



# United Way Community Matters

By Mary Lou Goeke

## Spending Quality Time with Your Child

Summer vacation is approaching! This time of year often brings feelings of excitement, anticipation and anxiety. For many parents, whether they work full-time or not, it can be particularly challenging to spend quality time with their young children.

First 5 Santa Cruz County reminds us that parents and caregivers need to set time aside daily to show their kids how special they are. First 5 Santa Cruz County offers the following tips to help families find ways to be together during the busy summer season and throughout the year:

Create summer art projects. Be creative and team up with your child to make your very own artwork with your family's personal touch. Young children can decorate with crayons while the parent or caregiver frames and mounts the art. This can be one of several inexpensive arts and crafts projects you and your child can enjoy together.

Tell stories. Children are intrigued by stories, whether they're real or make believe. Parents can read their kids a bedtime story, share their own childhood experiences or make up an adventure story that lets imaginations run wild. This is also a good way for a child to start building his or her vocabulary.

Eat meals together. Often, cooking a meal is the sole responsibility of the grown ups. Next time you're trying to decide what to put on the menu, involve the kids in the decision and preparation of the meal. Kids can be involved by helping to select the ingredients or setting the table.

When dinner is ready, the family can talk about everyone's day and share how they

are feeling, or perhaps recount something funny that happened. Parents should be attentive when their child talks, as this shows interest and makes him or her feel important.

Dance to your favorite tunes. Many families find it difficult to make time for physical activities, especially during the busy summer season. A good way to engage in some form of physical activity at home is dance to your favorite tunes. Letting your child pick his or her favorite songs will make this activity even more fun.

These easy and fun activities promote quality time together, which helps reduce the amount of time your child spends watching television during the summer months and provides them with early learning experiences before entering school. Many holiday summers will come and go, but your child's memories of growing up feeling loved will last a lifetime.

For additional tips on different ways to spend quality time with your children, contact First 5 Santa Cruz County at (831) 465-2217 or visit their Web site at [www.first5scc.org](http://www.first5scc.org).

*For the past 16 years Mary Lou Goeke has been the Executive Director of the United Way of Santa Cruz County. She has 32 years of experience providing social services to elders, children and families. The mission of United Way is to improve the lives of the people of Santa Cruz County by convening the community to seek solutions to their needs and by efficiently raising funds for the human care programs the United Way supports. Their website is [www.unitedwaysc.org](http://www.unitedwaysc.org).*