



The Alliance
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early Childhood THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALLIANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

FALL/WINTER 2020

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THE POWER OF SHOWING UP

How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become And How Their Brains Get Wired

..... By Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

An excerpt

IT CAN BE an overwhelming experience these days, trying to decide how best to raise our kids. An online search of parenting styles will leave you in a sea of confusing and contradictory terms and philosophies where parents are compared to helicopters, tigers, pandas, lawnmowers, snow plows, and more. And each metaphor comes with explicit instructions regarding what a loving parent does

or doesn’t do. Most of the discussions and arguments are worthwhile, in that they lead parents toward being more intentional about the way they want to raise their kids. But it’s all so complicated. The good news is that we can strip away all of the childrearing debates and competing philosophies, and boil parenting down to the one concept that matters most when it comes to helping children be happy and healthy, so they enjoy and find meaning

in life and in relationships. Our answer is simple (but not necessarily easy): We can show up for our kids. It’s smart to avoid simplistic formulas or so-called magic bullets that offer the one true way to raise kids. The fact is that parenting is complex and challenging, and the “answers” to most questions depend on the age and stage of the child, the overall situation, and your child’s temperament, not to

Continued on page 2

mention your own. That being said, though, virtually all parenting questions and dilemmas truly do come down to the idea of relationship, of showing up.

Showing up means what it sounds like. It means being there for your kids. It means being *physically* present, as well as providing a *quality* of presence. Provide it when you're meeting their needs; when you're expressing your love to them; when you're disciplining them; when you're laughing together; even when you're arguing with them. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to read all the parenting best-sellers, or sign your kids up for all the right enrichment activities. You don't have to have a committed co-parent. You don't even have to know exactly what you're doing. Just show up.

The longitudinal research on child development clearly demonstrates that one of the very best predictors for how any child turns out—in terms of happiness, social and emotional development, leadership skills, meaningful relationships, and even academic and career success—is whether they developed security from having at least one person who showed up for them. Across cultures around the globe these studies reveal a universal finding about how we can parent well, if not flawlessly.

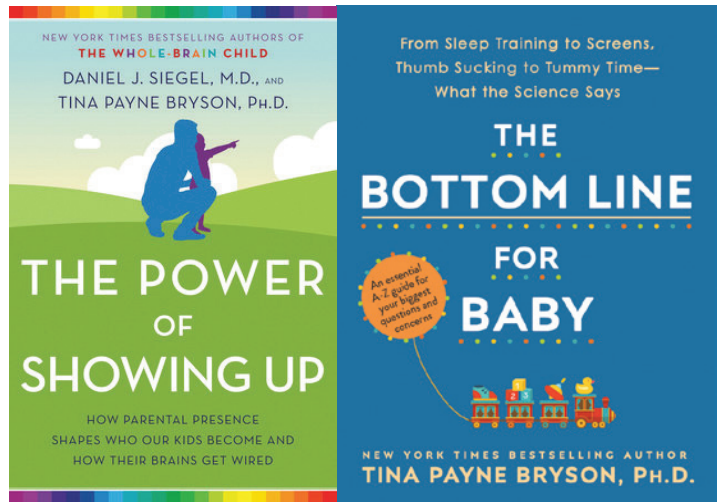
Predictable care that supports a healthy and strength-producing relationship comes in the form of what we call the “Four S’s”—helping kids feel 1) *safe*—where they feel protected and sheltered from harm; 2) *seen*—where they know you care about them and pay attention to them; 3) *soothed*—where they know you'll be there for them when they're hurting; and 4) *secure*—which develops from the other S's so

they trust you to predictably help them feel “at home” in the world, then learn to help themselves feel safe, seen, and soothed.

As a result, the child will not only be happier, but she'll also be much more socially adept, which means she'll be better able to get along with others, collaboratively solve problems, consider consequences, think about other people's feelings, and on and on. In short, a securely attached child is not only happier and more content, she's also much easier to be with and to parent.

For example, think about the first “S.” An absolute requirement for feeling secure is to feel safe. Kids feel safe when they feel protected physically, emotionally, and relationally. This is the first step towards a secure attachment, since a parent's first job is to keep his or her kids safe. They need to *feel* and *know* that they're safe. They have to know that their parents are going to protect them from physical harm, but that also, their parents are going to keep them safe emotionally and relationally. This doesn't mean that parents can't ever make a mistake or say or do something that leads to hurt feelings. We're all going to do that, a lot more than we'd like. But when we mess up with our kids—or when they mess up with us—we can repair with them as soon as appropriate. This is how they learn that even when mistakes are made and harsh words spoken, we still love each other and want to make things right again. That message, when consistently delivered, leads to a feeling of safety. Remember, the key is repair, repair, repair. There's no such thing as perfect parenting.

The second of the Four S's focuses on helping kids feel seen. A big part of parenting is about simply showing up for our kids physically: we attend



their recitals, spend time with them, play with them, read together, and plenty more. “Quantity time” does matter, yes. Of course it does. But *seeing* a child is more than just being physically present. It's about attuning to what's going on inside of them and really giving them our attention that's focused on their inner feelings, thoughts, memories, and whatever's happening in their minds *beneath* their behaviors. Truly seeing a child means we pay attention to their emotions, both positive and negative. Not every second of every day. No one can do that. But on a consistent basis, we celebrate our kids' joys and victories, and we hurt with them when they experience the injuries life will inevitably deliver. We tune in to their internal landscape. That's what it means to show up emotionally and relationally, to be there for our kids and teach them what it means to love and care for someone. This is how our children come to “feel felt” by us, to sense that we feel what is going on inside them beyond just observing their external behavior. When they know that we'll dependably show up—not perfectly, and maybe not even every single time—then they'll build those mental models that lead to deep security. Add this experience of feeling seen to

feeling safe, and a child will be well on the way towards living a life full of security, meaning, and joy.

In addition to feeling safe and seen, we want our children to feel *soothed* during their toughest times. That doesn't mean—at all—that we rescue them from all pain and discomfort. Difficult moments are, of course, where they often learn and grow the most. We must allow our kids, depending on their age and stage of life, to undergo those trying times they experience when conflict arises with friends, teachers, and others. To put it differently, soothing our children isn't about getting rid of the waves they will inevitably face in life's ocean. It's about teaching them to ride the waves when they come—and being with them when they need us. There should never be any doubt in their minds about whether we will show up when the hard times do come. They should know, at their core, that when they are hurting, and even when they're at their worst, we will be there. We will show up. We have to let them learn that with life comes pain, but that lesson should be accompanied by the deep awareness that they'll never have to suffer alone.

Feeling safe, seen, and soothed will lead to the fourth

S, security, which is based on predictability. Again, it's not about perfection. No one can parent without making mistakes. Rather, it's about letting your kids know that they can count on you, time and again, to show up. Their security will come when they believe that you'll do all you can to keep them safe, that you'll work hard to help them feel seen when they come to you, and that when things don't go their way, you'll be there to soothe them. The neurobiological effect of the Four S's is an integrated brain: a nervous system that's resilient and that doesn't stay in prolonged stress. As a result, kids can approach life from an assumption that they are safe, that love and relationships will be consistent and present in their lives, and that life's inevitable difficult storms can be weathered, leaving them feeling secure and at home in the world.

It's an exciting time to be raising children, considering the knowledge we now have about how to shape and encourage the growth of strong connections in their brains and bodies. Yes, life and the world in which we live offer many challenges in these rapidly changing times. But we have the opportunity to help our kids develop the inner resources and interpersonal skills that will cultivate their long-lasting resilience and empower them to live full, connected, and meaningful lives. In many ways, learning

to show up for our kids teaches them the skills of showing up fully for life itself. What better gift could we possibly offer. ●



Dr. Tina Payne Bryson is the co-author (with Dan Siegel) of two *New York Times* Best Sellers—*The Whole-Brain Child* and *No-Drama Discipline*—each of which has been translated into dozens of languages, as well as *The Yes Brain* and *The Power of Showing Up* and the forthcoming *Bottom Line for Baby*. She is the founder and executive director of *The Center for Connection*, a multidisciplinary clinical practice in Southern California. Dr. Bryson keynotes conferences and conducts workshops for parents, educators, and clinicians all over the world, and she frequently consults with schools, businesses, and other organizations. An LCSW, Tina is a graduate of Baylor University with a Ph.D. from USC. The most important part of her bio, she says, is that she's a mom to her three boys. You can learn more about Dr. Bryson at TinaBryson.com. We were honored that Dr. Bryson presented to our community of educators this past August at our 6th Annual Pre-K Summit, *Reimagining Connections in Early Learning*.




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LET'S PLAY! FORT BUILDING
 November 7 & 8, 10am-4pm • Crow Island Woods
 Sign-up required. theallianceforec.org




DEAR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS,

Since our issue last spring, our world has rapidly evolved and continues to change before our feet can plant on the ground to step forward. With the pandemic of COVID-19, 2020 has been an unprecedented year for our country and the world, schools and systems, and families and children. **While the prescription for our physical health is “physical distance,” our mental health needs connection and closeness to thrive. This year The Alliance for Early Childhood will offer programs that support the mental health of those who care for our most vulnerable, youngest community members.**

Our Fall/Winter issue weaves insight from both national and local leaders on the topic of connecting in early childhood. Our cover article, written by Dr. Tina Payne Bryson, boils down the power of showing up for our children, and how in return it will teach our children the skills of showing up fully for life itself. Alex Morgan, uncovers embracing digital humanity during a time of physical separation. Molly Pope acknowledges the challenges of parenting during a pandemic. Lesley Koplow explores safeguarding the essentials of early childhood education with connection being at the center. It is my hope that these diverse perspectives inspire our community to reflect and think about the importance of connection as we continue to step forward.

The Alliance for Early Childhood is committed to playing and learning together this year. We believe that our mission and vision are needed more than ever right now, and that connections are vital to the healthy growth and development of children. Please read below as to how we will embrace and adapt playing and learning together in 2020-2021 to nurture and strengthen connection.

PLAYING TOGETHER

Let's Play! is The Alliance for Early Childhood's ongoing community program, inviting families to engage and interact with their children in child-directed, creative, free play. This summer, we surveyed our community to guide our planning for this year. Based on survey data, we will host a variety of options to unplug and connect, including:

- In-person, outdoor events, based on Restore Illinois Guidelines. This will include necessary pre-registration for events with limited capacity and social distancing.
- At home events, that will invite families to participate through social media and community emails.

This year, our Let's Play! Guide will be published digitally to allow for up-to-date revisions as they arise.

Even though things may look slightly different this year, our ongoing Let's Play! Community Program will continue to:

- Bring our community together
- Unplug and connect families to experience learning together through play

- Provide children the opportunity to engage in child-directed free play, allowing them to follow their own instincts, ideas and interests
- Provide opportunities for children to negotiate, collaborate and problem solve through the creative process
- Engage parents with their children in experiences that build understanding of the importance of child-directed play

Please visit theallianceforec.org/lets-play to learn more about our 2020-2021 ongoing Let's Play! Community Program and for up-to-date calendar events.

LEARNING TOGETHER

Due to the many challenges of returning back to school during a pandemic, we reinvisioned our annual Preschool-Kindergarten Summit. This summer, we identified urgent professional learning needs for both in-person and remote learning, and delivered our **6th Annual Preschool-Kindergarten Summit Reimagining Connections in Early Learning** virtually, taking place August 4-August 20, 2020.

Our Virtual Pre-K Summit registered 2,200 educator attendees to engage in professional learning at home before school even started. It was our hope to inspire a positive start to the school year and support our early childhood educators to embrace the new school year ahead with confidence. We offered eleven virtual professional learning opportunities hosted by national and local experts in the field.

We are grateful to all of the elementary districts in New Trier Township for generously supporting our Pre-K Summit and allowing us to host Alliance member school educators for free. Thank you to the contributions from: Avoca District 37, Glencoe District 35, Joseph Sears School, Northern Suburban Special Education District (NSSD), Sunset Ridge District 29, Wilmette Public Schools District 39, Winnetka Community Nursery School, and Winnetka Public Schools District 36.

2020-2021 ALLIANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Educator Programming

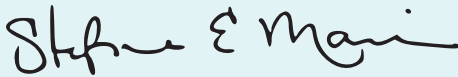
With the backdrop of COVID-19, educators are left especially vulnerable, as they navigate their own stress and concerns while modeling, teaching and caring for the social and emotional development of everyone who walks through their school doors. This year The Alliance for Early Childhood will offer ongoing relational, strengths-based support, that addresses the whole educator so she in turn can address the whole child. We will deliver a variety of programs from a licensed Infant/ Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant as a necessary and preventative strategy to ameliorate the disruption to social emotional development, caused by the safety precautions of COVID-19.

Parent Programming

Parent support is a necessity that our culture often overlooks. Young families need information and support as they navigate sleep schedules, eating habits, developmental milestones and challenging behavior. The physical distancing and health orders of COVID-19 have alienated the access and support they once had, such as grandparents and family, neighborhood or community groups, and even school. Additionally, the challenges many families are experiencing in the pandemic as they negotiate work schedules, sharing spaces, isolation, and changes in childcare have left parents with more concerns than usual. Accessible and attuned parent education is critical now more than ever. This year, The Alliance will launch a virtual support series, Pandemic Parenting: Tools and Tips.

As we embrace the new school year ahead, The Alliance is ready and eager to offer support to the adults who show up for children every day in our community. Please visit our website, theallianceforec.org, for up-to-date calendar information and specific program details. #WeGotThis.

In partnership,



Stefanie Maiuri · Executive Director
stefanie@theallianceforec.org



Stefanie Maiuri, Executive Director, taking connection to the next level during the pandemic with her two boys.



2020-2021 ONGOING COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Visit theallianceforec.org/lets-play to view our Let's Play! Guide.



Playing and Learning Together 2020-2021 CALENDAR EVENTS

OCTOBER 2020

Annual Networking Breakfast

October 2, 7:30-8:30am
Kenilworth Assembly Hall

EC Enrichment Series: Maintaining an In-Person Connection Through Interactive Distance Learning, Part II

October 13, 4-5pm

EC Enrichment Series: What's New In Children's Literature

October 22, 4-5:30pm

Pandemic Parenting: Tools and Tips

October 15, 7-7:45pm

NOVEMBER 2020

Directors' Reflective Practice Group

November 4, 1-2pm

Embracing What Counts: Professional Learning Series for Educators

November 5, 7-8pm

Let's Play! Fort Building, Crow Island Woods

November 7 & 8, 10am-4pm

Educator's Reflective Practice

November 17, 4-5pm

DECEMBER 2020

Pandemic Parenting: Tools and Tips

December 3, 7-7:45pm

Educator's Reflective Practice Group

December 15, 4-5pm

JANUARY 2021

Educator's Reflective Practice Group

January 12, 4-5pm

Directors' Reflective Practice Group

January 13, 1-2pm

Preschool Directors' Roundtable Meeting

January 21, 12:30-1:30pm

FEBRUARY 2021

Embracing What Counts: Professional Learning Series for Educators

February 11, 7-8pm

Pandemic Parenting: Tools and Tips

February 18, 7-7:45pm

Let's Play! Winter Woods Exploration

February 20, 10am-4pm
Crow Island Woods

Educator's Reflective Practice Group

February 23, 4-5pm

MARCH 2021

Directors' Reflective Practice Group


March 3

Symbol Key:

 **Parent**

 **Family**

 **Educator**

 **Parent & Educator**

Please visit our website www.theallianceforec.org for registration links and more information about events.

THE THINGS WE'RE HOLDING: THE LONG HAUL OF PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC

..... By Molly Pope



SEPTEMBER ARRIVED, and with it a new school year. But let's face it, this isn't a typical start to school. Whether your children are going back in person, remotely, or in some sort of hybrid, we are looking down the barrel of a pandemic school year. Nothing is promised, and every day we can eek out without sickness or shut-down is a win. We are a shriveled up bunch, we pandemic parents. We know this year is going to have its challenges.

We are coming off of five months of holding it together. The pandemic required us to give up a lot of our routines and connections that we lean on as parents. Gone were the summer camps, vacations, library visits, park dates, and big family gatherings. We made do with what was available. Our kids got bored and maybe a little lonely. But school will relieve some of that boredom and loneliness. There are new teachers who are investing in getting to know our children, and engage them in something new. There is a tiny light glowing at the end of the tunnel. So

let's take stock. What do we need to keep holding onto and what can we let go?

How can we sustain for the long haul of the school year?

Holding our breath

This is one that we have to let go. Literally. Like, right now. Breathe out whatever you've been holding. Take a deep breath and let your face and shoulders relax. There. The world is still spinning, clouds are still moving. We are going to need to take a lot of those deep breaths this year. You are going to be challenged, as you support your e-learning child, navigate technology, new policies and schedules. Give yourself grace and compassion in those moments of overwhelm. Tune into your thoughts and feelings. Name what it is that is getting to you. As Dan Siegel, renowned neuropsychiatrist and parenting author tells us, we need to "name it to tame it." Awareness is the first step to kindness, and we need to be kind to ourselves if we are going to last.

Holding space for feelings

Our job as parents is to help

our children manage their big feelings. This can be difficult even on good days. But when we try to smoothe over a little one's upset with "you're ok, you're ok" or shut down a big tantrum with a time out, we're communicating to our children that WE can't handle their big emotions. How do they learn to handle them themselves? Holding space for feelings is about letting your child feel what they are feeling, and helping organize their feelings by naming that feeling and normalizing their experience. "It's sad when we have to leave the park. You were having so much fun and now we have to go. I know it's hard." We want them to know that ALL of their feelings are valid, and that they are loved, regardless of their mood. That's unconditional love, to love someone even at their worst. Let's face it, some feelings are uncomfortable for us. It's ok if we are still learning to accept uncomfortable feelings. The path may be a little rocky for us. We can honestly tell them, "All of your feelings are valid. They are

not too big or scary for me to handle." After saying that the first few times, you will start to believe it yourself.

Holding boundaries

Family rules and routines got a little hazy this pandemic summer. Screen time rules flew out the window, bedtimes got later in summer, and staying in your pajamas all day was perfectly acceptable. With the return of the school year, we may find we need structure and routines back in place. Sometimes the above suggestion to hold space for children's feelings can get interpreted to "let my children do what they want because they are sad." This is not the case. We can softly hold space for children's feelings, while firmly holding the rule or boundary that caused the upset. We can empathize with their frustration, while calmly restating the expectation. It can take some practice, and some days go better than others, but children need you to hold the boundaries in order to feel safe and secure.

The other boundary that will be important to hold this school year is the one for yourself. You will continue to have your own big feelings and thoughts that you'll need to unload and work out with someone. Find your people. Call on them to do your venting, commiserating, joking and crying. This will enable you to be a supportive problem solver with your child, rather than getting swept up with them in the frustration or current crisis. You can honestly tell your child that you don't have all the answers, and be ok with that ambiguity, IF you've worked out your own worries with a friend or partner.

Holding onto connections
 Dr. Gordon Neufeld, developmental psychologist and author, reminds us that “parenting is not a set of skills and behaviors, but above all, a relationship.” No matter how old our children are or where we are in our parenting journey, the constant we have with our children is our relationship. Being intentional to make time and connect with our children will be important as we return to the rhythm of the school year. How do we do that when we have multiple children, multiple schedules, and multiple Zoom calls happening on any given day? Take a look at your natural routines like mealtime, getting dressed, bath time, and car rides. These are the moments where we can follow their lead, listen, be playful and present for our kids. And what about when things go poorly, you snap and tears ensue? Take that deep breath and remember that repair is the most important part of being in relationship with your children. It allows us to model how to be humble and human, and how to address one’s mistakes. Don’t worry if it’s awkward at first, once you commit to the path of making repairs with your children, you will find you have lots of opportunities to practice!

of yourself? This is going to take some of that same courage.” We can turn around and look at the experiences of the past five months to illustrate how we’re going to get through more pandemic challenges. As parents, we don’t hold all the answers, but we hold the big picture that helps organize the expectations of our children. Trauma therapist and author, Bonnie Badenoch tells us that “one of the cornerstones of resilience is building the expectation that when things go wrong, they will be righted again.” We also offer a growth mindset, that even if something is hard or goes sideways, doesn’t mean it’s bad. This is a helpful reminder for ourselves as well. We will get through this, and come out the other side that much more resilient, as long as we take care of ourselves, get support when we need it, and stay connected to those who remind us of these things when we forget. ●



***Molly Pope** has been working with early childhood and elementary age children for over 15 years as a school psychologist. Using a neurodevelopmental relationship-based approach, she works with teachers, parents, and administrators to help build connected relationships and supportive learning environments for children. She currently provides mental health consultation to preschools and child care settings, as well as parent coaching and education. Molly presented at our 6th Annual Pre-K Summit, Reimagining Connections in Early Learning this past August. www.mollypopec.com*

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EMBRACING DIGITAL HUMANITY DURING A TIME OF PHYSICAL SEPARATION

..... By Alex Morgan



Using projection and webcams to augment reality. Through this experience, children can relate to each other in new and different ways.

“You have to consider the computer, the digital, a material. It is important not only to give children experiences with technology, new and old, to use as a tool—but also to use digital as a material.”
—Carlina Rinaldi, President, Foundation Reggio Children - Loris Malaguzzi Center

THE PAST three decades have brought major changes in the ways we relate to each other, offering additional platforms and strategies for connection across long distances. New technologies have been developed, making it possible to respond to non-verbal cues without sharing a physical space. We no longer have to gain information about far away places through static and unresponsive images, when we can now engage with augmented reality, such as a virtual tour that offers possibilities for exploration and investigation.

At Boulder Journey School, we have been researching young children’s relationships with technology for several years. Inspired by the words of Carlina Rinaldi, we have sought to examine ways that we can

offer children experiences to engage in collaborative, creative, and constructive uses of digital tools. We have looked for opportunities to step outside of passive, consumptive uses of technology and, with intentionality, searched for uses of robotics, social media, augmented reality, GPS, and more that provide us the ability to play with connection.

Boulder Journey School is a full-day, full-year early childhood program and teacher education program located in Boulder, Colorado that welcomes over 200 children, ages 6 weeks to 5 years, and their families. For almost 20 years, we have been inspired by our relationship with educators from the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and have engaged in an intensive study of their philosophy and values, including a strong image of children as capable and competent. Our partnership with educators from Reggio Emilia has impacted our daily life at the school, as well as how we educate teachers. We hold a strong image of teachers, just as we hold a strong image of children.

Our curriculum decisions, both with children and adults, are inspired by our values and philosophy and guided by these ten design principles.

One class of 4- and 5-year-old children used a combination of GPS and social media in the form of an app called Geocaching, a digital treasure map populated by real world treasures left by other players. The children embraced using the technology to search the neighborhood.

One of their Geocaching adventures led them to discover and explore an undeveloped strip of woods just a few blocks from the school. It is called ‘Violet Park’ but it is a park in name only. While they were there, they discovered hidden spaces, spent time climbing trees, making forts, and getting to know the Violet Park woods. This was an enchanted space, and in asking faculty who had been at the school for over 20 years, the class realized that, although right down the street, no one from the school had discovered it before. This union of technology and real world exploration took them to

undiscovered spots.

The children worked to create a guide to Violet Park filled with landmarks to find and possibilities to engage in. The finished guide was a gift to Geocachers, a wide community who can use it even though this class has moved on to Kindergarten and beyond. Read the guide created by the children: <http://bit.ly/violetpark>.

It was through experiences such as this one that we played with embracing the reality that the world we live in has one foot in the physical world, one foot in the digital world, and more than making due, we need to live our fullest lives in both of these worlds.

Then, in March 2020, like the rest of the world, we found ourselves wrenched from idealistic hypotheticals of fostering human connections within digital spaces to relying on digital spaces. As COVID-19 shut down our abilities to physically connect with one another, we were thrown into a time of confusion and fear as we, like the rest of the world, struggled to find our role navi-

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Learning IS...
 INTERDISCIPLINARY,
 SOCIALLY CO-CONSTRUCTED,
 MEANINGFUL AND RELEVANT,
 PERSONALIZED, NOT STANDARDIZED.

Learning HAPPENS...
 OVER TIME,
 THROUGH EXPERIENCE,
 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES,
 IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY,
 IN SPACES THAT ARE INSPIRING, PROVOCATIVE,
 AND VARIED.

Learning CAN...
 BRING SMALL & LARGE SCALE SOCIAL CHANGE.



Example of an invitation sent home to families. The teachers gathered photographs of children playing with light filters and invited families to find similar materials in their homes.

gating completely new terrain.

We found comfort in the words of Ellen Hall, our founding executive director:

"If everything around us is 'us', then the digital is also 'us'."

Ellen's words helped remind us that this new reality we were forced into did not have to be viewed as only a remote and distant experience. The digital space was created, by humans, to extend our connections to one another and the world around us.

We found ourselves struggling to remember that while we may not know how to teach during a pandemic, we do know how to teach. After an early attempt at a synchronous meeting to engage toddlers with materials to make ramps, we reflected that we would never invite 17 toddlers and their families to sit together in one classroom and try to play with the same material—we would invite a small group of children to an experience, while the rest of the class was engaged in other work. In our digital classroom, we could also host small group experiences.

We reflected on our pre-pandemic use of schema within the classroom to help guide our virtual experiences. Now that access to materials was no longer set by the school or teachers, examining schema supported equalizing the playing field at home. Rather than asking fami-

lies to have specific materials, such as unit blocks or Legos, we could ask them to consider a concept and find materials that fit that concept, such as something flat and something with height to make a ramp.

Further, we recognized that playing with ramps was really investigating the schema of trajectory. One teacher created a video using a bottle of water and string to make a pendulum. The families were sent this video and then invited to join a video conference with materials that met the broad concept: spinning. One child joined with a top, another with an outdoor rope swing, and another with just her body, which she spun and spun in circles.

We identified that we were using 4 categories of online learning:

- *Synchronous meetings*, such as a Zoom puppet show.
- *Asynchronous collaborations*, such as posting a question on Facebook and waiting for others to respond.
- *Offerings and provocations*, such as suggesting possibilities for how to make pendulums at home.
- *Family education*, such as sharing resources around early childhood development.

This time of physical distancing helped us solidify the understanding that when we

look at technology as something separate from ourselves, we remove our humanity from it. It is fundamentally human to want to connect, support, and care for each other. When we remove our humanity from the digital world, we remove these traits from ourselves.

When, instead, we look to technology to examine the ways we might meet new people or expand our definitions of the world around us, we are using technology to enhance our human traits of connection, support, and caring, and in this way, we are enhancing our humanity within this world. ●

To explore resources related to this topic, bit.ly/DigitalHumanityResources



Alex Morgan is the community outreach specialist at Boulder Journey School. She works with teachers and children to support the development of curriculum. She designs and coordinates professional development opportunities to encourage adult learning, both locally in Colorado and at conferences and workshops around the country. Additionally, Alex is an instructor in the Boulder Journey School Teacher Education Program. Alex is passionate about working with adults and children as they discover, uncover, and mess about. Alex presented at our 6th Annual Pre-K Summit, Reimagining Connections in Early Learning this past August.



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As a community, we can "put the child back in childhood" and build a strong developmental foundation for our children's lifelong learning, accomplishment, and joy.



Pictured above:
 Mari Pagone-Franklin
 (Co-President),
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SAFEGUARDING THE ESSENTIALS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IN THE TIME OF COVID

..... By Lesley Koplow

YOUNG CHILDREN learn through interaction with peers and teachers. They learn through *doing*: playing, pretending, building, drawing, painting, exploring, discovering, moving, dancing, singing, and touching. Young children develop through relationships with others. They learn about social connection and empathy by playing with other children who may have different ideas and feelings than they do. They learn that they are a worthy member of their classroom by being acknowledged for their contributions and by receiving comfort from school adults when they are sad or worried.

Warm relationships with first teachers set the stage for positive social, emotional and cognitive development throughout the school years. (Hamre and Pianta, 2001; Roorda, Spilit, & Oort, 2011) A joyful learning experience in early childhood classrooms predicts receptivity to learning and social mastery in the early elementary grades. (Torres et al., 2015) These are the essential components of early childhood education. These essentials give young children a social, emotional and cognitive



foundation for making sense of their own experiences. These essentials don't happen behind desks, or within chalk squared parameters. They happen through playful interaction.

Given what we know about the ways that young children learn and grow, the challenge of our time is to make sure we are safeguarding these essential experiences along with the mandates for masks and social distancing. Directives from officials often seem to apply a "one age fits all" approach to coming back together, not taking the developmental issues of early childhood into account. Teachers and school leaders who *know* what young children need, have to channel their creative capacities to re-invent an early childhood practice that can meet *both* the developmental needs of young children as well as meeting the need to protect their communities from the coronavirus.

This is a difficult mission during anxious times, but necessary for ensuring a joyful early childhood classroom experience for young children. School leaders that invite teachers to "play"

with ideas that protect both physical and emotional health in the classroom are building an infrastructure that fosters playful thought and meaningful practice. These early childhood programs ensure that practice is not motivated solely by worry and fear, but includes components of creative innovation at a time when children are depending on us for a meaningful early childhood experience.

For example, we know that very young children need close contact with adults when they are sad or distressed. Physical comfort has always been an integral part of early childhood practice. Some forward-thinking programs have ordered smocks for teachers to wear over their clothes. If a child needs to be held, a teacher holds them, then takes off the smock and replaces it with a clean one. This practice safeguards the teacher, as well as preserving warmth within the teacher-child relationship, allowing children to feel safe and well cared for at school.

Young children readily pick up and absorb adult anxiety, and since children take in ev-

erything that goes on around them, they are likely to need even MORE opportunities to connect with others around the changes and losses that COVID has brought into their lives. The continuum of change and loss affecting young children includes loss of routine, loss of in-person school community for many months, loss of access to peers, grandparents and caregivers, loss of familiar ways of being at school as well as tragic primary losses as the result of severe illness.

Adults *talk* to each other when life becomes overwhelming, sad, confusing or frightening, in order to feel less alone and more grounded. Indeed, while children benefit when parents and teachers verbally acknowledge loss and change, children will need to *play* about these experiences to make overwhelming feelings and events small enough to master. Representational play and drawing give young children a way to make emotional sense of their life experiences.

Considering these developmental factors, it is incumbent upon early childhood profes-



sionals to make protected space for the meaningful activities of representational play and drawing in the re-invented COVID era classroom. How might we ensure protected space for symbolic processes in the time of COVID? The answers are likely to be different in programs across the country, depending on illness rates and community resources. Certainly, all programs can make drawing materials available on a daily basis, creating individual packets for each child's use, and verbal invitations for "free draw", or drawing in response to relevant read alouds can be part of the daily routine.

Encouraging representational play during times of COVID is more challenging. Programs with available outdoor space have moved materials that foster representational play outdoors, lessening exposure risk when children interact. In addition to allowing children to run, play, and discover nature, outdoor classrooms that include *some* pretend play materials can encourage children to use art supplies or natural resources to create additional props to extend their play.

Many developmentally oriented early childhood programs have divided whole groups of children into very small "pods, small groups that go through the day together in the company of one staff member, having minimal interaction with other children or adults. Pods allow programs to offer children opportunities to play and interact with peers and with their teacher within these relationship-based circles. (This way of practicing assumes many available staff members, and a policy of sending the whole pod home for 2 weeks if anyone within the pod becomes ill.)

These are just a few of many inventive solutions that creative school leaders are encouraging. Safeguarding the

essentials of early childhood practice as well as protecting the physical health of children and teachers can be expensive! Our teachers and children deserve the government support needed to make these and other creative and protective practices available to every early childhood school community implementing in-person education in the time of COVID. Otherwise, inequity will be exacerbated, and children in lower resourced areas will be in the classroom 6 ft apart from one another, but left alone to make sense of their feelings and experiences of loss in the complex world of COVID. An early childhood classroom without playful interaction has surrendered the young child's right to learn, grow and make connections within relationships. Those rights are precious, and deserve our best and most creative protective efforts during this critical time. ●



Lesley Koplow M.S., L.C.S.W., is the director of the *Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice at Bank Street College. The Center collaborates with early childhood programs and elementary schools to support the social and emotional well-being of children, parents and teachers in the school setting. Ms. Koplow is the author of several books on child mental health in schools. Be on the lookout for her fall release, Emotionally Responsive Practice: A Path to Schools That Heal. Lesley presented at our 6th Annual Pre-K Summit, Reimagining Connections in Early Learning this past August.*



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2020 TEACHER TRIBUTES

Congratulations to all!

The following educators have been honored with an Alliance for Early Childhood Teacher Tribute, received between September 1, 2019 and September 1, 2020.

Jennifer Arra

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North Shore Country Day School

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Joseph Sears School

Chris Joob

Carleton Washburne School

Julia Kisiel

Middlefork School

Liz Krupkin

A Joyful Noise Preschool



Teacher Tributes

We invite our community to recognize someone who has made an impact on the lives of children. Join The Alliance for Early Childhood in our long-standing tradition of honoring a teacher, educator, or support staff at your school.

WITH EACH DONATION OF \$75, THE TEACHER TRIBUTE HONOREE WILL RECEIVE:

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EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY CALENDAR

ONGOING

Family Storytime
September 1–November 24.
11–11:30am. Virtual.
glencoepubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup/calendar
All ages. *The Family Storytime you know and love, now on Zoom! Join us every Tuesday as we share stories, songs, and smiles during this interactive storytime. Log in early and/or hang out for a few extra minutes at the end for hellos, how are yous, and chatting with Glencoe librarians and other grown-ups! Register on the library website to receive the Zoom link.*

Moana - Skyline Studios
September 9–October 28.
5:15–7:15pm. 410 Kenilworth Ave, Kenilworth. Ages 7–12.
Boys and Girls. *Join Skyline Studios for Moana Jr. this fall. We Know the Way to sing, dance, act and have a ball. It's time to see just How Far You'll Go when you join your favorite characters in this Shiny new show. You're Welcome to make new friends and join the cast. After all, The Ocean Chose You to make memories that last.*

Musikgarten
September 22–January 22.
9am–5pm. Virtual.
musicinst.org/musikgarten
Babies, Toddlers, Pre-K, ages 4–7. *Early Childhood Music and Movement Classes MIC Musikgarten® classes offer a comprehensive, sequential plan for the musical development of children, birth to age seven, in a joyful and stimulating educational environment.*

Baby Doll Storytime
October 16–November 20.
10:30–11am. Virtual. Register here: winnetkalibrary.libcal.com/event/6835294
Ages 2–5. *Bring your own baby doll and join us for a special storytime where we'll learn how to interact with our babies through song, fingerplay, and behavioral skills. A great practice for children expecting a new sibling! Once a month on the 3rd Friday of the month.*

Virtual Storytimes For All Ages
Birth to age 7. *Join us for live and interactive storytimes with the Wilmette Public Library this fall! These Zoom programs feature age-appropriate stories,*

songs, and movement. Each storytime has a targeted age group, but they can be enjoyed by all of the young children in your household. Check our online calendar for dates and times at wilmettelibrary.info, or view our archive of storytime videos, any time!

Sunday School
11–11:30am. Virtual.
christchurchwinnetka.org
Age three through 4th grade. *Every Sunday we gather (virtually) to re-connect, sing some favorite songs, learn a short lesson (usually with a video) and hear what everyone has been up to! The focus is on fun and fellowship.*

OCTOBER 2020

10 Saturday Morning Dance Party with Mr. Jon & Friends
10:30–11:15am. Virtual. Register here: winnetkalibrary.libcal.com/event/6894493
All ages. Put on your dancing shoes for a morning children's concert from Mr. Jon & Friends. You'll laugh! You'll wiggle! You'll dance your way into Saturday!

19 Mini Mindfulness
10–10:30am.
glencoepubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup/calendar
Ages 3–5. *Miss Lani from Banner Day Camp will teach simple mindfulness techniques perfect for little ones.*

NOVEMBER 2020

16 Mini Mindfulness
10–10:30am.
glencoepubliclibrary.evanced.info/signup/calendar
Ages 3–5. *Miss Lani from Banner Day Camp will teach simple mindfulness techniques perfect for little ones.*

23 Holiday Business Window Decorating Contest
Villages of Winnetka and Northfield. *All ages. The Holiday Business Window and Decorating Contest is a free event for all ages that encourages residents to come out and vote for your favorite decorated holiday business window in the village. Voting starts 11/23 and the winner is announced on 12/3.*



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COVID-19 has left parents and educators especially vulnerable, as they navigate their own stress and concerns while teaching and caring for the social and emotional development of our children.

While the prescription for our physical health is “physical distance” our mental health needs connection and closeness to thrive.

This year The Alliance for Early Childhood will offer programs that support the mental health of those who care for our most vulnerable, youngest community members. Check out our calendar for dates on the following programs:

- **Pandemic Parenting: Tools and Tips**
- **Embracing What Counts: Professional Learning Series for Educators**
- **Directors’ Reflective Practice Group**
- **Educators’ Reflective Practice Group**



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