

## Seniors and Kids

Since the earliest period in the development of the human family, consistent interaction between generations has resulted in mutual learning and mutual support. Elders throughout the ages have been part of the main stream of growth in villages, towns and in nations. They have been models of stability and continuity of the world's cultures. In the United States the role of older people had traditionally been integral to the growth of our families and our communities. And extended family of several generations living in close geographic proximity was the norm.

However, within the last four decades changes have occurred in our society that has resulted in the virtual disappearance of the extended family and a dramatic decrease in the amount of significant interaction between the generations. Economic changes since the late 1950s precipitated a mass movement of young nuclear families away from their roots and their elders. The geographic separation of the family members has resulted in infrequent contact between the generations and has yielded a change in lifestyles, values, and attitudes toward aging. Along with this separation caused by distance and the economic adjustment that include two-income families, people other than family members are caring for infants and preschool children. Conversely as families remain separated over long periods of time the elders may respond to their lack of involvement in the family's development with feelings of rejection, loneliness and purposelessness.

America now possesses not only the largest and fastest-growing population of older adults in our history, but the healthiest, most vigorous, and best educated (Civic Ventures). The 1990s report the largest population of young children in our history with a need for care outside the home, peaking in the year 1995, with an estimated two-thirds of all preschool age children having mothers in the workforce (Goffin).

Intergenerational programs that introduce older adults as an additional adult component into childhood programs enhance the cognitive, emotional, and social growth of the children. Some specific developmental outcomes for children:

- Children attend to their learning tasks more effectively with the presence of older adults who, as reported by teachers, become a “stabilizing influence” in the environment;
- Children's knowledge and skills are increased through an enriched curriculum provided by a wealth of life experiences older adults bring to the preschool environment;
- Children's sense of mastery and self esteem is enhanced by the presence of supportive and caring older adults who take an interest in their activities; and

- Children's perceptions about what it means to grow old in today's society are positively affected by the actual presence of older adults in the setting as role models.

When over 55 meets under 5 there are "high-fives" all around.

If you're over 55, retired and think there's nothing left to accomplish or contribute, you haven't "high-fived."

The first five years in a child's life can make the difference between a child ready for success or a child conditioned for failure.

Join the intergenerational partnership for success. Volunteer today and there will be high-fives all around!

Call 1-800-510-2020

First 5 Commission of San Diego County  
Improving the lives of Children 0 to 5

Aging & Independence Services  
County of San Diego  
Health and Human Services