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## **Matthew Kaplan, Ph.D.**

State Extension Specialist  
Intergenerational Programs and Aging  
Department of Ag & Extension Education  
(814) 863-7871

## **Ideas for Intergenerational Living**

*a series of articles devoted to promoting cooperation  
and exchange between the generations*

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### **TEACHING KIDS ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY**

A new feature on the Social Security Administration's web site may surprise some of you: it's designed specifically for children.

From a human development perspective, "Kids' Stuff" is brilliant. Friendly animals introduce basic Social Security concepts and share messages about the importance of saving and planning. By clicking on a turtle, young visitors learn how the slow and steady turtle beat the fast but overly-assured rabbit. The moral? "Slow but sure wins the race."

A lion says: "When I used to chase the cows, I couldn't get them because they stuck together. I was able to get them, one by one, after they fought and separated." The concept? "United we stand, divided we fall."

A grasshopper may provide the most direct message about Social Security's importance: "When I saw an ant moving an ear of corn... I invited the ant to stop working so hard and relax with me. The ant said he had to keep working to store food for the winter. When winter came the ants shared the corn they had stored and I had no food, so I was very hungry." The moral here: We all need to prepare for the future.

To find out what a pig, stork and crow have to say about saving and planning, check out the Web site at <http://www.ssa.gov/kids/kids.htm>.

According to "Social Security eNews," the administration's online publication, learning about Social Security is "important to everyone -- even grade-schoolers. They'll learn about the value of saving and planning for the future. Teaching these values to kids at an early age will help them to be prepared when the time comes."

Young people must realize that Social Security is more than a retirement or "old people's" program. In fact, 30 percent of the recipients aren't elderly, but people who receive support through Social Security's disability insurance and survivor's insurance programs.

The Social Security system is built upon a social compact between generations. People who are retiring now and about to draw benefits made payments into the system that funded the previous generation's benefits. Similarly, for current workers to draw benefits when they retire, they must count on contributions made by future generations.

Consider too that the older adult who receives benefits that keep pace with the increasing cost of living will be better able to provide financial and other types of support for younger family members, as well as others.

It's in everyone's best interest to support the long-term solvency of the Social Security system.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to lose sight of the interdependency between generations. Services for young people and older adults usually are housed in separate, unconnected agencies. They often are supported by agencies and advocates with opposing sets of agendas.

Generations United, a Washington D.C.-based organization, uses a different, "intergenerational approach" when framing public policies that impact children, youth and older adults. Working with national organizations like National 4-H Council, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, National Council on the Aging and American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, they come up with an "intergenerational advocacy platform" that simultaneously considers the needs of different age groups. They have addressed challenges as diverse as strengthening the Younger Americans Act (including language that calls for "ongoing relationships with caring adults") and changing senior housing programs to better accommodate the needs of grandparent-headed households.

When we bring "single-generation" focused groups together to promote a common agenda, we ensure that policies created to support the long-term welfare of any one group will build upon the common concerns of all.

Our desire to create a more civil society will be well served by continuing to explore ways that the unique strengths of each generation can help meet each others' needs.

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