



EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Newsletter of the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood

Spring-Summer 2009

PLAYING TO LEARN

by David Elkind, Ph.D

Play is the child's inborn ability to learn about self and world through self-created learning experiences. At each stage of development, spontaneous, self-initiated play is essential to the child's healthy intellectual, emotional, and social development.

The early years

No one teaches the infant to babble. Yet it is through the infant's self-initiated babbling that he creates all the sounds from which to select those of his native language. Likewise, the infant's progress in crawling, standing, and walking derives from his own desire for locomotion, not from instruction. Nor can we teach a child the difference between hot and cold, rough and smooth, loud and soft, sweet and sour, round and square. It is only through actively touching, feeling, listening, tasting, and observing that the child learns to make these different assessments. To be sure, we can give the child the names for these experiences. But it would make no difference to the child, for example, if we taught him to call black things "red" or round things "square." Giving a child the name for something is really the icing on the cake. The hard part is the discriminations the child has to make through playful exploration and discovery.

Through her self-created experiences, the young child learns about herself as well as about her world. One only has to

watch a baby fascinated by moving her hands to appreciate how the child learns about herself through play. Or observe the toddler teaching herself to climb everything that is remotely climbable. And look at how the preschooler engages in negotiations over who is to play the

child is shy. And she begins to construct a sense of gender identity as she sets herself apart from the rough and tumble play of the boys. While some of this learning about world and self can come about through instruction, it is learned more easily—and more profoundly—through play.

Play is not only a fundamental mode of learning about self and world. It is also a mode of discovery and invention. At a few months of age, the infant turns everything it grasps into an object to be banged. In effect, the infant has invented new uses for wooden spoons, dolls, toys, and any other object that comes to hand. With the attainment of language, the child's playful creative powers come to full flower. There are the charming metaphors—"Look Mommy" says the child holding a potato chip, "A butterfly." Or, "Mommy, please turn off the sun, I want to go to sleep." Preschoolers also make up their own words to represent concepts they themselves have created. One of my sons introduced the word "stocks" to

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Photo by Betsy Koehn



teacher, who will be the pupil, who's the doctor, who's the patient, and so on. Through these spontaneous conversations and interactions, the child learns whether she is a leader or follower. She also learns which child is outgoing, which

Dr. David Elkind is a psychologist and Professor Emeritus of Child Development at Tufts University. He is the author of many books, including The Hurried Child and The Power of Play, and he is recognized as the leading advocate in the nation for the preservation of childhood. He recently spoke in Winnetka at an event co-sponsored by the Winnetka Alliance, Family Awareness Network, and North Shore Country Day School.

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Q AND A

PARENTING



Advice from Barbara Monier, LCSW, on common parenting issues.

Q My two-year-old, Charlie, has started throwing things—his dinner plate, keys out the window, etc. How do I discipline him, especially given that his siblings find it funny?

Not Laughing

A Dear Not, Since Charlie has older siblings, then you undoubtedly already know that this behavior is completely normal and expected for a two-year-old. Charlie is very much at the age where the world is an ongoing science experiment. You and I take it for granted that each and every time we throw something, it will fall, but Charlie still needs to discover for himself that this is the case. In addition, he is also learning about how others *react* when he does various things. Add all of this together and the combination becomes truly irresistible to Charlie, meaning that he feels a tremendous sense of impact on his world when he can hurl objects, get them to fall [often with a great clatter of sound!], and get the people around to either laugh or get upset or react in some other dramatic fashion.

With all that said, of course your work as a parent is to teach him appropriate limits, and dropping/throwing things often stands as our earliest need to discipline. Keep in mind that at his young age, prevention is always the best strategy. For instance, try to remove his dinner plate at the earliest sign that he is finished eating; don't allow him to play with toys if he's near an open window, etc. The more you can limit temptation, the better. Some children have an intense love of throwing from a very young age. I know a family who had great success handling

this by having a big basket that was filled with soft, nerf-type balls. Whenever their child showed signs of needing to throw, they immediately got the basket and let him throw to his heart's content. Especially with younger children, substitution can offer a more palatable alternative than an across-the-board "no throwing." For



the times when you cannot foresee Charlie's behavior and prevent it, nor do you have a good substitute handy, make sure you remove the thrown toy or object immediately with a simple, quick "No throwing."

As we said earlier, Charlie is also acutely aware of his siblings' reactions, and their finding it funny gives Charlie additional reinforcement for his throwing. With this and any other behaviors that the older children find entertaining, you can take them aside and elicit their help in "teaching" Charlie good behavior. You might remind them that it's only a matter

of time, after all, until Charlie throws something that's really precious to them!

Q I have noticed that my four-year-old son taunts and hurts the cat? We are animal lovers in our family and this really distresses me. How can I handle it?

HSB

A Dear HSB, In the previous question, we talked about how children approach the world as an ongoing science experiment. They search for patterns, always looking for things that are immutable (such as gravity!) versus things that vary. They also search for ways in which they can have an impact on the world around them. Causing various kinds of *reactions* is one way to feel powerful, and some children are intensely curious about reactions and have strong impulses in this direction.

Generally speaking, four years of age is considered to be about the earliest time that a child can be expected to reliably treat pets and other animals well. At around four, a child should possess both a moderately dependable ability to control his or her impulses as well as a rudimentary sense of *empathy*, meaning the ability to understand that other people (and, in this case, animals) have their own inner feelings and can be hurt, just as that child knows she/he can be hurt.

Your four-year-old's treatment of the family cat depends upon many different factors: impulsiveness, level of persistence, level of energy and activity, and the degree to which they have developed empathy AND can view the cat, an animal and not a person, as being able to be physically hurt and experience pain, just as they can be. Some four-year-olds will have completely mastered all of this, whereas others will be a long way away – and both are perfectly normal!

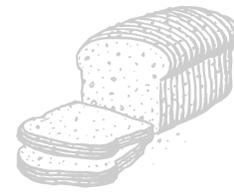
Unless your cat is highly unusual, it will probably begin to avoid your child by running away (and possibly even scratch-

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"Oh, Daddy," said three-year-old Jonathan, as he looked out the window at the snow coming down fast and furiously. "It's a 'lizard'!"

NOW IT'S MOM'S TURN



Raising kids on the North Shore — from a mom's point of view

BACK TO BASICS: IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS, TAKING INSPIRATION FROM “THE GREATEST GENERATION”

by Jennifer McManus

I grew up with all of my grandparents, four members of the “Greatest Generation.” They were all in their forties when I was born. I also had four great-grandparents who were alive when I was born. They had all survived the Great Depression, and I grew up listening to stories of how they got by during the worst economic crisis in the nation’s history. The incredible hardships, yes. We’ve all heard the stories of struggle and sacrifices made just to provide food and shelter. I always listened to these stories and tried to be aware, and thankful, that my life was much easier.

But equally fascinating were the stories of the ways they found to have fun. The younger ones were, after all, children. They were incredibly inventive in their play, mainly because they had to be. No stick of wood was overlooked—it could always be turned into a baseball bat, an oar for an imaginary row boat, or a sword to mimic Errol Flynn. A piece of cloth could be a baby doll’s blanket or dress, or even, with the addition of a ball of twine, the doll itself.

Nothing was wasted in the kitchen, of course. My great-grandmothers were masters of waste-not, want-not when it came to what came out of the icebox or off the stove. My Sicilian grandmother, in particular, made everything from scratch: sausage, pasta, butter, mozzarella, ricotta, bread, even wine. I was fortunate to be paying attention to what she did in the kitchen—

my love of cooking, my appreciation of food comes almost entirely from her. I am the proud caretaker of her original handwritten recipes, many in a crazy combination of Sicilian and broken English.

Both my Sicilian and Polish grandfathers were masters in the garden. They grew whatever they could in the Midwest to remind them of their heritage. They brought that food to the kitchen for their wives to turn into a meal.

How to get back to basics

I have been thinking of them a lot lately in the face of the current economic crisis. How can we get back to basics in 2009? One of the answers in our home is to simply up the ante on what I already do—cooking and gardening, for starters. Weekly bread making is back in my schedule. The girls are old enough now to pay attention and participate in the process. We all find deep satisfaction in watching the dough rise, the result of the magic combination of yeast, warm water and sugar. Then the fun of the knead - taking the wet mass and turning it into a solid, silky, elastic thing of beauty. The first and second rise, then into the oven. There’s nothing like a yeast bread dough baking in the kitchen to make the world feel right and sane again. Then we have the pleasure of eating our creation each day at lunch or, at the end of the week, as French toast.

I will be starting my vegetables from seed this year. We are starting our first

compost pile – the ultimate in waste-not, want-not. We are going to rid our small backyard of the energy-depleting grass and turn most of it into garden. “Grass up front, Tuscan garden in the rear”—at least that’s my goal for the summer.

Though the girls have gotten older, I still have some tips on the kinds of things to save to be used by kids of all ages. Baby food jars, bottle caps, cereal boxes, cardboard tubes, cotton clothes and rags, egg cartons, margarine containers, frozen food containers, popsicle sticks, socks, sponges, string, unused wrapping papers scraps, wood scraps, yarn and yogurt containers. All of these items are standard stock in any preschool craft closet.

They are used to create things you can easily do at home. Baby food jars turn into sand art vessels, bottle caps are jewelry, cardboard tubes are binoculars or periscopes, margarine containers are maracas, etc. A terrific and fun yeast dough that all kids love is the time honored recipe for Monkey Bread. Small balls of dough can easily be rolled by little hands. After each ball is rolled in brown sugar, cinnamon and butter, they are piled on top of each other in a bundt pan. What comes out of the oven will often result in squeals of delight and satisfaction.

So try to find ways to get back to basics with your children. It will help make these dollar-pinching times a bit easier. And it will create lifetimes worth of memories for all of you.

Jennifer McManus, a resident of Kenilworth, is the mother of two daughters. A former preschool teacher, she currently holds cooking classes for children.



While cleaning out toys in the basement for donation, Julie, age 5, asked in disgust, “Who is Charity and why does she get all our toys?”

PLAYING TO LEARN

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refer both to my socks and his mother's stockings. Another child called his daddy's briefcase, his "work purse." One youngster, lacking the word for airplane, called the first one he saw a "choo choo bird." This form of language play fades once the child enters school, and self-initiated play takes on new forms and functions.



The school years

Infants and young children are programmed to learn to walk, talk, and make sensory discriminations. School age children, however, have no inborn need to learn academics. That is why play is such a crucial adjunct to learning the school curriculum. Good teachers have always known this. Such teachers appreciate that children of school age take enjoyment from playing games with rules. Contemporary teachers who make learning a game, and who link instruction to children's interest in sports, music, TV programs, and computer games are much more effective than are those who do not. Successful instructors teach children first and subject matter second, while the reverse is true, those more interested in teaching subjects than children. The focus on children helps explain why one of the most effective educational initiatives today is the integration

of curriculum with computer game technology. Now that computers have become permanent fixtures in our schools, it will become increasingly possible to link children's motivation for game playing with academic subject matter.

Equally important for this age group is the social learning that children derive from playing games with rules. Consider children playing a game of Monopoly. The children have to learn strategies—when to buy and sell property—but they must also get to know the other players' tactics, their body language as well as their likes and dislikes. In playing their own self-initiated games like "Hide and Seek," children have to set their own boundaries, to decide who is "it," and agree on when, where, and how long, to play. In so doing children learn to compromise, to make and break rules, and to distinguish between rules which are of their own making and those which are dictated by society. They also learn "mutual respect," the willingness to abide by rules made by their peers. While some of this learning can be acquired through participation in organized team sports, it is achieved more meaningfully, and more fully, in children's self-created games. That is why it is so important to balance children's adult organized activities with those they themselves have devised.

What parents can do

Children are programmed to play—it is their birthright. As parents, we need to insure that children have the time and opportunities to engage in the kinds of play that foster their mental and physical growth and encourage their imagination and creativity. For infants and young children, the primary rule is that "less is more." Infants and young children are so good at creating their own learning experiences, we do not need to overload them with toys and technology. A troubled mother confided in me recently that her two-year-old daughter had spent more

than an hour playing with toilet tissue. I assured her that her daughter did not think of what she was playing with as toilet tissue. For this child, it was a magic material of which she could make robes, capes, bandages, and much more. At Christmas, I am always impressed at how my grandchildren have more fun with the boxes the toys came in than with the toys themselves. The single best toy for these age groups is a good set of differently-sized and shaped wooden blocks. With increasing age and ability, children will use these blocks in ever more complicated and interesting ways.

During the first four or five years of life, it is also important not to rush children through their play. Many young children will become so engrossed in their self-initiated play that they may remain concentrated on the same activity for hours. Although this play may seem repetitious and boring to us, it is not to the child. Each repetition is filled with fresh nuance that we experientially foreclosed adults can hardly appreciate. That is why children love to hear the same story over and over again. What we adults fail to appreciate is that at each reading the child takes in more of the details of the pictures and the nuances of the spoken word. Young children "dawdle" for the same



Photo by Gina Mathews

reason. The world is very new and fresh for them and they need time to explore and discover it.

Young children's questions provide a unique opportunity to encourage their imagination and fantasy. The critical point to remember in answering a young child's questions is her belief that everything on earth is here for a purpose. So when a child asks, "Why does the sun shine?" she is not really asking, nor would she

 *The Crow Island kindergarten teacher was discussing the concept of "even" with her class and asked the children to describe something that was even. "The floor," offered one student. "The bottom of my shoe," suggested another.*

The last little boy said, "Even is when someone kicks you and then you kick them back. That's even!"

UPDATE ALLIANCE



What's new? What's happening with the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood?

FIRST SPECIAL NEEDS ROUNDTABLE MEETS APRIL 29

The Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood introduces its new Roundtable, supporting families of children with special needs. Please join our professionally moderated sessions to discuss such topics as:

- Delayed or missing developmental milestones—when to be concerned
- Birth-to-Three program vs. private therapies
- Navigating the insurance labyrinth
- How to be your child's best advocate
- IEP, NSSED, NSSRA

Parent Julie Erst initially approached the Alliance and suggested a need in our community for supporting families with special needs children. The idea of offering the Roundtable on Special Needs emerged as a way to start the process. Read Julie's compelling story at www.winnetkaalliance.org.

Come to network and share information and ideas with other parents of children with special needs. The first meeting will be Wed., April 29 at 1:00 p.m. in the Winnetka Public Library (Lloyd Room). For more info, call Julie Erst, 847-446-2649, or the Alliance, 847-441-9001.

CALLING PARENTS OF DIST. 36 INCOMING KINDERGARTENERS

Dr. Mary Herrmann, superintendent of the Winnetka Public Schools, will speak about the district's history and philosophy on Mon., May 11 at 9:15 a.m. at Skokie School in the Community Room.

Parents of incoming kindergarten students, as well as anyone new to Dist. 36, are invited to attend. Dr. Herrmann will discuss the rich history of the Winnetka Public Schools, founded in 1859, and its progressive philosophy, which has had an important impact on American education. She will also talk about what parents can expect as their children enter kindergarten in the fall. Questions? Call Nancy Fehrenbach at 847-441-8618.

Photo by Betsy Kochar

ALLIANCE TO HIRE PROJECT MANAGER OF TV TUNE OUT

The Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood is probably best known for TV Tune Out Week. The 15th annual TV Tune Out was successfully held from March 1-7 and was the biggest and best ever, with more children from more schools participating in more (in number) and more (in variety) activities than ever before. This year's *TV Tune Out Guide*, listing the activities as well as ideas for projects to do at home and media literacy information, was also the largest ever.

With TV Tune Out Week growing each year and taking up more and more staff time, the Alliance board has decided to create a new position—Project Manager of TV Tune Out. The job includes working with an active and enthusiastic board of directors to put on TV Tune Out Week, including the desktop publishing of the 60-page *TV Tune Out Guide*. This is a part-time position. Most work can be done from home and occurs between November and March. A detailed job description is available at www.winnetkaalliance.org.

Do you know someone who would be perfect for this job? Are you interested? If so, please contact Winnetka Alliance board president Erika Kreisa at dwkreisa@comcast.net.



Winners of the TV Tune Out Drawing Contest and those receiving honorable mention are honored at the Kick Off Event on Sun., Mar. 1.

NUTRITION ROUNDTABLE WILL MEET ON MAY 13

Proper childhood nutrition is more important than ever and easier than you think! The Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood announces its first Nutrition Roundtable to bring parents together to discuss this important topic. We can learn about nutrition, trade ideas that work, talk about creating a healthy community, and find solutions that strike the appropriate balance for us all. Nutritionist Michelle McKenna, M.S., R.D. (see her article on page 16 of this newsletter) will be on hand to offer her practical expertise.

Parents (and teachers) are invited to meet on Wed., May 13 at 1:00 p.m. at the Winnetka Public Library (Lloyd Room.) Questions? Call Tev Bond, 847-207-3139.

COMMON REGISTRATION DATE FOR PRESCHOOLS

Through the facilitation of the Winnetka Alliance, four preschools have agreed to adopt the last Friday in January as the common date when the first tuition payment is due. This payment secures a child's spot in a school for the following school year. This procedure begins with registration for the 2010-2011 school year, with the common registration date being Fri., Jan. 29, 2010. Each school will determine the rest of its registration procedures.

The four schools agreeing to the common date are All Things Bright and Beautiful Preschool, Willow Wood Preschool, Winnetka Community Nursery School, and Winnetka Public School Nursery.

A common final deadline date allows families to learn which schools have accepted their child and to weigh their options before making a final decision.

Moving the registration date from the fall to January allows teachers to know children before making a recommendation for next year's placement. The 2010-2011 registration will serve as a pilot before being permanently adopted by the four preschools. Other preschools are considering adopting the common date, as well.

PLAYING TO LEARN

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appreciate, an answer having to do with the relation between heat and light. A more appropriate answer would be “to make the flowers grow and to keep us warm.” This is really not a wrong answer and has the advantage of letting the child know that we understand what she is asking. In addition, such an answer reflects what the child herself was thinking. Indeed, the child often has her own answers to the question she asks. Another option, therefore, is to ask the child, “What do you think?” If we use this approach, we must be sure to accept the purposeful response and thank the child for an “interesting” answer.

Encouraging play, imagination and curiosity for school age children becomes a bit more complicated because of school,



Photo by Loney Sibol

peers and technology. With respect to school, it is helpful to teach children the “dumb books” concept. Children tend to believe that anything that is in a textbook is true and correct. But all too many textbooks are full of errors of fact and grammar, of bad examples, and of confusing and contradictory statements. It is a meaningful exercise in critical thinking to go through textbooks with children and to look for and to identify errors of this kind. This exercise can take the mystique out of texts and help children appreciate that if

they don’t understand something in a book, it could well be the book that is in error.

We can also nourish our children’s creativity by encouraging them to give alternate endings to the stories we read together. And, while riding in the car, we can play games like asking our children to think of as many uses as they can for familiar objects, such as spoons and forks, pencils and popsicle sticks. Imagination, curiosity and creativity are very much like muscles—if you don’t use them, you lose them.

Supporting self-initiated social and individual play

We can also help ensure that our children engage in healthy social learning. In the past, children routinely played with their peers in the neighborhood. For many young people, this is no longer possible or desirable. Organized activities provide one avenue for bringing children safely together outside of school. For most children, one sports activity, like soccer, one artistic activity, like music lessons, and one social activity, like scouting, fill the bill. Some children may need more; some less. What is critical is that these activities do not monopolize the time and opportunities children have for spontaneous social play. Play dates can be helpful if the children are allowed to choose their own games and activities. It also makes sense for parents to alternate taking a group of friends to a playground where they can play their own games.

Ensuring that our children have a healthy amount of active individual and social play is made difficult by the ready availability of so many passive—and engaging—TV programs, videos, and computer games. This problem is complicated by our own busy schedules and time frames. Nonetheless, there are a number of ways to address this issue. First of all, it is important to buy toys which leave room for the imagination. Books, board games, playing cards, craft materials for drawing, painting, and modeling have withstood the test of time,

unlike many of the toys on the market today. Secondly, it is essential to help children evaluate both advertising and programs. “Does that ad make sense to you?” and “Why do you like this TV program? Why not?” Engaging your children in discussions about advertising and media content is an important step in helping them become informed and critical viewers and consumers.

Finally, we need to practice what we preach. If we don’t want our children spending too much time on the computer, we should limit the time we ourselves spend surfing the net. If we want our children to be thoughtful consumers, we should model wise shopping practices. If we want our children to eat healthy, we should do likewise. As a general rule, we should not bring anything into our homes that we do not want our children to eat. Likewise, if we want our children to engage in regular physical ex-



Photo by Betsy Kochhar

ercise, we ourselves should, to illustrate, walk to venues that are within comfortable walking distance.

Healthy parenting is never easy, and each generation has its own unique challenges as well as those which parents of all generations have encountered. Today, our unique task is to ensure that our children have sufficient time and opportunity to engage in self-initiated individual and social play. To be sure, we can’t do all we would like to do in this regard. But because we can’t do it all does not mean that we can’t do anything. A little support for self-initiated play may not seem a lot to us, but it can mean a great deal to our children.



Five-year-old Libby searched through her winter clothes, looking for her “ear muffins.” Much more sensible than ear muffs.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2008 ANNUAL FUND DONORS

The Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood depends upon donations from individuals, families, foundations, and our member organizations.

We'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all who generously gave in 2008. (This list reflects donations received between 3/11/08 and 3/20/09.)

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RIGHT NOW

Openings at the French School. Spaces still available at the French School for the 2009-10 school year. Half-day total French immersion program for 3 year olds (8:30 -11:15a.m.). Children must turn 3 by December 31, 2009 to begin school in the fall. For more information, contact the French School, 562 Green Bay Road, Winnetka, 847-501-5800 or visit our website at www.FrenchInstituteNS.com.

Register now for French School Summer Camp. The French School will offer an 8-week summer camp for current students and French-speaking children (space permitting) aged 3-6 years old. Sign up for the week or weeks that best fit your summer schedule. Camp runs from June 1st to July 24th. French Camp offers fun activities, outdoor play, games at the park, creative crafts, jewelry making, cooking, dramatic play, and more, all in a French immersion environment. For more information or to register, please call the French School at 847-501-5800 or visit our website at www.FrenchInstituteNS.com.

Openings at the Winnetka Covenant Church Preschool. Openings for the 2009-2010 school year are still available in the 2-day and 3-day programs. Please contact Linnea Johnson at 847-446-4300.



APRIL

23 North Shore Country Day School's Mini-Open House. 9:00 a.m. for new families. For more info, call 847-441-3313.

25 French School Spring Show. French School students will sing songs, perform dances, and put on short plays for parents, family and friends. French School, 562 Green Bay Road, Winnetka, 847-501-5800.

25 Sacred Heart School's Annual Fundraiser "Nite Lites." The theme is "Destination Europe." Dinner and casino. Held at the school. 6:00 p.m. 847-446-0005.

29 Winnetka Alliance Special Needs Roundtable. Parents of special needs children are invited to join our professionally moderated sessions to discuss such topics as: delayed or missing developmental milestones; Birth-to-Three program vs. private therapies; navigating the insurance labyrinth; how to be your child's best advocate; IEP, NSSED, and NSSRA. Come to network and share information and ideas with other parents. The first meeting will be Wed., April 29 at 1:00 p.m. in the Winnetka Public Library (Lloyd Room). For more info, call Julie Erst, 847-446-2649, or the Alliance, 847-441-9001.



MAY

4 Dr. Diane Levin: "So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids." Chicago Children's Museum's 3rd Annual No Kids Allowed parent and educator event. Keynote speech by Dr. Levin, followed by lively dinner conversations focused on Dr. Levin's address. Dr. Levin, an author of many books and a professor at Wheelock College in Boston, is an internationally-known expert on the subjects of children and the media, advertising to children, and the commercialization of childhood. She spoke at the 2008 Alliance Networking Dinner to rave reviews. 6:00-7:00—keynote speech; 7:00-9:00—conversations over dinner and dessert. \$100 per person, \$50 educator and student rate. For more info, call 312-464-7702.

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4-6 Spring Book Fair at Joseph Sears School. 542 Abbotsford Rd., Kenilworth. For more information, please call. 847-256-5006.

7 The Volunteer Center's Annual Recognition Luncheon and Volunteer Fair. At the Michigan Shores Club, 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. The Executive Director of the Inspiration Cafe will be the speaker. Attend fair and visit with agency reps. immediately before luncheon. Call the Volunteer Center for more info. 847-441-7665.

7 "Beauty and the Beast, Jr." Christian Heritage Academy's Lion's Pride Ambassadors present at 1:00 p.m. on May 7 and at 7:30 p.m. on May 8. For more info, please call 847-446-5252.

11 Superintendent of the Winnetka Public Schools Discusses District 36's History and Philosophy. Join Dr. Mary Herrmann, as she discusses the rich history and philosophy of the Winnetka Public Schools. Appropriate for parents of incoming kindergarten students, those new to the school district, or anyone interested in learning more about the Winnetka Public Schools. 9:15-10:30 a.m. in the Community Room at Skokie School, 520 Glendale, Winnetka. For more info, call Nancy Fehrenbach, 847-441-8618.

13 Nutrition Roundtable. Childhood nutrition is more important than ever and easier than you think! The first Nutrition Roundtable, sponsored by the Winnetka Alliance, will bring parents together to discuss this important topic. Learn about nutrition, trade ideas that work, talk about creating a healthy community, and find solutions that strike the appropriate balance for us all. Nutritionist Michelle McKenna, M.S., R.D. will be on hand to offer her practical expertise. 1:00 p.m. at the Winnetka Public Library (in the Lloyd Room.) Questions? Call Tev Bond at 847-207-3139.

28 Middlefork School's Kindergarten Visitation Day. For incoming students and their parents. Meet the kindergarten staff and tour the classrooms. Visit anytime between 3:15-4:30 p.m. and 6:00-7:00 p.m. 847-446-6725.

30 63rd Annual Northfield Family Fun Fair at Middlefork School. Amusements, food and games for all ages. 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. 847-446-6725.



JUNE

12 & 13 65th Annual Winnetka Children's Fair. Winnetka Community Nursery School's annual fair, held on the Winnetka Village Green on Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Games, rides, face painting, pony rides, booths and refreshments. Fun for the whole family. 847-446-4432.

15 Winnetka Community Nursery School's Summer Camp begins. Call 847-446-4432 for more information.

18 Adventures in Learning. This tuition-supported summer program, sponsored by the Winnetka Public Schools, is designed to provide exploratory learning for elementary school children under the direction of skilled Winnetka teachers. Activities are centered around the child's interest and experiences in self-chosen areas of study, promoting discovery and exploration for maximum enjoyment of learning. June 18-July 17. For more information, call 847-446-9400.

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DATES AHEAD

July 4 Winnetka Fourth of July Celebration. Parade begins at 10 a.m. Flag-raising ceremony, children's flag parade, and family races follow the parade on the Village Green at 11 a.m. From 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Duke Child's Field, the Winnetka Park District presents "Fourth Fest," featuring food, children's entertainment, and pre-fireworks concert. Fireworks begin at 9:15 p.m. Free of charge.

Oct. 17 Winnetka Public School Nursery's Pumpkin Fest. 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Pumpifest is held on the Village Green in Winnetka. Great family fun with games, rides, food and pumpkins galore. For more information, please call 847-446-5153.

Oct. 21 French School Open House. 7:00 p.m. Please call to make a reservation. 562 Green Bay Rd., Winnetka. 847-501-5800.

March 7-13, 2010 TV Tune Out Week. Join over 6,000 kids in Winnetka, Northfield, Kenilworth, Wilmette, Glencoe, and Glenview as they experience a week without television or other screens during the 16th Annual TV Tune Out Week. Choose from dozens of alternative activities available all week long. Find more information on the Winnetka Alliance's website at www.winnetkaalliance.org.



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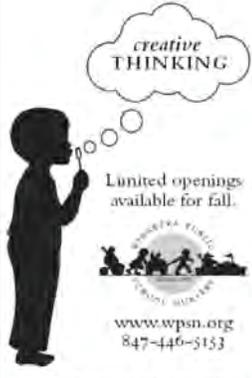
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B. J.'S BOOKS



B. J. Kass discusses books for and about young children

ARE THERE BOOKS THAT ARE JUST FOR BOYS?

by B. J. Kass

There has been a movement afoot the past few years to concentrate on “books for boys.” “All the books are written for girls.” and “Why don’t the publishers print more books that will interest boys?” are common statements. Jon Scieszka has a website on the subject, as do several other people. Their take on the supposed fact that boys are not reading is that there is a lack of good books for boys and therefore not the selection that boys need to spend quality time reading.

People who have heard me talk about good literature for children, since my days of working and overseeing the book fairs at The Book Stall at Chestnut Court, have heard me say, probably more than once, “Girls read boys’ books, but boys do not read girls’ books.” While this truism speaks for itself, I do not feel that it means there are no good books for boys or that books with female characters are not good reading for boys. What is a good book for boys is exactly the same thing that is a good book for girls. It is a book that is well written, that has wonderful language, that has developed characters with whom the reader identifies, that has settings that are valid and vivid, that has a plot that draws the reader into the action, and that has an ending that brings resolution to the reader with knowledge gained or emotional development. It should not matter that the characters are male or female. Who cannot identify emotionally with *Julie of the Wolves*? Or Annemarie Johanesen and Ellen Rosen in *Number the Stars*? Or Kevin Henkes’ *Chrysanthemum*, if your name is Zachariah Xerxes?

If one is looking for good picture books for boys I would suggest that any good picture book is the proper choice.

Librarians and teachers have spent years promoting the concept that truck books are not just for boys, just as books about playing house are not just for girls. I am sure that no one in the 21st century would limit picture books to characters that are the same sex as the listener. Of course, authors and publishers think they bypass that concept by having cute little animals instead of real children.

Once past picture books, the field of genres opens up much like a blossoming flower. Let’s look at some of these categories.

Folktales: There are single stories and collections and enough stories of kings, queens, princes, quests, and tricksters to satisfy everyone. At the public library, look in the 398.2 Dewey Decimal section.

The genres for beginning readers, middle readers and older readers are pretty similar. The number of choices expands as the books become more challenging. Within **fiction** or **novels**, there is a wealth of great reading of the following types: **historical fiction; mysteries; science fiction; fantasy.** Do not forget **non-fiction** and **biographies** which are a specialized category of non-fiction.

Fiction: Some of the types of books that fall into the fiction genre include humorous stories, contemporary life, historical fiction, survival and adventure stories, mysteries, fantasies, and science fiction. Again, may I emphasize that the qualities of a good book are the language, characters, themes, plot and setting. Let me say here that I DO NOT expect boys to be interested in the latest “prom queen” book. Based on the truism I mentioned above, girls may be interested in a book about a male wrestler

achieving success and fame, but a boy will most likely not be interested in a book about two girls living the angst of dating. I specifically did not mention sports books because it is the first genre everyone thinks about for boys. May I remind all that not every young male is a sport enthusiast.

Biographies: The field is so wide, the possibilities are limitless. Any interest that any child has can be expanded by suggesting biographies: for history—world leaders; for science—scientists and inventors; for the arts—musicians, artists and writers. And, of course, the vast field of sports stars.

Non-fiction: Do not forget to suggest non-fiction for reading. There are a number of children who never find a lot of satisfaction from reading fiction. They were born as non-fiction readers and probably will be for all of their lives. They will work their way through most of the categories of non-fiction, from science and technology to history to poetry to reference. If you have a young gentleman who is particularly difficult to satisfy, try pointing him toward non-fiction.

I am not making any title suggestions. They would be limitless. But, here are some web sites and some books that may help with titles.

- Michael Sullivan, www.talestoldtall.com
- Jon Scieszka, www.guysread.com
- *Great Books for Boys* by Kathleen Odean
- *Best Books for Boys: A Resource for Educators* by Matthew D. Zbaracki

B. J. Kass is a children’s literature consultant who has worked at Greeley School and The Book Stall at Chestnut Court.

PARENTING Q AND A

continued from page 2

ing or biting), and the problem could very well have this completely natural consequence. You could then help your child understand that the cat is afraid of him, and that if he/she wants the cat to like him and trust him, he will have to behave differently. You can reinforce the concept of “gentle” and even practice it by petting stuffed animals. Then reintroduce the actual cat under your supervision while the child demonstrates his gentle handling. I would try to maintain supervised contact for awhile (a couple of months at least) before trusting that the appropriate treatment is fully in place.

Q *What should you do when a five-year-old girl kisses a five-year-old boy?*
Not Ready to Be the Mother of a Teen

A Dear Not Ready,
Years ago, my answer to this question may very well have been, “Get your camera!” But thoughts on this have changed significantly more recently. First off, it depends on *where* this behavior is occurring. Today, even in preschools, there is much concern around the subject of children touching one another in any way that may be construed as intrusive, unwanted, or even just undesirable. A five-year-old already has learned that the rules can be quite different between home and school; also, he/she has probably experienced homes with very different rules during play dates or at relatives’ homes. So, a child this age should have no difficulty accepting that this is against school rules, just the same as roughhousing and wrestling, and that therefore school is not the place for this.

Developmentally speaking, five is a prime age for curiosity about adult roles and behaviors, and boys and girls still mix

together in their play. Children this age may have strong “romantic” feelings for one another that they are interested in playing out. It’s not at all unusual to hear kindergarteners talk about who they intend to marry, and they feel quite serious about it. There’s no need to worry about whether your child is heading directly toward a premature adolescence, though. Within the next year or so, children will begin to segregate dramatically into boys-only and girls-only groupings, with very little intermingling, and this will remain the case until early adolescence brings renewed (and often intense!) interest in the opposite sex.

With that said, you really do have the liberty of deciding your own comfort level with the kissing. Some parents find it charming and maintain a relaxed attitude about it (as long as it doesn’t become too much of a preoccupation), while others are uncomfortable and choose to discourage it. As with any and all behavior that our children engage in, the important thing is to make sure they understand that *both* children *must agree* that this is *mutually acceptable!* This holds true whether we are dealing with wrestling, roughhousing and other such behaviors, or hugging, kissing and the like. Children must always respect their friends’ wishes, and must also be prepared to take no for an answer!

Q *My eight-year-old daughter, Maddy (not her real name), has recently talked about being “fat.” She is a completely normal eight-year-old and I have no idea where she got the idea that she was fat or what I should do about it. Help!*

North Shore Mom

A Dear North Shore Mom,
This is a sad reality of our contemporary American culture. Even if you have never said a word about weight or thinness, by the age of eight, “Maddy” has been bombarded by

messages about this via the media literally all of her life.

Research has amply demonstrated that female dissatisfaction with appearance – poor body-image–begins at a very early age. Human infants begin to recognize themselves in mirrors by about two years old. Girls begin to dislike what they see only a few years later! Recent surveys show that even very young girls are going on diets because they think they are fat and unattractive. In one American survey, 81% of ten-year-old girls indicated they had already dieted at least once!

Why are girls so self-critical? Because even young girls understand that they will be judged on their appearance more than boys will, and that standards of female beauty are considerably higher and more inflexible. Girls are continually flooded with images of the ‘ideal’ face and figure. Constant exposure to idealized images of female beauty on TV, magazines and billboards makes exceptional good looks seem normal and anything short of perfection seem abnormal and ugly. It has been estimated that young women now see more images of outstandingly beautiful women in one day than our mothers saw throughout their entire adolescence!

Counteracting all of this should be an ongoing part of parenting our daughters, and this begins with monitoring your own attitudes and behavior. Focus as much as possible on who your child *is*—he many qualities that make her unique—and minimize focus on physical appearance. Watch how you talk about your own body and physical appearance, making sure you don’t make comments about your own imperfections, need to lose weight, aging, etc. Keep a dialogue going about the media and how it promotes unrealistic images that can be harmful to us, and use specific examples from her favorite shows, bands, and performers. When you go to the park, or mall, or any place where there are a lot of regular people, point out the reality of how we come in many different shapes, sizes, types, backgrounds, and that this tremendous variety is something to be cherished and celebrated. Finally, make sure you stress the importance of being healthy—eating well and being physically active—as being vital ways to care for our bodies and ourselves, rather than adhering to someone else’s narrow concept of attractiveness.



Four-year-old twins Peyton and Carter were discussing what they wanted to be when they grew up as they rode in the back seat. “I’m going to be a doctor,” announced Peyton. “I’m going to be a doctor, an artist, or a soldier,” replied her sister. “Of course,” mused Peyton thoughtfully, “I guess I can’t be the Easter Bunny.”

TO YOUR FAMILY'S HEALTH

Advice and commentary on medical issues by Michelle Liu, R. N.

EAR INFECTIONS: CAUSES AND TREATMENT

by Michelle Liu, R. N.

Ear infections are a common illness in young children. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), during the first few years of life, the chances are significant that when a child has a cold, he or she will also acquire an ear infection. In fact, the AAP states that two-thirds of all children have at least one infection by their second birthday. Luckily most children will outgrow this by the time they enter grade school.

There are three parts to the human ear: the outer ear, the middle ear, and the inner ear. The outer ear includes the part of the ear that we can see as well as the ear canal. It is separated from the middle ear with the eardrum or tympanic membrane. The middle ear is normally an air filled area with some tiny bones and the opening of the Eustachian tube. The inner ear includes the cochlea, which is the organ of hearing; it also includes the semicircular canals, which affect balance. Most commonly infections affect the middle ear with a build up of fluid. This is called otitis media.

Middle ear infections usually start with a cold or allergies; fluid will collect in the middle ear. In addition to causing discomfort and decreased hearing, it also sets up a perfect environment for an ear infection to begin. Children have smaller and straighter Eustachian tubes which connect the middle ear to the nose, and it is prone to obstruct during seasonal allergy or a cold.

The National Institute of Health reports that common childhood ear infections do affect hearing, even if temporarily. Ear infections affect the way sounds travel through an ear. If an ear is filled with fluid, sounds are just plain different. Unfortunately, this is happening at a critical time of speech development.

Carole White, M.S., CCC-SLP/L, preschool speech–language pathologist for District 36, referenced research from the American Speech and Hearing Association and the *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* to comment on the continued controversy surrounding the link between frequent ear infections and delayed speech. Hearing loss usually is reversible, once the middle ear fluid clears, but recurrent ear infections may affect the learning cycles for speech and language. If you suspect your



Photo by Betsy Kochmar

child is behind his or her peers, then contact your district for a speech screening. Winnetka Public Schools provides screening for preschool children each spring, as do most other school districts in the area.

When an older child has an ear infection, he or she can tell the parents that his or her ear hurts. Sometimes the child may not have pain with each infection or it may happen over time, so the child may not recognize the pain. Dr. Shoshana Elkin Waskow, from Pediatric Associates of the North Shore in Wilmette and Glenview, states that, if children are under age three, they should be brought in to the pediatrician if they awake from sleep acting fussy, pulling or rubbing an ear, and/or if they have a fever. With children over age three, Dr. Waskow recommends bringing them in

right away if they have fever and pain. If a child is complaining of ear pain but does not have a fever, Dr. Waskow says that the current recommendation is to wait a day or two before bringing the child into the pediatrician, as, in many cases, it will go away without treatment.

When you bring your child to see the pediatrician, he or she will look into the child's ear with an otoscope to evaluate the ear. Once it has been determined that the child does, indeed, have an infection, then the decision of which antibiotic to use will be made. If a child is younger than two, Dr. Waskow says that the current practice is to treat with antibiotics. If the child is over two, antibiotics will, often times, be held, since ninety percent of children over two will improve spontaneously. If the pain isn't controlled or if the child has continued fever despite Tylenol or Ibuprofen, then an antibiotic will be initiated.

If a child has multiple infections, he or she may be referred to an otolaryngologist or ENT to be evaluated for possible ear tube placement. Dr. Waskow will usually

refer if a child has more than four infections per season or six to seven per year. The surgery is called myringotomy, and the doctor will place tiny tubes into the eardrum, allowing fluid to drain. This would, in theory, decrease the incidence of middle ear fluid build up and, thus, infections. The surgery takes about 10-15 minutes and the child comes home the same day and goes back to school the next day. The tubes

normally will fall out on their own, and only a small percentage of children will need to have the tubes replaced.

Ear infections are a common problem faced by parents and can usually be treated either symptomatically or with antibiotics. Rarely, surgical tubes may need to be inserted. The prevention of repeated middle ear infection will decrease the chances of hearing loss and its possible long-term effects. If you suspect your child is experiencing an ear infection, don't hesitate to call your pediatrician. You are your child's best advocate.

Michelle Liu, R.N., is a former school nurse and the mother of four children. She has also worked in neurology and neurosurgery at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

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continued from page 7

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EATING OUT WITH KIDS

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be made on whole wheat bread, with sides of fruit, and good soup (a good way to sneak in a serving of vegetables).

Another new local spot is **D'Haute Dog**, which serves turkey hot dogs and burgers, sweet potato fries (a good source of vitamin A), soups, and salads. It even has a black bean burger and organic milk.

All fast food spots have their nutritional information online. Be prepared to know what items have the least calories and fat with the most nutrition. For example, at **McDonald's**, the best bet for kids would be the Happy Meal with chicken nuggets, apple slices, and milk.

There are many good places to dine in the area—these are only a few. The ordering tips contained in this article can be easily transferred to your favorite spot. Often just ask and your wait staff will provide a side of vegetables or fruit which may not be listed on the menu.

Start educating your kids early, eat well, and have fun!

Winnetka resident Michelle McKenna, M.S., R.D., is a registered dietitian with a Master's degree in nutrition from Rush University.

ALLIANCE OFFERS TRIBUTE FOR INSPIRING TEACHERS

Once again, as part of this year's Annual Appeal, the Winnetka Alliance will offer the opportunity to thank an outstanding early childhood educator whom you feel has made a special difference in the lives of young children. For every contribution of at least \$75, the Alliance will recognize a designated educator in several ways:

- ◆ He or she will receive a personal letter, telling of the gift on his/her behalf. The donor will have the option of including a personal statement.
- ◆ His or her principal or director will be advised of this distinction.
- ◆ His or her name will be posted on the Alliance website, listed in *Early Childhood*,

and mentioned in the *Winnetka Talk's* School Digest column.

- ◆ He or she will be acknowledged at the Alliance's 2010 Networking Dinner.

Those wishing to honor a teacher may complete the form below and enclose it with your check. Details about how to make a Tribute gift are also available at www.winnetkaalliance.org.

A Teacher Tribute gift can ensure that a dedicated teacher hears an important thank you "many times, many ways" while affording the Alliance the critical funds it requires to continue serving the community's youngest members, their parents, and their teachers. Acknowledge greatness—thank a teacher!

Pay Tribute to an Outstanding Early Childhood Educator.

Each \$75 donation honors one outstanding early childhood educator. Educators will be recognized with a letter from the Winnetka Alliance and notice to their school. Their names will be published in the *Winnetka Talk* and *Early Childhood*, posted on the Alliance website, and announced at the January 2010 Networking Dinner. **Thank an educator today...and help support the work of the Winnetka Alliance, too.**

Educator's Name: _____

School/Center: _____

Address: _____

Optional comments about this educator:

Thank you for your tax-deductible contribution to the Winnetka Alliance. Your gift makes it possible to support the parents and professionals who nurture and teach our young children in Winnetka, Northfield, Kenilworth, and on the North Shore.

___\$50 ___\$75* ___\$100 ___\$250 ___\$500

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PRACTICAL PARENTING



WHAT TO EAT WHEN EATING OUT WITH CHILDREN

by Michelle McKenna

We all know how hard it is to get our children to eat healthy foods at home. It seems almost impossible when you go out to eat. The kids' menus seem to be filled with things like chicken fingers, hot dogs, and grilled cheese. We get excited when we see pasta with butter or tomato sauce. Is this nutritious? To get the nutrients needed for proper health and growth, children between the ages of six and 11 should consume five servings of whole grains, 4-5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 4-5 ounces of protein, and 2-3 servings of calcium-rich foods. A recent study claims that kids who eat fast food on a regular basis lose any benefits gained from breastfeeding in protection against asthma. In addition, fast food increases the risk of obesity and diabetes.

If eating out was only for special occasions, it would not be an issue. However, nearly half of all American families eat out once a week or more. Therefore, it is important to find a way for kids to eat healthy foods, even when eating out.

There are many occasions and reasons that families eat out. When the kids are little, parents usually look for a place where kids will be entertained and not cause too much commotion. As kids get older, parents may choose restaurants that they themselves enjoy. Reasons for eating out range from busy schedules and no time to

prepare a meal at home to the pure enjoyment. Whatever the reasons, here are some tips that can make the eating out easier and, hopefully, healthier.

Some tips at local spots

A great way to get kids to try new things is take them out to eat, as they may be more willing in a new setting. **Jerry's** and **Mariana's** in Winnetka are great places for this. Go early during the week to experience fewer crowds. These restaurants offer small portions and you can order multiple things for the table to share, giving your children a chance to sample things without pressure. You may find they like beets (both serve a great beet salad) which are loaded with vitamins A, B, and C, as well as many minerals. Other good local spots like **JP McCarthy's** will bring a side of vegetables, when asked. **Little Ricky's** has some great chopped salads with lots of vegetables and protein which it will serve with less or no lettuce for your child. **The Noodle Shop** in Wilmette makes its own whole wheat pasta. All of these restaurants have nice appetizers, salads, and pasta.

Buon Giorno offers a good breakfast and smoothies packed with fresh fruit. For lunch, places such as **Panera**, **Corner Bakery**, **Captain Nemo's**, and **Three Tarts** offer sandwiches that can

TIPS FOR EATING OUT WITH KIDS

1 When you can, stay clear of the kids' menu. Instead, order appetizers or half orders, split a meal between children, or give them some of yours off the regular menu.

2 If you must order the chicken fingers, get a side of vegetables or fruit.

3 Stay away from the soda. Get kids used to ordering milk or water.

4 Set a good example. Make sure that you, as parents, order healthy things when eating out.

5 Set guidelines for ordering before you go.

6 Become familiar with the menus of the restaurants you frequent. Most places have a website with their menu available these days.

7 Use the opportunity of eating out to try new things. You might be surprised that the kid who won't eat broccoli at home might just eat it when out.

8 Go for balance. Try to choose a lean protein, fruit, or vegetable, and a whole grain.

9 Ask the wait staff not to bring bread to the table before the meal. Kids (like adults) will fill up on bread and end up not eating their dinner.

10 Try a salad with protein (like chicken) and a lot of vegetables. Then, ask the server to go light on the lettuce. If you can get the salad chopped, this might be a good option for children on finger food. If you order dessert, get something for the table to share.

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