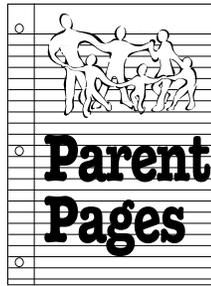


# Children's Hobbies Have Big Payoff

There's more than meets the eye in a child's stamp collection, vegetable garden or hand-sewn sports bag. Activities that children pursue just for fun can:



- ◆ improve academic skills
- ◆ teach the relationship between money and work
- ◆ bring the satisfaction that comes from sustained effort
- ◆ boost children's confidence in following their own interests

Hobbies that fascinate and keep a child busy don't seem like work, but many hobbies require categorizing and organizing things, following directions, reading, writing and even doing research. Because the activity is the child's choice, he has built-in motivation to improve these skills - the same skills critical to school performance. When children are interested and motivated, they are fast learners.

Learning first-hand about the link between work and money can be another payoff for a child who pursues a hobby -- if parents play it right. Some hobbies, such as sketching, require little investment; but others, such as fishing or model railroading, can be started with a modest outlay of cash and become progressively more expensive. Parents should not buy everything children want right away, but bankroll just enough equipment or materials to get them started. Then, if they become more committed to the hobby, parents can help them find ways to budget their allowance or earn money with which to buy that special fishing lure or another hundred feet of railroad track.

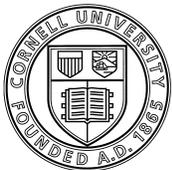
Giving children the opportunity to work to save money for something they really want teaches a basic economic lesson, but requires some restraint on the parent's part. These days, when parents often have more money than time and use money to save themselves time, it's difficult not to do the same with children's activities.



Another reason parents shouldn't invest too heavily in their children's hobbies is because it makes it harder for them to allow children to give up a hobby in which they've lost interest. It's easier for parents to support children who change their minds if much of the outlay of time and money is the child's. And, despite the parents' interests or the financial investment, children should be able to try out different things, learn what they like and dislike, refine their own tastes and ultimately develop confidence in choosing their own interests.

Hobbies that are truly satisfying to children are those in which they've invested time and effort. Seeing a collection grow, catching that long-sought fish or carrying a tennis racket and balls in a bag they sewed, brings a feeling of solid accomplishment that only comes from hard work. Such achievement does much to strengthen a child's perseverance in facing other demanding tasks in school and at home.

~ Continued ~



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Parents can encourage children to pursue hobbies by listening for clues as to what they might be interested in, then supporting that interest at each child's own pace. Offer your own expertise and support, but watch out for the temptation to identify too much with what your child is doing. Even if you enjoy the same hobby, children's success or failure is their own - not yours!

Especially with two parents working outside the home, everything they do with children tends to get accelerated by the limited time they have. Remember that children benefit only when they can pursue an interest at their own pace; keep the learning process as the priority. Set aside some time when children can move along as they choose and not be programmed or pushed. Within that time, even if it's only 15 minutes, show your genuine interest by giving your child your undivided attention.

One of the best things about a hobby is sharing it. Almost all hobbies provide a shareable accomplishment for a child. Joining a club where other children have the same interest gives them the enjoyment of learning more about it and teaching others what they know.

4-H clubs are ideal places to share a hobby with others or take up a new one. A sampling of club activities includes archery, model airplane building, horseback riding, photography, doll making, computers, electronics, nature study collections, fishing, sewing and fiber crafts, puppetry, cooking, dog obedience training and gardening. For more information on 4-H programs in your area, contact your county Cornell Cooperative Extension office.

*Source: Sue West, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*