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Green and Greener: It's the Kids' Fault!

By Dave Rochlin and Katy Foreman

Dave: Now that both of my kids are over 6 feet tall, it's no wonder everything gets used faster in my house....food, gas, paper towels, and even hot water. Having teens is like inviting a plague of locusts into your home. It's a struggle to keep on a reasonably green path. Just taking a family vacation that involves flying is about as good for the climate as setting fire to a rainforest. Katy: I'm just starting my own baby adventure, but I already struggle with the same thing. I'm fighting a losing battle against the wave of stuff that is flooding my house. Dave: Maybe we can help each other out! The obvious starting point for you has to be diapers. Over 15 billion disposable diapers end up in US landfills each year, and the average baby uses over 6,000 before potty training takes hold. In Lamorinda alone, that's 3 million diapers/year. Stacked up, you could make a tower of stink 40 miles high! Katy: That's an easy one for me, actually. There are plenty of good options in reusable diapers these days. I read reviews, asked around, and wound up choosing the kind they carry at the Nurture Center in Lafayette. While the cloth/disposable debate is heated, I believe that cloth is better, not just for the planet but for the baby's health, and to make toilet training easier. Now let's talk about your constant shuttling of kids to and from school, events and games. Dave: Have you noticed traffic jams around the high schools? Since teens can't drive with other teens for their first year behind the wheel, you have lots of solo drivers. It's a good rule, but highlights the impact that all this kid-moving driving has on our towns. Carpooling takes a bit of coordination, but has big pay offs in creating free time for parents, and reducing automobile congestion and emissions. I also try to convince my kids to get some homework done rather than come home between school letting out and after school activities. Katy: Or, a radical thought, they could walk or ride their bikes. Moraga isn't THAT big! What about all of this baby stuff that gets used for less than a year? You managed to off load some of yours onto me. In fact, I've been ridiculously lucky to get almost everything I needed from other moms and a few local consignment stores. My favorite is "They Grow So Fast" in Lafayette. I did buy a new stroller, but made sure to get one that transitions from newborn to toddler. Lots of items are made to grow with the child these days - highchairs turn into tables and chairs, cribs turn into beds, changing tables turn into regular dressers. It's nice to see that kind of innovation in product design. Dave: If only our Playstation 2 would turn into a Playstation 3! Some things are designed for obsolescence. Looking for products with longer use windows, and going the reuse route definitely pay off. On pickup days, I'm always amazed at how much gets thrown away. Katy: Well, one thing I won't be throwing away is little glass jars. Once we pass the breastfeeding stage (big environmental win there) and venture into "real" food, I'm planning to make my own instead of buying it. Avoiding the packaging alone will be a huge benefit, and I'll know what my kid is eating. Dave : Keep in mind that "convenience" is why baby food and disposable diapers were created, and sometimes they make sense...the key is to be thoughtful. It's hard to teach your kids to make good environmental decisions if they aren't aware that we make trade-offs every day. Katy: True, but I'd argue that if we are really thoughtful, and don't just succumb to what is marketed to us, we will often wind up making greener decisions. And, on the flip side, I see kids "teaching" their parents to be greener all the time. They've grown up more accustomed to thinking about the planet. Just last week at the Yogurt Shack, I saw a kid correct his mom's choice of the styrofoam cup over the paper one. Sure, it's a little thing, but it reflects a new, hopeful mindset. Katy Foreman is a committed environmentalist who lives in Lafayette, and Dave Rochlin is a lazy environmentalist who lives in Moraga. Together they operate ClimatePath. Individuals and businesses can measure and then reduce their carbon footprints through tax deductible donations that support carbon reduction activities, renewable energy project, and forestry initiatives around the world at www.climatepath.org

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