CROSS-COUNTRY CONVERSATION

LIFE SKILL
communicating with others

Why keep in touch when you're not together?
It's not unusual for parents, children, and grandparents to live in different places. When family members are separated, parents and children have to work extra hard to keep the lines of communication open. Talking on the telephone is only one way of communicating. This activity can help family members keep up-to-date about what's going on in their lives.

What do you need?
an 8 x 12 spiral-bound notebook; a manila envelope to mail the notebook; postage

How long will it take?
as long as you like; as often as you like

What do we do?
The person who starts this activity buys a notebook and uses the first page to explain the activity to the other family member. He or she explains that sending the notebook back and forth is just like having a conversation. Use the notebook to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences with each other. When the notebook is full, it can become a special keepsake.

Make a rule that each time you receive the notebook, you must send it back within a week. Try to think of interesting things to say to each other. Here are a few ideas to consider:

• Draw a picture of what you did that day.
• Ask a thought-provoking question; then leave space for an answer.
• Start a sentence and ask the other person to complete it.
• Write a story or poem together by taking turns adding paragraphs or lines.
• Draw a picture together by taking turns filling in details.
• Ask each other riddles.
• Draw cartoons and ask the other person to make up the captions.
• Paste in a photo, newspaper clipping, or magazine illustration and ask the other person to comment on it. Mail the notebook in a manila envelope. Send it third class to save money and don’t forget to use correct postage. If it seems expensive, remember that it probably costs less than a long-distance phone call. And you’ll end up with something that will last a lot longer!

Younger children could use an audiocassette tape instead of the notebook.

Here are some suggestions for children to record.

Tell what you did that day.
Ask a question.
Start a story and ask the other person to add the next part.

What happened?

What was the most difficult thing about this activity?
What was the easiest thing?

What did you learn?

What made you want to keep writing?
Did you learn new or interesting things from the person you corresponded with?

Why was this activity important?

Did you feel closer to the person who is far away?
Do you think you’ll be able to communicate more easily when you do see each other?

What’s next?

Are there other ways to keep up cross-country relationships?
What did you learn about long-distance relationships that will help you in the future?