

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Bridging the Gap Between Generations”

Intergenerational connections reduce loneliness and boost happiness for older adults. Children develop life skills and a sense of who they are. They can benefit heavily from interactions with previous generations. Children learn through interactions with other people. Humans are social beings, and the more variety of contacts children can have can teach them about themselves. This could be what they like, what they don't like, and what other people have experienced.

That's part of growing up and especially our youth's early childhood. They're really starting to develop their understanding of other people's beliefs, thoughts and desires. As they're working with a variety of people, in particular, older adults, it helps them understand the passage of time, different experiences, and provides them with another adult with whom they can connect, learn and teach.

Younger children develop life skills by better understanding other people's talents and perspectives. While they get some of that from interactions with parents, teachers and perhaps coaches, many of those relationships are with people of similar ages and experiences. When older adults are spending time with children, you get a radically different perspective. Younger children are generally demonstrating different talents and different ways of engaging than they do in the more structured environments of family and school.

Older adults also can often offer their undivided attention, which in turn, reaffirms the value of the older adult to the community, as well as providing the attention that children crave more than anything. Often, we know the solution to some of the issues in early childhood is attention. We can't always provide that. If we're in the middle of fixing our plumbing, we can't stop and play ball with our child. It's important to recognize that as parents, we can't give our undivided attention all the time.

Social engagement, more than anything, is the most protective factor against age-related declines in cognition, thinking and mobility. So, the more opportunities we can provide for children to engage with older adults, the better off the older adults will be, and the children benefit as well.

Information comes from K-State University Child Development Specialist, Bradford Wiles.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.