

# PARENTALK

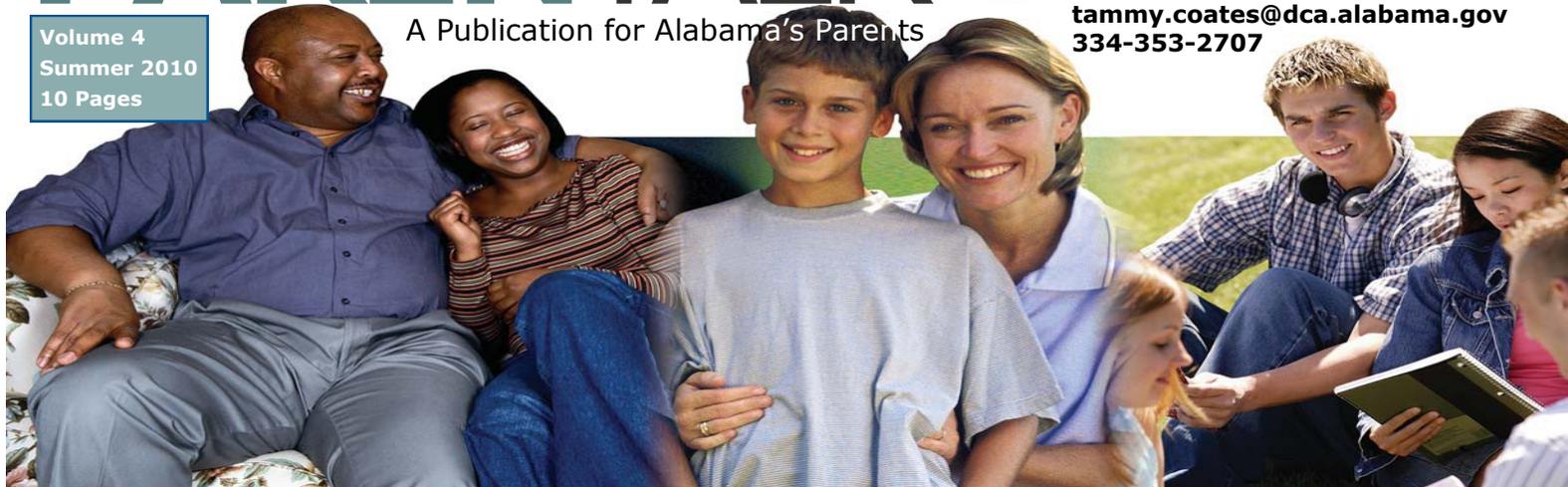
A Publication for Alabama's Parents



THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
CHILDREN'S AFFAIRS  
THE ALABAMA PARENT NETWORK

tammy.coates@dca.alabama.gov  
334-353-2707

Volume 4  
Summer 2010  
10 Pages



## IN THIS ISSUE

Cover & Page 2

Ten Commitments  
of Great Parents

3 Is Your Child  
Ready for Kinder-  
garten?

4-5 Home Alone:  
What to Consider  
Before Leaving  
Your Child Alone  
at Home

6-7 Cure for the  
Summer --Time  
Blues

8 Five Tips for  
Life: (Kids and  
Teens)

9 10 Kids' Health  
Issues

Back Cover  
Safety Net: Emer-  
gency Prepared-  
ness for Kids

## Ten Commitments of Great Parents

Adapted from Todd E. Linaman, PhD

At one time or another, nearly every parent says, "I wish my child came with a set of instructions!" While none of us can claim to have all the answers, there are basic commitments that you can make as you raise your child. You are encouraged to utilize these ten commitments as you navigate the responsibilities and challenges of raising responsible adults.

1. **Provide for physical needs**-Growing children need healthy diets, adequate clothing, and quality health care; protection from harm—from "small stuff" like sunburn or too much junk food to real dangers like careless driving or access to alcohol or drugs.
2. **Be there for them**-When your children talk to you, face them and really listen. Turn off the TV and computer. As much as possible, attend their games, recitals, school conferences and church activities. Your presence, attention and availability will make a significant difference in their lives.
3. **Give them "roots and wings"**-Children need to try new things. You may think an idea they have will bomb, but they need the opportunity to try, and to learn from the experience. You might be surprised how many times they succeed.
4. **Balance individuality with absolutes**-Each child is unique and not necessarily a clone of you. Celebrate his individual strengths and try to see life from your child's perspective, showing respect. Your child needs security of unmovable boundaries and guidelines for behavior.
5. **Hold them accountable**- Children want to do what's right and be accepted. If they have done wrong, encourage them to make amends. They might repair or replace a broken object, write an apology or perform community service. This restores their self-respect and lets them know that their behaviors have consequences.

Continued on page 2

# Ten Commitments of Great Parents (continued from cover)

6. **Admit when you're wrong**— Let's face it. As parents, we do make mistakes, and our kids can see it, whether we admit it or not. If we're willing to say, "I blew it-I'm sorry," your child learns that the relationship is more important than maintaining the upper hand. It gives him the freedom to admit his mistakes as well. Facing the truth is a key to good emotional health.
7. **Love your spouse**— Children whose parents' marriage is stable are far more secure than those who are wondering if their world is about to blow apart. If you want your child to have a happy marriage, she needs to see you weather the storms with a commitment that supersedes your personal comfort or happiness. Believe it or not, your child will be happier if you put your spouse first and your child second. If you are divorced, do your best to maintain a respectful relationship with your child's other parent.
8. **Practice what you preach**— Actions speak louder than words. If you tell your child not to lie and then say, "Tell him I'm not home," when a salesman calls, or if you tell him to respect his teachers while badmouthing your boss, don't expect good behavior reports at school conference time!
9. **Demonstrate a love of learning**— If you read for enjoyment and self-improvement, your child is more likely to enjoy learning. Discuss new ideas with him to stimulate analytical thinking. Test ideas against what you know is right, and help your child reach conclusions for himself. Also, expose your child to new opportunities for learning like going to the library, surfing the internet (do this with him) or taking him to a local museum.
10. **Never, never, never give up on them**— As our children grow, some of them will make us proud and satisfied that we have done a good job. Others may make us wonder if we did anything right. The time comes when we have to back off and let them make their own decisions and mistakes. But, we must never stop loving them and encouraging them to be the best they can be.

Dr. Todd E. Linaman is a licensed psychologist, author and the President of Relational Advantage, Inc. He previously worked at Family Life Communica-

## 101 WAYS TO PRAISE A CHILD

(author unknown)

WOW - WAY TO GO - YOU'RE SPECIAL - OUTSTANDING - EXCELLENT - GREAT— GOOD - NEAT - WELL DONE - REMARKABLE - I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT - I'M PROUD OF YOU - FANTASTIC - SUPER STAR - NICE WORK - LOOKING GOOD—YOU'RE ON TOP OF IT - BEAUTIFUL - NOW YOU'RE FLYING - YOU'RE CATCHING ON - NOW YOU'VE GOT IT - YOU'RE INCREDIBLE - BRAVO - YOU'RE FANTASTIC—HURRAY FOR YOU - YOU'RE ON TARGET - YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY - HOW NICE—HOW SMART - GOOD JOB - THAT'S INCREDIBLE - HOT DOG - DYNAMITE - YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL - YOU'RE UNIQUE - NOTHING CAN STOP YOU NOW - GOOD FOR YOU—I LIKE YOU - YOU'RE A WINNER - REMARKABLE JOB - BEAUTIFUL WORK—SPECTACULAR - YOU'RE SPECTACULAR - YOU'RE DARLING - YOU'RE PRECIOUS - GREAT DISCOVERY - YOU'VE DISCOVERED THE SECRET - YOU'VE FIGURED IT OUT- FANTASTIC JOB - HIP, HIP, HURRAY - BINGO - MAGNIFICENT - MARVELOUS—TERRIFIC - YOU'RE IMPORTANT - PHENOMENAL - YOU'RE SENSATIONAL- SUPER WORK - CREATIVE JOB - SUPER JOB - EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE- YOU'RE A REAL TROUPER - YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE - YOU ARE EXCITING - YOU LEARNED IT RIGHT - WHAT AN IMAGINATION - WHAT A GOOD LISTENER - YOU ARE FUN - YOU'RE GROWING UP - YOU TRIED HARD - YOU CARE - BEAUTIFUL SHARING - OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE - YOU'RE A GOOD FRIEND - I TRUST YOU - YOU'RE IMPORTANT - YOU MEAN A LOT TO ME - YOU MAKE ME HAPPY - YOU BELONG- YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND - I RESPECT YOU - YOU'RE A TREASURE—YOU'RE WONDERFUL - YOU'RE PERFECT - AWESOME - A PLUS JOB - YOU'RE A-OK - MY BUDDY - YOU MADE MY DAY - THAT'S THE BEST - A BIG HUG - A BIG KISS - I LOVE YOU - TOP SHELF!



Your child is starting kindergarten soon and you're not sure if she's ready. All children develop and learn differently. Academic success in school is influenced by a combination of physical well-being, social and emotional maturity, language skills and general knowledge about the world around her. This guide is a start to your child's academic success.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Health and Physical Development</b></p> <p>Uses a pencil or crayon to draw or copy and tries some letters</p> <p>Has independent restroom and hygiene skills</p> <p>Uses tools to color, cut and paste</p> <p>Demonstrates left to right progression</p> <p>Shows sense of responsibility and keeps up with belongings</p> <p>Gets at least ten hours of sleep per night, and health needs met</p> <p>Has plenty of opportunity to run, skip, jump, hop and climb</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Language Development, Communication, General Knowledge</b></p> <p>Speaks in complete sentences</p> <p>Tells first and last name, age and birthday</p> <p>Knows parents' first and last names, street address and phone number</p> <p>Recognizes colors and shapes</p> <p>Counts to 10 and recognizes numbers 1-5</p> <p>Recognizes and understands common words like mom, stop, dog, the, dad</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social and Emotional Development</b></p> <p>Listens to, understands and follows simple 2-3 step directions</p> <p>Understands conversation—takes turns talking</p> <p>Can play/work in a group—shares, takes turns and uses self-control</p> <p>Expresses a range of emotions, needs, wants and feelings</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Approaches Toward Learning</b></p> <p>Is curious—asks questions</p> <p>Can stay with a self-chosen activity for 15 minutes</p> <p>Can stay with a teacher-directed activity for 10 minutes</p> <p>Uses a variety of strategies to problem-solve while learning</p> <p>Initiates activities in the classroom</p>

## As a parent and teacher, are we ready to help our children blossom?



Along with academic success, it is the full expression of our children's gifts and talents, all the creativity, problem solving and tenacity, that determines their success in life. Grades and aptitude tests are accurate predictors in how they will perform in school, but not in how they will perform in life. We must be careful not to place our children in a box, in an attempt to make our lives easier as parents and teachers. But rather, take the time to help them develop in both academics and life skills.

No matter in which skills our children are proficient or deficient, are we ready to meet them where they are, work with their gifts and passions, help them improve where needed, celebrate their gifts, build in them a strong sense of belief, foster their independence, praise and build confidence?

In the long run, a single skill will not determine success—our children still have years and years to develop according to their internal map and calendar. At the end of the day, isn't what we want most as parents and teachers is to have our children say, "I have value and dignity, and I can do anything I put my mind to?" If every child who "graduates" from kindergarten leaves with that self-belief, there is no obstacle he could not overcome - be it academic or behavioral.

**Kirk Martin, Behavior Expert, [www.celebratecalm.com](http://www.celebratecalm.com)**



***"Is it ever okay to leave my kids home alone?"***

***"What do I do when I'm the only parent and I have to work on the weekends? I can't afford child care."***

***"Surely, if I'm going out for just a minute, there's no harm."***

***"They're asleep, so what will it hurt to leave for a bit?"***

At some point a parent faces the choice to leave a child home alone for the first time. For some parents, the decision is based on convenience and others might feel as though there is no choice. Whether it's just for a few minutes or the hours after school, as a parent, it's your responsibility to ensure your child has the skills and maturity to handle the situation safely. How many times have you heard of a tragic end to leaving a child home alone? A child faces real risks when left unsupervised. Those risks combined with your child's ability to handle challenges are a few of the factors to consider before leaving your child at home alone.

The latest survey by [childtrends.org](http://childtrends.org) suggests that 15% of children ages 6-12 are in "self-care" for 4<sup>1/2</sup> hours per week. "Self-care" means the child either took care of himself or stayed alone with a sibling age 12 or younger on a regular basis.

## What to Consider

### Risks Involving Child's Emotional Well-Being

Some experts claim that the degree of risk for self-care depends on the age and residence of the child, the amount of time spent alone during the day, and amount of supervision at other times. Dr. Vivian Katzenstein Friedman, a child clinical psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Alabama at Birmingham says, "Children are often ready to stay alone during the day several years before they're ready to stay alone at night. Also, there's a big difference between being left alone once in a while and being left alone as a regular child-care arrangement." For some children, time alone brings fear and depression. They might feel abandoned by their parent. This appears to stem

both from the individual child's emotional readiness for the responsibility, and the manner in which the parent treats the situation. Dr. Ruth A. Lawrence, a professor of pediatrics at the University of Rochester School of Medicine says, "Help your children understand that being trusted enough to be left alone at home is a special privilege, not an abandonment."

Another risk is the negative feeling you may have about leaving your child alone. You might be anxious and worried about your child's safety while alone, her use of time, or the bad influence of other children.

### Risks Involving Age and Maturity

Because children mature at different rates, a decision to leave your child at home should not be based on age alone. Dr. Deborah Belle, an assistant professor of psychology at Boston University says, "Chronological age doesn't tell you whether a child can handle being left alone; neither does intelligence." How a child reacts to unpredictable situations should first be considered. For four years Dr. Belle studied 53 families with children in elementary school who cared for themselves after school and in the evenings. "Many handled the situation well. But we had children who, no matter how many times they were told not to, still answered the door," Dr. Belle says. "Other children couldn't motivate themselves to do their homework or, in one case, didn't eat dinner unless an adult was there."

### Risks Involving Safety

Research finds that when children under 13 are regularly left unsupervised they may be at risk for accidents and injuries. ([www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)) Unintentional injuries and violence are the leading cause of

# HOME ALONE *(continued from page 4)*

death, hospitalization, and disability for children ages 1-18. (Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC as published on [www.childrensafetynetwork.org](http://www.childrensafetynetwork.org))

Teaching your child personal safety skills will help him protect himself. Some of these skills are difficult for young minds to absorb, so teach them to your child gradually, making certain he has a firm grasp on one before moving to the next. Rather than simply asking your child to tell you what he would do, such as placing a 911 call or what he would do if the lights go out, act out these situations with him, in as realistic a manner as possible (again, this is role play so be realistic but don't actually place the 911 call). Dr. Belle says, "Studies of how children handle emergencies have invariably shown that they don't handle them as well as their parents think they will. Just because your child can parrot back [repeat] emergency instructions doesn't mean he'll remember them in a crisis." Just because he says he knows, doesn't mean he does. The more practice he gets, the more likely he will remember what to do and how to be safe in a real emergency.

In short, your child needs to know what to do and whom to contact in an emergency situation. Knowledge of basic first aid is also useful. For tips on first aid and emergency preparedness, refer to page 10 of this newsletter.



**Phone safety:** Post a list of emergency phone numbers on the fridge or by the phone.

A major concern of parents with a child alone at home is to keep outsiders from knowing that no adult is home. Practice these tips with your child:

- Do not give out your name, address, parent's phone number, or any other information on the phone.
- Never tell the caller that you are alone. Instead, say your parent cannot come to the phone.
- If a caller scares you in any way, hang up and call your parent immediately.

## What to tell your kids about door safety



In some families, the rule is not to open the door for anyone unless you have been told to expect someone, even if it's someone you know. Be sure the door is always locked. Look through the peephole and talk through the door. Do not open the door until you know who it is and what they want. Even if they ask to use the bathroom or telephone, don't open the door. If someone continues to knock, call your parent, neighbor or police for help.

## Tips for Parents ([www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu))

If you believe that your child is ready to spend time at home alone, there are several things you can do to help him feel less frightened.

**Have a trial period.** Start with small separations. Leave your child in the house alone for an hour while you go outside or next door. Be accessible, but out of site. Afterwards, talk with your child and see if he was afraid or lonely. If this separation works well for both of you, slowly increase time and distance apart. Leave some specific directions for him to follow. If he is unable to follow these instructions, he might not be ready to be left alone for an extended period of time.

**Role play.** Act out possible situations to help your child know what to do. Help your child identify things that might frighten him and then provide ways to overcome them. For example, a child is much more sensitive to creaky noises when there is no one around. "You can sit with your child in a quiet house and listen for the noises that the house makes. That way the child doesn't hear those noises for the first time while he's alone," says Dr. Friedman of UAB.

**Establish rules.** Rules play an important role for a child at home alone because they define boundaries for safety and help your child feel secure. Rules show what you expect your child's behavior to be. The best indicator of your child's readiness to spend time alone at home is how well he handles rules and responsibilities when you are around. Does he come home when he's supposed to? Does he do his homework without being prodded? Is he responsible with his chores?

**Check in.** The telephone is your life-line while you are away. If possible, have your child call when he arrives home from school. A call from you once or twice can make your child feel more secure. If you are unable to call, have a friend or neighbor call and check on him.

**Keep him busy.** Provide chores and activities he can do to prevent boredom. When your child is active, he will be less likely to engage in improper activities.

**Don't overdo it.** Even a mature, responsible child shouldn't be home alone too much. Consider other options such as programs offered by schools, churches, community centers and youth organizations. Inquire about volunteer opportunities to keep your child involved. Some places offer life-skill trainings to better prepare your child for staying home as well as the world outside your home.

# Cure for the Summer-Time Blues



"I'm bored." "It's too hot outside." "Why can't we go somewhere?" If you've got children, you've probably heard these words before. It's the middle of summer break and your kids are in serious need of activities. You've got to do something for their enjoyment-and your state of mind.

Don't panic. Here are some suggestions for safe, affordable activities that might actually get your kids to smile.

## Young Children

**Play dirty.** Pull out old play clothes, mark off a piece of the yard that is "hers", far from your prized roses, and let her dig and explore. Provide items for her to build a fort, search for treasures or plant her own garden (seeds can be purchased very inexpensively at your local plant nursery.) Green beans, carrots and sunflower seeds are great for first-time growers. Plus, think of her excitement when you actually get to eat her masterpiece! Encourage her to decorate and maintain her area in her own style with safe items found around the house and yard. For your sanity, designate a place for her to clean-up before she comes into the house.

## Did You Know?

Dirt is actually good for you. Apparently, there are types of bacteria that are naturally found in soil which activate the neurons that produce serotonin—a natural anti-depressant. Research has shown that early exposure to the naturally occurring microbes in soil will help build stronger, more disease-resistant kiddos. Without enough exposure to different bacteria and microbes, it is thought that the immune system doesn't learn to recognize its own cells, and this could be a reason for higher rates of asthma, eczema and other diseases. In our techno-savvy generation, kids aren't getting enough time outside. So, let the kids get dirty. Get dirty with them. And leave the anti-bacteria lotion inside! ([www.simplemom.net](http://www.simplemom.net))

**Birds, Butterflies and Bugs.** Most kids love to watch hummingbirds as they aggressively flit around your yard or look at the colorful butterflies as they dance from bush to bush.

Set up a hummingbird feeder:

**Step 1:** Wash a large, clear plastic soda bottle and remove the label.

**Step 2:** About one-fourth of the way from the bottom of the bottle, cut a square hole that is about one inch on each side. Make a crease in the front of the bottle, just above the hole.

**Step 3:** With an adult's help, boil 1/2 cup of sugar and two cups of water to make a syrup. Let the syrup cool.

**Step 4:** Use your finger to cover the hole in the bottle, and pour in the syrup. Put the lid on the bottle.

**Step 5:** Glue red plastic flowers on the bottle, especially near the hole (hummingbirds like red).

**Step 6:** Tie a string around the top of the bottle, and use it to hang the feeder.



## Hummingbird fact to share with

**your child:** Hummingbirds can hover, fly backwards, and even fly upside down. They flap their wings up to 78 times per second. All that flapping burns up the calories, so hummingbirds have to eat half their weight in food every

day. Of course, some only weigh about one-tenth of an ounce.

## Plants that attract butterflies

([amazingmoms.com](http://amazingmoms.com))

**Annuals:** Coneflowers, impatiens, marigolds, phlox, sunflower, verbena, zinnia

**Perennials:** Asters, bee balm, butterfly weed, chrysanthemums, daisies, live forever, purple coneflower, sedum, heliotrope, rosemary nasturtium, yarrow

**Planting parsley to attract caterpillars will help to generate a very active butterfly garden**

## Tweens

Middle school moms are faced with the challenge of finding engaging activities for their unengaged tweens. They're not old enough to drive but too old for boring kiddy camps.

Get with other responsible parents and plan a day trip a couple of times a month. If you're unable to travel yourself, connect with a community center or church organizations who regularly schedule day trips to nearby zoos, sporting events and activity centers.

Get your adolescent a disposable camera and let her document her summer activities. For about \$20 she can get a scrap book, fun papers, a few supplies and pictures developed. Your child will have an on-going activity that develops imagination and something to share with her friends.

## Teens

If you ask a teen what he wants to do during the summer, more than likely, he'll answer how he plans to lounge about playing video games, watching TV, and hanging out with friends. Two weeks into the summer, he's over these things.

If your teen has access to transportation, suggest he volunteer at a local animal shelter, soup kitchen, hospital or church. Many elderly and disabled adults are not able to care for their lawn during the summer months. This is a great opportunity for your teen to show he cares by mowing the grass, planting flowers, and other outdoor maintenance.

The idle days of summer are a great time to learn something new. Encourage your teen to practice a new sport, learn a foreign language or try a new hobby. The local library provides great books and internet access for browsing sources to research his new endeavor.

One parent suggested her daughter redecorate her room. She challenged her daughter to earn as much money as she could for a month. At the end of the month, she would match her daughter's earnings. This would be the budget for her re-do. The daughter babysat for neighbors, cleaned houses and quickly earned money, which her mom matched. The result, a teen who learned responsibility, filled her time with productive activity and had a room that matched her new-found independence.



The heat of summer will remind us that one of the main factors of fatigue is dehydration. Drinking plenty of water throughout the day will combat fatigue by providing us with needed energy. The lack of hydration causes bloating, weight gain and illness as the body tries to hold on to as much water as it can.

### Water Rules

Drink half your body weight in ounces of water per day.

1/2 ounce of water per pound of body weight (160 pounds = 80 oz of water; 100 pounds-50 oz)

### Total hydration

Drink throughout the day. If you are awake 16 hours a day and need 80 ounces of water, drink ten ounces every two hours. To prevent nightly trips to the bathroom, drink until a few hours before bedtime.

### Caffeine dehydrates

Drink an extra cup of water per cup of caffeinated drink.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend youth to increase their physical activity by a total of at least 30 minutes a day to improve health. This can be done in short five to 10 minute bouts adding up to a total of 30 minutes. Parents should monitor and reduce sedentary activities at home; which includes TV watching, video games and computer time by at least 30 minutes a day. ([metromonthly.net/healthy](http://metromonthly.net/healthy))

- Encourage your child to join a sports team such as basketball, soccer, dance or gymnastics at school or a recreation center.
- If your child is not comfortable participating in group activities, let him try skateboarding, roller blading or biking. Remember safety! Always wear a helmet and protective gear. Learn the rules of boarding and blading in public places.
- Many video games now offer interactive activities, such as dance, boxing, bowling and team sports. Although some can be pricy, it's an indoor alternative to extreme outdoor heat.



When we were kids our parents told us how to act, what to eat, even when to do our homework. But as we start taking charge of our own lives, many of us decide to make changes — stuff like eating right, being more environmentally conscious, or doing better in a sport. These practical tips on goal setting can help make it easier to determine a goal and then reach it.

Now that you have an idea of the goal you want to set, let's figure out how to get there and stick with it. This tool guides you through the specific steps needed to plan your individual goal. When you're finished, you'll be able to print out a personalized sheet just for you. It takes about ten minutes. Type in this link: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/misc/making\\_a\\_change\\_module.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/misc/making_a_change_module.html)

**1. Specific, realistic goals work best.** When it comes to making a change, the people who succeed are those who set realistic, specific goals. "I'm going to recycle all my plastic bottles, soda cans, and magazines" is a much more doable goal than "I'm going to do more for the environment." And that makes it easier to stick with. Put your specific goal in writing. Then write it again. And again. Then break it down. Say you want to run a marathon. Break it down into smaller goals –week one: two miles, week two: four miles and so on. Pretty soon, you'll have reached your goal. Be sure to check off the small goals from your list. Seeing the progress keeps you motivated. Be sure to reward yourself along the way.

I paste my resolutions on the wall and remind myself of what I have to do.  
Joan, 13

**2. It takes time for a change to become an established habit.** It will probably take a couple of months before any changes — like getting up half an hour early to exercise — become a routine part of your life. That's because your brain needs time to get used to the idea that this new thing you're doing is part of your regular routine. Let's use the marathon example again. If you try to run the entire distance of 26.2 miles tomorrow without any training, you're unlikely to succeed. It takes the average person 4 months of training to run that far! But the bigger risk is that you'll get so bummed out that you'll give up your marathon dreams-and running-altogether.

I remind myself each and every night what my goal is.  
Andrew, 16

**3. Repeating a goal makes it stick.** Say your goal out loud each morning to remind yourself of what you want and what you're working for. Every time you remind yourself of your goal, you're training your brain to make it happen.

**4. Pleasing other people doesn't work.** The key to making any change is to find the desire within yourself — you have to do it because you want it, not because a girlfriend, boyfriend, coach or someone else wants you to. It will be harder to stay on track and motivated if you're doing something out of obligation to another person.

**5. Roadblocks don't mean failure.** Slip-ups are actually part of the learning process as you retrain your brain into a new way of thinking. It may take a few tries to reach a goal. But that's okay — it's normal to mess up or give up a few times when trying to make a change. So remember that everyone slips up and don't beat yourself up about it. Just remind yourself to get back on track. Go back and look at your list and celebrate all the things you have accomplished.

People started believing in me, so I started believing in me.  
Juneil, 14

I talk to my family about it-it really works.  
Liliana, 15

**You're not alone.** Everyone struggles with staying motivated and reaching their goals. Just look at how many people go on diets, lose weight and then gain it back again. Making a new start, no matter how small, is a big deal. But, it's not impossible. Surround yourself with people who will encourage you, maybe someone who has a similar goal or who has already accomplished their goal. If your friends are not supporting you, you might want to take a break from that friendship and choose someone who wants to see you succeed.



Experts have identified 10 important health issues making headlines. Over the next several issues of ParentTalk, we will discuss some of these affecting Alabama. Watch for more info on specific headlines in upcoming issues!

1. **Earliest Signs of Autism Identified in Babies**—With about one in every 110 children in the US being diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, there's been an upsurge in autism awareness and research. Researchers say that the earliest signs of autism in babies include difficulty establishing eye contact, an absence of babbling or joyful expressions, and not responding to one's name (visit [www.alex.state.al.us/autismAL](http://www.alex.state.al.us/autismAL)).
2. **Obesity and Kids: What Parents Should Understand**—About 177,000 of 512,000 (34.6%) of Alabama children ages 10-17 years are overweight or obese (Report from the Childhood Obesity Action Network (NICHD) [www.nschdata.org](http://www.nschdata.org)). Why are so many kids today overweight or obese? Many factors are involved, from out-of-control portion sizes and eating on the go to sedentary lifestyles and parental uncertainty about what kids should weigh.
3. **Many Kids Missing Out on ALL Kids**- A recent study came to a conclusion that seems obvious-kids who lack regular pediatric care often don't get the medical services they need. Children need to be healthy to reach their full potential. To stay healthy, children need to have regular checkups, vision and dental care and get medical attention if they get sick or injured. There is help available for Alabama children under the age of 19 in the form of ALL Kids. Visit [www.adph.org/allkids](http://www.adph.org/allkids) or call toll free 1-888-373-5437.
4. **H1N1 Flu Pandemic Affecting Kids the Hardest**– Worry over H1N1 has let up but experts caution that the cases could surge again. Parents should remain vigilant and do their best to protect their families, especially since kids were hard hit by this pandemic. Experts recommend vaccinating your kids against both H1N1 and seasonal flu.
5. **Texting and Driving: Just Say No**– If your child brags on her mad texting skills while driving, you need to be alarmed, not intrigued. Alabama is working to pass a bill that would make it illegal for drivers to type or send text messages while driving. If it passes, Alabama would be the 20th state to ban texting while driving. Some Alabama cities already have this ban in effect. ([www.al.com](http://www.al.com))
6. **The Importance of Vitamin D**- Most of us know that vitamin D is crucial to bone health, but now it's been shown that insufficient levels can cause or increase the risk of developing a number of health problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Recent studies report that about 70% kids in the United States have low vitamin D levels, partly due to more time in front of a TV or computer screen. Foods rich in vitamin D are egg yolks, cheese, fatty fish (salmon, tuna or sardines); foods fortified with vitamin D are milk, OJ and some cereals. Time outdoors will also provide vitamin D, just remember to use sun block.
7. **The Toll of Constant Social Networking**– Does it seem like your kids are always online? Are their status updates on Face Book seemingly a matter of life and death? If so, you're not alone. Many parents lament the loss of face-to-face time and worry that kids are spending too much time online.
8. **The Impact of Concussions**-This is making headlines because a concussion can be very hard to detect, yet is one of the most common and dangerous injuries. Many athletes are encouraged to "play through" head injuries, even though the player is reporting poor balance, dizziness and a headache. Wearing proper headgear and safety equipment when playing contact sports, biking, blading and boarding will help prevent many injuries.
9. **Pregnancy, STD Rates Increasing Among US Teens**– According to the CDC, birth rates among teens have increased. Teen sexual reproductive health has either flattened or worsened. For instance, in 2008, the CDC reported that more than 25% of 14-19 year-old girls have one of four sexually transmitted diseases.
10. **Smoking: Good News Bad News**– Good news: smoking rate has decreased sharply since 1960's from 40% to a little over 20% (CDC). Bad news: according to the American Lung Association, each day, 6,300 kids try their first cigarette and nearly 2,000 become daily smokers.



# wise kids

## A Parent's Guide to Making Your Kids Wise in a Crisis

**Personal safety skills will help children protect themselves and also keep them from being afraid. Determining between a crisis and an emergency is the first step. The second step is having a plan for both.**

**A small crisis is a tense and upsetting situation; an emergency calls for immediate action.**

### Examples Of Small Crises

**Locked out.** This happens to many of us and can be scary to a child. Arrange to leave a key with a contact person if one lives close by and is usually at home. Or, hide a key in a special place that no one else knows about.

**Blackout.** Planning ahead for a blackout involves keeping a flashlight or two in a handy place to be used in emergencies only -- never for play. Show your child the circuit breaker box or fuse box and how to reset the circuit or replace a fuse. Discuss in advance what to do if the blackout is caused by a local area power failure. The first plan may be for your child to call you or a contact person. You may want to place a list of things your child can do during a blackout near the flashlight. Provide a few items that can run on batteries, such as a radio, clock, or electronic games.

**Plumbing.** Show your child how to close the shut-off valve for each sink and each toilet if a pipe should leak. If a pipe bursts, be sure your child knows whom to call for help (contact person, parent).

### Examples Of Emergency Situations

**Home Fires.** Children at home should be taught fire safety, fire prevention, and ways to get out of a smoke-filled house. It is essential for your child to understand that the most important thing for her to do is to *get out of the house*. She should not try to put out a small fire or go back into the house to get anything. She can call the fire department from a neighbor's house.

For printable Checklists and Guidelines, visit The Alabama Emergency Management Agency at [www.ema.alabama.gov](http://www.ema.alabama.gov) or call 205-280-2200 to find an EMA office near you.

Show your child where the smoke detectors are and let him hear what one sounds like.

Prepare a diagram of your house with escape routes from each room drawn in.

Practice fire drills.

Practice leaving a smoky room by crawling on hands and knees to the nearest door that goes outside. Practice what to do if your clothes catch on fire: stop, drop, and roll. Drop to the ground or floor and roll until the fire is out.

**Severe Weather/Tornadoes.** Prepare a severe weather kit with your child; keep it with the flashlight. Some items for the kit might be: water, food, flashlight with extra set of batteries and first aid kit and weather radio. Teach your child how to use severe weather announcements: a watch means to be on the alert for more information; a warning means a tornado or severe storm has been sighted nearby, and your child should go to a safe place. The safest places in a home are in a small hall, bathroom or closet, near the center of the house or in a basement. Warn the child to stay away from windows and doors.

**First Aid** . Your child should be taught some basic first aid. He also needs to know how to recognize an emergency (get help) and what injuries can be handled at home. Assemble a first aid kit, explaining each item and how it should be used. Explain what to do for cuts and scrapes, nosebleeds and minor burns. Write these instructions down and keep them with the kit. Additionally, poisons should be locked up and out of reach!

The Alabama Department of Public Health Emergency Preparedness Office provides free information on local and national health and emergency links, online tool kits and a Family Readiness Guide. [www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org) or 1-866-264-4073

Many emergencies are not foreseeable. The best way to prevent exaggerated stress in the case of emergency is to be prepared. The period during an emergency is not the time to come up with a plan. Be proactive not reactive. Print out the checklists from The Alabama Emergency Management's web site and create emergency and first aid kits, then place these kits in a convenient location. This weekend, get with your family and discuss possible crisis and emergency situations, come up with a plan for handling them, then act out the scenarios. Do this as many times as needed until each family member is comfortable. You might feel strange doing it now, but you'll be relieved when an emergency presents itself.

References: *The Alabama Cooperative Extension at [www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0606](http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/H/HE-0606) and EMA at [www.ema.alabama.gov](http://www.ema.alabama.gov)*