

The “Gift” of Life Skills

By Tracey Matthews, Supervisor of the Knox County Schools Family and Community Engagement Department
and Tamekia Jackson, Director of the Knox County Schools Family Resource Center
Contributing Writer: Eliza Norrell, Family and Community Engagement Department
Communications Intern

Season’s Greetings! This holiday season, as our children’s “wish lists” include tangible items such as bikes, dolls, and the latest video games, we are reminded that gifts come in different forms. Some of the most valuable gifts are not tangible and given over time in the form of priceless lessons; although, the “value” may not be recognized by our children until later in life. One of the most prized gifts that a parent can give a child is **the gift of life skills**. This involves teaching children smart ways to tackle aspects of everyday life! Read on to discover some practical skills that children should learn now and that will last a lifetime.

Healthy Eating

Teaching habits of healthy eating is a life lesson that will impact your child’s health throughout his or her life. Insisting that your children try new fruits and vegetables that they say they don’t like (but have never actually tasted) *before* rewarding them with dessert or another special treat is a great start! When my family eats out, a green vegetable must be included (and eaten) if they are to receive a healthy or small dessert. What if we try to select mostly lean protein and whole grains when available at restaurants and grocery stores? Research suggests that we should steer clear of processed foods as much as possible, which unfortunately are the lowest priced items in most stores! When you go to the grocery store, explain to your children *why* you are selecting a certain item versus another item. Limit household snacks to healthy choices and beverages to water, as children will have plenty of opportunities away from home to eat junk food! Ordering water vs. other beverages at restaurants is also a way to save money! And don’t forget to ask your children to help with the grocery list, so you can be sure to include healthy items they enjoy!

Healthy Cooking

Cooking with your child provides a great opportunity to teach important life lessons about healthy food preparation and basic kitchen “know-how” and offers other teachable moments! How about beginning by modifying how we prepare foods? If children grow up eating meats baked, broiled or grilled instead of fried, what an advantage that will be to their future health! Also, children who are accustomed to helping in the kitchen learn basic preparation skills, enjoy cooking and probably more open-minded eaters. These are the children who are more likely to make HEALTHY food choices, even in your absence. As a former classroom teacher, I think it’s important to remind parents that trying out new healthy recipes together with your children will also expose your child to new vocabulary words and give them an opportunity to practice fractions, measuring and estimating. Financially speaking, teaching your son or daughter how to enjoy preparing basic healthy meals may also impact their future spending practices of purchasing fast food or eating in restaurants too frequently.

General Household DIY (Do-It-Yourself) Skills

When children learn basic household DIY and repair skills, it fosters a strong sense of independence, and it will also save them money during adulthood. Start by demonstrating the use/purpose of basic tools with your son or daughter when there are small projects to be completed around the house. If you are not familiar with various tools or basic maintenance skills, yourself, recruit a family member or friend to provide a “family lesson!” Include children in home projects as simple as changing a light bulb, using a plunger, changing filters in the air unit, dryer, refrigerator (water) and others. Have them watch—or

even better—*assist* repairmen/women (or a family member) as they make basic repairs or complete general maintenance around the house. You may not need to call a plumber to change the “thingy” the next time it doesn’t operate correctly!

Outdoor DIY

Now let’s go outside the house. Do you and your children know how to change a car tire, check the oil, check and add air to car tires or change the air filter? None of these tasks involves getting under the car, so there’s really no excuse! Most children are either old enough to watch or old enough to help. Remember to practice safety during all DIY lessons! Once your child reaches adulthood, these practical skills will lessen the need for them to rely on a repairman for every leaky faucet! This will save them both time and money, which are definitely Life Skill Gifts!

The Knox County Schools Family and Community Engagement Department and Family Resource Center wish you a Happy Holiday Season!

Please be sure to visit us at **knoxschools.org/fce**.

FAMILY RESOURCES OF THE MONTH: Clothing Center, Community Chest, FISH Pantries

The Knox County Schools/PTA Clothing Center serves students in preschool through 12th grade by providing clothing free of charge to help ensure these students are able to attend school each day. For information on obtaining clothing, please call 594-3791. Thanks in part to clothing and monetary donations from the community, the Clothing Center served more than 2,100 students and provided more than 50,200 articles of clothing in the 2013-2014 school year. New and gently used clothing can be dropped off at the Clothing Center, located at 1000 N. Central Avenue, Monday-Friday during the school year and on Tuesdays during the summer. For more information, visit knoxschools.org and search “Clothing Center.”

Did you know the *Community Chest of Knoxville* sells all clothing items for only \$1.00 each? And that’s just the great news! The even greater news is that three items of young children’s clothing can be purchased for \$2.00!

However, the greatest news is that the proceeds from the *Community Chest of Knoxville* are used to support FISH Hospitality Pantries. FISH Hospitality Pantries distribute food to needy families every Tuesday and Thursday and third Saturday.

Visit **knoxschools.org/frc** for details regarding hours of operation and locations and to find other local community resources.