

News Notes To Parents

A Purdue University Extension Newsletter for Parents and Caregivers of Preschoolers

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Pumpkins– From Decoration to Delectable!

Once autumn rolls in, pumpkins flourish. They are used to decorate porches, flavor baked goods and coffee drinks, and star in fall festivals across the country. Many of you may have already been taking advantage of the fall/winter squash selections in stores and from local growers. You may also be reading this thinking, I'm passed pumpkin and moving on to peppermint and gingerbread but with Thanksgiving tomorrow, pumpkins still have time to be featured! They come in all shapes and colors, varying from short and stout, oblong, tall and narrow, green, orange, yellow, white, and purple. Pumpkins offer many nutrients and health benefits in addition to their fall décor qualities.

Squash that is harvested in the fall is known as winter squash. Each type of winter squash differs in color, shape, size, and flavor but all have thicker shells than summer squash. These thick shells can be more of a challenge to work with but are what make these squash shelf-stable for a few months when kept in proper conditions.

Choose a firm, well-shaped squash that feels heavy for its size. They should have hard, tough skin without soft spots or areas that have sunken in. Store pumpkins in a cool, dry place to keep them shelf-stable for several months. Many varieties can be baked, boiled, steamed, cooked in an electric pressure cooker, and even roasted in an air fryer. Be sure to first rinse the squash under running water prior to peeling or cutting through the skin. Depending on what you plan to do with the pumpkin will determine whether you peel it before or after cooking methods. When steaming, the peel should be removed prior to cooking. If baking, there is no need to peel prior to the baking process. Simply remove the ends, cut the squash in half, remove the seeds, and bake as squash halves.

These delectable and colorful decorations are a great source of vitamin A, vitamin C, and potassium. These nutrients are important for nerve impulses, skin formation, healthy bone maintenance, and contribute to our eye health. They also provide us with antioxidants that we know work to keep the good stuff in our bodies and shuffle the bad things out.

Pumpkins are over 90% water and all parts of the pumpkin are edible. You can eat the skin, leaves, flowers, pulp, seeds, and even the stem... if you so choose. The flesh of the pumpkin is what we eat most frequently and what is incorporated into baked goods. Pumpkin puree can help stretch your next pot of chili a little farther or add flavor to your next bowl of oatmeal. Seeds of the pumpkins can be roasted or baked for a crunchy snack, mixed with oats as a granola base, or sprinkled over a bowl of soup. Try tossing the seeds in olive oil and cinnamon for a sweeter snack or oil and chili powder for a savory snack. Separate the seeds from the pulp and lay them in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Bake at a low temperature of about 170°F for 15-20 minutes and enjoy!

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Photo: "Amelia's Happy Place"
Credit: Brandy Anderson, 2025

Building Connections with Kids

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Having healthy relationships with the kids in our lives is one of the best ways to support and protect their mental health. A healthy connection parent-child relationship not only helps children bounce back from life's difficult moments, but it also helps children handle big emotions, reduce negative behaviors, boost their attention spans, increase their sense of belonging and build social skills.

Building a healthy connection with your child starts the moment they're born. The way we interact with them, the way we respond to their behaviors and the way we handle our own stress are all important. We have some resources to help get you started:

Intentional Child Time: Parenting is hard and your time is limited. What if we told you there are recommendations of things you can do when spending time with your child that research has shown builds healthy relationships and improves child behavior? The best part is that it only takes a few minutes a day!

Conversations: Our children want to feel like they're important and heard. This is why we recommend daily check-ins with your children. Conversations about topics big or small build closeness in the parent-child relationship, help you get to know your child, and help children feel comfortable coming to you when they're in need.

Routines: Creating a daily schedule and routine for children can often feel like a magic wand when it comes to building positive behaviors. This is because when kids know what to expect out of their day, they feel more in control. Additionally, power battles decrease because they start building habits.

Responding to difficult behaviors: How we treat our kids when they misbehave is just as important as how we spend fun time with them. While our job as parents is to guide their behavior, we also want to make sure we



respond in a way that does not harm the relationship.

Take care of you: Parenting can be hard because we are humans too. We feel strong emotions just like our children and on hard days, it is really difficult to show up as our best selves and parent. Taking care of yourself will help you be more effective at connecting with your kids.

You can start improving your relationship with your child today. Select one or two steps that you feel most comfortable with. Over time, expand to more of them. As you try more elements, you will gain confidence and be ready to do even more.

Source: <https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/mental-wellness/building-connections-with-kids>

PARENT TIP: Check out these great conversation starters found on [kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org](https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org)



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News Notes To Parents is a product of Purdue Extension—Wells County. If you have comments or need information, call (260) 824-6412. The office is located at 1240 4-H Park Rd Bluffton, IN 46714. **Tell someone about us!**

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