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Parenting Tips: Bond with kids even in routine tasks

K-State child development expert says day-to-day activities are opportunities to build on relationships

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – For some parents, bathing the kids, doing the laundry, making dinner and packing school lunches may seem like check marks on a daily to-do list.

Bradford Wiles sees it much differently.

“If we approach those tasks as opportunities to interact and bond with our kids,” said Wiles, a child development specialist at Kansas State University, “it frames it in a much different way.”

He said being intentional in what may seem to be mundane, day-to-day interactions is how parents can help their children grow into confident adults.

“The responsiveness really matters to forming a bonded and secure relationship with children,” Wiles said. “It’s really about parents taking advantage of those everyday situations that can build and maintain that relationship.”

Wiles said children form bonds with adults based on trust and responsiveness: “It’s when young children to feel confident that if they need something, they more than likely are going to receive that from their parents or primary caregiver,” he said.

“That bond is really around forming trust between each other (and) having an emotional connection. That feeling of security that is a foundation. Children know that their primary caregiver is a secure base from which they can explore their world. They can always turn back to that secure base.”

Wiles used an example of a child on a playground. They may wander from parents, explore something in the playground, then return to the caregiver for a short time. Then, they go explore more and come back again.
“As children get older, adults need to be more intentional in nurturing that bond because the
child’s peers become more important,” Wiles said. “When that starts to happen, leveraging
everyday activities is important for continuing the bonding and sharing (between adult and
child).”

One strategy to help adults bond with their children – aside from simply spending time with them
– is to ask simple questions about what the child is doing. Wiles notes an example of watching a
child drawing pictures at home.

“I love hearing about what is going on in their drawings, even when their drawings are
completely undecipherable,” he said.

“Mindfulness is really about being open to possibilities. When parents form those relationships,
it becomes more about being open to what your children want to teach you about themselves.”

More information on child development is available online from K-State Research and
Extension.

-FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Applied Research in Child Health and Enhancing Resilience, www.hhs.k-
state.edu/ahs/extension/child-development

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