue. If you have children, invite neighbors who also are parents, ideally ones whose children are the same age as your own. Kids have sparked many a conversation, and discussions about local schools, parks and programs for youngsters can be great ice breakers.

Strong communities are built around people. When moving to a new community, adults can overcome the challenges such relocations present by taking various steps to connect with their new neighbors.



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Addressing the **childhood obesity epidemic**

Obesity is a health epidemic that does not discriminate based on age, gender or ethnicity. While obesity poses a serious health risk for everyone, children who are obese may be setting themselves up for a lifetime of medical problems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States. According to the CDC National Center for Health Statistics, 18.5 percent of children and adolescents are considered obese, which equates to around 13.7 million youth. In Canada, obesity rates among youth have nearly tripled in the last 30 years, as noted by the Government of Canada. Children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of developing a range of health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and bone and joint problems. Females may miss or experience abnormal menstrual cycles. Childhood obesity is not just an issue in North America, as it has even reached epidemic levels in developing countries.

Childhood obesity has become the most chronic disease of childhood, states the Obesity Action Coalition. Although the causes of



obesity are widespread, certain risk factors are major contributors. Some causes can include:

- heredity;
- lack of physical activity;
- dietary patterns, such as poor portion control;
- socioeconomic status; and
- eating more meals out than at home.

The CDC defines obesity as a body mass index, or BMI, at or above the 95th percentile of the CDC's sex-specific BMI-for-age growth charts.

Treating obesity begins with changing behaviors. The following lifestyle changes may be effective.

Place a greater emphasis on daily physical activity. Eschewing devices for physical activity can help children get off the couch and lose weight.

Change dietary habits. Entire families may need to change some of their dietary habits, such as poor food choices and lack of portion control, to help obese youngsters lose weight. Focus on consuming fewer calories each day while increasing nutrient intake if previous diets were low on fruits and vegetables.

Help kids change their behaviors. Children also may need to modify behaviors if they routinely turn to food for stress relief or to quell boredom.

Parents can help set positive examples about healthy eating and exercise by incorporating healthy habits into their daily routines and encouraging kids to join in.

Obesity is prevalent among children, but it can be overcome with diligence on the part of parents and youngsters.



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How to spark more family communication

Communication is at the core of any successful relationship. Families who are able to communicate effectively can express their concerns, needs and desires to one another in an open and honest manner. Effective communication can change a home environment, foster more intimate and trusted relationships, and serve as a foundation for children to grow.

The benefits of effective home communication are numerous. According to Hearing and Speech-Language Services, regular and intentional communication with a child is one of the most effective tools parents and caregivers can use to foster healthy development, paving the way for the child to be an effective communicator as he or she grows and interacts with others. In addition, regular communication can foster a strong sense of self-esteem, improve problem-solving abilities, decrease problem behaviors, and prepare kids for voicing their opinion on important issues.

No topics are off limits when it comes to stimulating family

conversation. In fact, the more creative, funny and adventurous the ideas, the more apt children and adults may be to engage in the discussion. These talking points can help get the conversation flowing and require specific answers instead of vague generalities.

These are a handful of interesting conversation starters that can get creative conversation juices flowing at home. Families can customize the questions or turn them into a regular game that everyone can enjoy throughout the week.



Conversation Starters

- What has been the best part of the week so far?
- Tell me something interesting you learned at school (work) today.
- What is the funniest joke you have ever heard?
- If you could be anyone or anything in the world, what would you be and why?
- If you won a lot of money, what would you spend it on?
- What do you do when you see someone being teased?
- Name a quality of yours that you are most proud of.
- If a genie granted you three wishes, what would they be?
- What is your favorite childhood memory?
- Where in the world would you like to live most?
- Are there things that scare you? If so, what?
- What would your superhero power be?
- If you could fly for a day, where would you go?

Did you know?

Adolescence can be a trying time for teenagers and their parents. According to the American Psychological Association, parents and caregivers face an entirely new set of tasks to deal with the changing needs of children as they reach adolescence. The changes that accompany adolescence include physical, cognitive and social changes, and parents may need to adopt an entirely new approach to parenting as they deal with the changing needs of their children during their period in their lives. The APA notes that adolescents often crave greater independence and autonomy, and this desire is a natural part of their development process. It's important that parents of adolescents find a way to maintain the familial bonds they and their children have developed up to this point, while also allowing increasingly mature teens a level of autonomy that can benefit them throughout their lives. According to clinical psychologist William Stixrud, Ph.D., decades of psychological research has shown that a lack of perceived control leads people to feel overwhelmed, helpless, hopeless, passive, and resigned. So adolescents who feel that they have control over the direction of their lives, feelings which can be strengthened when they are given some level of autonomy as teenagers, are less likely to feel overwhelmed, helpless, hopeless, passive, or resigned as adults.





How parents can help address bullying

Bullying is a global issue that affects children every day. A 2018 study from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics found that nearly one-third of teens worldwide had recently experienced bullying. Even more troubling is that the same study found that, in countries where children reported the highest incidences of bullying, 65 percent of girls and 62 percent of boys reported bullying.

Preventing bullying is a community-wide responsibility. Parents can do their part by taking the following measures to address bullying.

Address aggressive behavior.

According to StopBullying.gov, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, aggressive behavior in young children is very common. Failure to address such behavior can lead to bullying, and children whose aggressive behavior goes unchecked may experience other problems with their peers. Whether

their children have exhibited aggressive behaviors or not, parents can encourage cooperative behaviors like helping, sharing and problem-solving.

Engage with your children.

Various studies have shown that children are more likely to bully other kids if their parents spend little time with them or do not regularly supervise their activities. But studies also have found that students are less likely to bully other children if their parents warmly engage with them.

Learn about bullying.

Parents who learn about bullying are in better position to prevent it. Various myths prevail about bullying, and it's important that parents recognize these myths. No child is immune from bullying, as StopBullying.gov indicates that children from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are vulnerable to bullying, which also affects kids of all ages. In addition, any child can engage in

bullying. Parents who recognize these facts are in better position to identify signs their child is being bullied or even bullying other students.

Teach by example.

Children reflect the attitudes and behaviors of their parents. If parents exhibit disrespectful behaviors toward one another or other people, children are more likely to follow suit. In addition, a 2001 study published in the *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* found that abused children are more likely to bully others and be bullied by others than children who are not abused. Maintaining a home environment in which every individual, including children, is respected can reduce the likelihood that kids will bully or be bullied by others.

These are just a handful of strategies parents can employ to address bullying with their children. More information is available at www.StopBullying.gov.

The ideas behind strength-based parenting

Many a parent is familiar with the notion that children do not come with instruction manuals. Since babies are not born with instruction manuals, the best way to raise children is open to interpretation, and interpretations often lead to theories on parenting.

One such theory is strength-based parenting, an approach that focuses on developing and nurturing a child's character. Dr. Lea Waters, a Melbourne, Australia-based psychologist and author, has studied ways to improve interactions between parents and their children for decades. Dr. Waters emphasizes the value of identifying and nurturing children's character strengths, and the value that such efforts can have in regard to promoting children's long-term happiness and achievements.

In an article for Greater Good Magazine, Dr. Waters defined character strengths as those things that are personality-based and internal, including curiosity, courage, humor, and kindness. These character strengths work in conjunction with talents, which may include things like athletic ability, musical skills and problem-solving. Strength-based parenting espouses the importance of cultivating kids' character strengths as much as their talents. Dr. Waters notes that it would be hard to find anyone who made the most of their talents without also relying on their



character strengths. For example, even the most gifted natural athletes need to draw on their work ethic in order to reach their full potential as athletes.

Dr. Waters' research has led her to conclude that children and teenagers whose parents help them to identify and use their character strengths benefit from that assistance in myriad ways. Such children experience more positive emotions and flow, are more persistent, are more confident, and are more satisfied with their lives compared to children whose parents did not help them identify and use their character strengths. Dr. Waters' research, published in 2018, also found that children whose parents took a strength-based approach to parenting earned better grades, were less stressed, more capable of coping with friendship issues, and more capable of coping with homework deadlines than children whose parents did not employ a strength-based approach to parenting.

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