Home Management Tips

The following tips were excerpted from *Stay-at-Home Parenting*, a monthly newsletter formerly published by Dawn Smith and Linda Anderson.*

**Money Saving Tips for the Grocery Store**
Groceries are one of the biggest expenses a family has (at least I know this is true for mine!). Here’s a list of ways to cut down the cost. Remember: Every little bit will help your bank account grow.

- Never shop while hungry. You’ll buy more because everything looks good.
- Make a list of meals for the week, and have things in the house for quick breakfasts and lunches. This will eliminate extra trips to the store. Put your grocery list in order of how things are in the store — it will help you get through faster.
- Don’t buy what’s not on your list. Make an exception only if you really need it.
- If possible, use store ads to make your list, and take advantage of sales.
- Use coupons. (I save around $10 per week.)
- Don’t buy things just because they’re on sale or because you have a coupon for them. It won’t save you money if you’re not going to use them.
- Buy store brands or generic varieties instead of name brands. In most cases, you won’t be able to tell the difference.
- Boxed cereals are very expensive. Buying a store brand or generic variety versus a name brand, in most cases, will save you $1 or more per box.
- Day-old bread stores have awesome deals. A loaf of good bread at the grocery store costs about $1.50, but at the bread store I go to, the cost for five loaves is $3 or 69 cents each. This includes hot dog and hamburger buns, English muffins, bagels and more.
- Larger quantities are usually cheaper, just as long as you’ll use them.
- Try shopping only once a week — this will help cut down on impulse buying.

**Give Yourself a Happy, Healthy Stress-Free Life**
Parenting is always busy — so you need to take a moment off to do something nice for yourself and get rid of some stress. The following are a few presents to give to yourself. Try an idea once a day or week as needed. It’s amazing how little things, like these, can make a big difference.

- Give yourself a compliment, or give one to someone else.
- Be thankful.
- Look at old photos, or frame a picture you love.
• Enjoy silence. Meditate.
• Take an early morning walk, perhaps to the nearest park. Smell a flower.
• Visit a lonely person or shut-in. Help a stranger.
• Go to the library. Use a new word.
• Take yourself to lunch. Try a new food.
• Take a risk. Follow an impulse.
• Hide a love note. Tell someone you love him or her. Send a card for no reason.
• Surprise a child.
• List 10 things you do well.
• Turn off the TV and talk, or tell a joke and laugh at yourself.
• Reread your favorite book. Write a poem.
• Have breakfast in bed.
• Sing in the shower.
• Curl up before an open fire. Hug yourself.

**Bedtime Can Be Hectic**

Bedtime with kids can be the worst time of the day. But it can be a very special time for the entire family. Every family should have a nightly routine — this way there aren’t any surprises, and the kids know what is expected of them. Here are some ideas you might want to include in your evening to help bedtime go more smoothly:

• Snack time should be done about one hour before bedtime.
• Pajamas should be put on before bedtime to avoid conflicts later.
• Brushing teeth should be done ahead of time for the same reason.
• Quiet time should start about half an hour before bedtime. This will give your kids a chance to wind down — by watching TV, reading with you or talking as a family.
• At bedtime, make sure the kids have used the bathroom and had their drinks. There should be no more excuses left for getting up. Read them a story, or if you have older kids, give them time to read until a specified time. Then, lights out. Give them a big hug and kiss, and close the door.

“Bedtime” should be over at this point. However, if your kids get up with excuses, be stern and don’t give in, unless they need to be up with a legitimate reason. This isn’t easy, but after being stern with them for a few nights, they’ll realize you mean business, and bedtime will become less of a hassle — even an enjoyment — for the entire family.

**Inexpensive Gift Ideas**

Holidays and birthdays are special times of the year for many, but they can be very difficult to enjoy if you’re spending time worrying whether you’ll be able to stick to the budget. Here are some gift ideas to make these special occasions a little kinder on the budget. Creative, personal gifts often mean more than expensive gifts.
1. Homemade gifts add a personal touch that often means more to the receiver than a store-bought gift because of the thought and time that was put into it. A few suggestions:
   - homemade jams or something that can be done ahead of time
   - cookies and treats — kids will enjoy helping with these
   - breads or something for those who don’t like sweets

2. Personalized baskets — large or small, expensive or inexpensive. Get creative. Use your imagination. Some ideas:
   - For a woman: a simple basket, lined with a pretty washcloth or fabric, filled with items like soap, bath beads or oils, lotions, sponges or perfumes.
   - For a man: center your ideas around a theme, like sports or a specific team, animals, hobbies or anything he’s interested in. Buy a bunch of little items that fit your theme. Instead of using a basket for a fishing theme, put your items in a tackle box or cooler. For a sports team, put the items in a hat or team waste basket.
   - For kids: get a school box and fill it with papers, markers, pencils, crayons, stickers and erasers. Or fill it with other craft items, like beads, string, glitter, glue, scissors and construction paper.

3. Coupon books that include different favors you will be doing for that person. Be sure to include an expiration date.
   - For a woman, some ideas include house cleaning, dinner on you, a back rub, babysitting...you name it.
   - For a man, consider such ideas as mowing the yard, shoveling snow, taking out the trash, taking him out for dinner or cleaning his car.
   - For kids, include such things as playing catch or a game, a day without chores, taking them out for dinner or bringing home pizza and videos.

**Open Communication**

Communication between parent and child is extremely important. As your child gets older and more independent, open and honest communication becomes more difficult. Developing good communication must begin at a very young age and consistently worked on daily.

The following suggestions are fun, easy ways to develop communication for an excellent parent-child relationship. Find a daily, 5 to 10 minute period of time when the family is together — either at dinner, breakfast, bedtime or in the car. Come up with a simple, short question, such as:

- What’s one fun thing you did today?
- What’s your favorite color, animal or food?
- What’s something that made you laugh today?
Slowly increase the difficulty of the question as the child’s understanding increases, as they get older or when you have more time. You can use the same questions over and over, or have a new question daily.

If your child has had a difficult day, ask a question to help them express their feelings. Your children can help make up the questions. A few sample questions:

- What did you learn today?
- Who said something to make you feel good today, and what did they say?
- What made you angry today?
- What did you do today that you are proud of?
- What is something you did today that you wish you could change?

Make sure that, as parents, you also answer these questions — it’s important that your child gets to know your feelings also. Show your children that it is good and fun to talk with you. Give them your undivided attention, helping them see how what they say is important to you. Communication is a two way street. Make this a fun time, and soon your whole family will be looking forward to this time together.

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