

# Encouraging Children to ‘Go Green’

Thursday, January 31, 2013, *By News Staff*



The younger children are when they first become interested in conserving energy and the earth’s resources, the more likely they will be to support public projects for ecological well-being when they grow up. That’s one of the findings of a paper recently published in the journal *Early Child Development and Care* by Professor Emerita *Alice Honig* and former graduate student Meghan Mennerich in the *Department of Child and Family Studies* at the David B. Falk College of Human Dynamics.

While adult awareness of, and support for, environmental concerns has been growing,

little is known about what children think of global warming or conservation. Honig and Mennerich interviewed 41 children and asked how they thought they could help the Earth. With increasing age and cognitive maturity, children’s responses showed a marked change toward more feelings of responsibility for conserving the Earth’s resources.

One 10-year-old girl in the study affirmed, “Recycling is sorting garbage and things that can be reused. You should know that they are different.” Another child explained, “We should make sure that no one throws litter outside. Everyone should follow those laws!” Even in early childhood classrooms children can learn the benefits of making their own play dough and using recycled containers for storage.

The study, while small in sample size, helps to better understand how prosocial behaviors by children can have powerful consequences. “I love that very young children begin to realize that if we waste lots of paper that means cutting down lots of trees and trees keep our air clean,” Honig says.

The findings clearly suggest that schools and child-care facilities have an important role to play in increasing children’s awareness of and participation in conservation efforts. “Parents have a role, too,” Honig adds. “It’s easy to start incorporating a number of tools and techniques at a very early age to introduce the idea of helping the Earth.”

Some of the techniques Honig suggests in her paper include:

1. Using child-friendly words rather than technical terms. For preschoolers, even the concept “Go Green” was too puzzling.

2. Reading books on how to help the Earth. Drawings and photographs are also good. Books like “The Lorax” by Dr. Seuss show how sad it was when all the trees were cut down.
3. Talking with children about natural protectors of the Earth, such as green trees.
4. Looking for appropriate museum and library programs.
5. Using catchy slogans like, “Stepping out? Lights out!”
6. Encouraging hands-on projects like growing vegetables, composting and recycling.
7. Using examples of endangered animals to arouse interest and compassion.
8. Sharing news and stories about conservation heroes and heroines, like those who protect hatching baby turtles from predators so they can reach the sea safely.
9. Promoting peer interaction: encouraging children to work together in a community garden.
10. Sustaining ecological awareness across school years so that older children can think up and carry out their own projects to help the Earth.

Honig says involving children in *ecologically friendly activities* boosts children’s satisfaction and feelings of well-being. “Helpfulness enhances their thinking skills and deepens their sense of pride and belonging in their school and community,” she adds. “This is valuable for both public health and global good.”