

Impress your kids – help save the world

Admit it – it’s April, and you’ve already been thinking about summer for a while, haven’t you? You’re wondering what do with the kids, as in how to sneak in quality family time amid the hustle and bustle of what’s shaping up to be another crazy summer.

Here’s something you probably haven’t thought about: In the long run, the overall safety, health and quality of life for your family rests on one thing: the safety, health and quality of life of our planet Earth. “Great,” you say. “But I don’t have time to become a tree-hugging champion of the Earth.”

Hold it right there, Mr. and Ms. Incredible – it’s not that difficult. It’s the little things that you do each day that add up to make a big difference in the environment and in your quality of life (and they can put more green in your pocketbook.) These differences can be enjoyed by both you and your kids.

By adopting a few Earth-friendly practices and passing them on to our children, we can leave a legacy for generations to come. Here are a few practical (and fun!) ways you can get started around the house.

WASTE NOT

Whether you have access to curbside recycling along with your weekly trash pickup, or need to make trips to the nearest recycling center, recycling is a great way to get the kids involved around the house. Divide your family into teams and take turns sorting

recycling and taking out the trash each week. Make a bar graph to chart how much recycling versus how much trash you produce each week. Kids might even start an enterprising venture by collecting aluminum cans for cash.

Visit the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to find the recycling center nearest to you at www.dnr.mo.gov/env/swmp/rrr/rrr.htm.



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FLIP IT

Electricity goes to waste in several places around the house. Train everyone to turn off lights when they leave a room. Kids can keep track of how many light switches they turn off over the course of a day or week. If your crew isn’t very trainable, light switches with

motion detectors are a relatively inexpensive improvement to your home.

KILL A WATT

Did you know that some appliances that are turned off still drain energy while they are plugged in? You can purchase a Kill A Watt meter from Amazon.com that will tell you how much energy your plugged-in appliances are drawing when they aren’t turned on. With a parent’s help, kids can assist in testing and monitoring how much energy different appliances use and making a plan to conserve energy drawn by appliances.

LESS IS MORE

Water is another often over-used

Earth Day celebration

The citywide Earth Day Celebration will be held 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Discovery Center on April 22. Admission is free, and in addition to tons of hands-on exhibits, participants will also have the chance to take part in several Earth Day activities and get a sneak peak at the new “green” expansion building.

resource. In the bathroom, place a small timer in the shower and limit your shower time. See who can take the fastest shower (and still get clean)! When you are brushing your teeth, turn the water off until you are ready to rinse at the end.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS

There are many great ways to improve the value and efficiency of your home, and in 2006 you can get tax credits for energy efficient home improvements (www.energy.gov/tax-breaks.htm).

In the bathroom, faucets with motion sensors and dual flush toilets (toilets that have the option for a “half flush” or “full flush”) can reduce the use of water. High-efficiency insulation and windows can stop air from escaping your home.

Energy Star appliances help reduce the amount of energy you use on a daily basis. Let the kids help pick out these new features, and use the project

as an opportunity to teach them why energy conservation is important.

OUT AND ABOUT

Don’t leave your new Earth-friendly habits at home. Try to be just as conscious about the environment everywhere you go. Get the kids involved in packing “green” lunches for your family. No, this doesn’t mean broccoli and avocados five days a week. It means utilizing reusable containers, such as plastic or insulated lunch boxes, thermoses for drinks rather than juice boxes, and reusable packaging such as Tupperware instead of plastic baggies. Try buying items such as chips or pretzels in bulk and packing them in plastic containers rather than using single-serving snack packs, which generate trash every day.

We all know that gasoline is getting to be ridiculously expensive. If possible, carpool together as a whole family (automatic built-in family time!) or with neighbors and friends who take similar routes. Kids can help you check the tire pressure in your tires on a regular basis.

Finally, when you travel, try to patronize hotels with environmentally friendly practices such as letting you choose to reuse towels or only changing the sheets every third day.

If you find yourself in lodging that doesn’t have measures in place, simply hang the do-not disturb sign on your door to prevent housekeeping from squelching your Earth-friendly habits.

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