



Early Childhood THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ALLIANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

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SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING STARTS WITH US

..... • *By Wendy Turner, M.Ed.*

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL): some say it is the most important work educators do in classrooms today. I wholeheartedly agree! Students must first unlock and understand their social emotional selves before they can access and unlock their academic potential. This critical component of every child’s learning experience starts with the example he/she sees from the adults in the room. When we engage in our own Social Emotional Learning and model it for young children, we are investing in all of us. SEL starts with parents and educators.

Defining
First things first. What exactly is social emotional learning? The Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL), defines it as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” I call it the fine art of being



a successful human. CASEL further breaks SEL down into five specific competencies: self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, all of which we want to exist in our local and wider communities. The graphic on the following page from CASEL illustrates the concepts nicely.

Regulating Ourselves
The perfect place to start with our youngest learners is self-management, a critical competency to build early in life. CASEL defines self-management as the ability to “effectively manage

stress, control impulses, and motivate yourself to set and achieve goals.” As children grow and mature, they build the skills necessary to regulate emotions, which helps them learn and enjoy social success both in and out of school. Being in a dysregulated state can be a barrier to learning. As adults, we know that it can also be a barrier to our personal and professional success.
So what can we do to support our children as they learn and grow, navigating the various emotions they encounter in everyday

Continued on page 2



Source: www.casel.org/what-is-sel

Continued from page 1

situations? We can model our own efforts in self-management, including when we struggle and when we are successful. We can explicitly name our emotions in real time, as we experience them, and share what to do when they show up, especially the tough ones! As we work on our own self-management, we'll develop our children's ability to manage themselves, a win-win for all. Authentically committing to this work is an important first step for parents and educators.

Identifying Emotions

First, we need to teach children the various emotions they will encounter in everyday life and model how we navigate through them ourselves. Some positive emotions we experience are happiness, excitement, pride, gratitude and interest. Everyday emotions that can be difficult include sadness, worry, fear, nervousness, and embarrassment. This poster hangs in my classroom to help us learn about emotions; you can create something similar

to use at home. Emojis are universal language in this day and age for people of all ages, all over the world. We want young people to know and understand that every emotion is normal, and there are tools we can use to help us handle difficult emotions when they arise.

Focusing on feelings allows children to identify the emotion they are experiencing, the first step towards regulation and self-management. In my classroom and in my home, I regularly use "I statements" to express my feelings connected to actions and events. On any given day, I could say "I am sad today because my daughter and I got in an argument at the bus stop before school" or "I am so excited about this new project we are starting this afternoon". You also might hear "I am frustrated because many of you are not listening to my instructions right now" or "I am nervous about a big presentation I have coming up next week". Asking young children to explain how they are feeling using an "I" statement connected to an

emotion is one way to help identify emotions. Modeling this practice on a regular basis at home and school is an effective way to support their learning. It also helps us develop a stronger command of our own emotions and ability to manage ourselves. You can start by using "I" statements, daily, to share how you are feeling with your family members and students. Another simple way to bring conversations about emotions into your everyday life is to identify and talk about emotions that storybook characters may be experiencing, when you read stories with children.

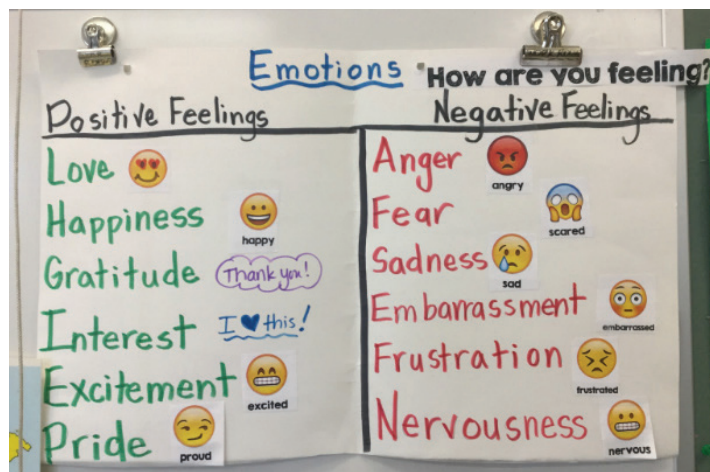
Strategies

Proactive strategies to keep our brains unstressed and help us experience positive emotions more often than negative ones are so valuable. At home and in school, we can use feeling check-ins, exercise and brain breaks, laughter and practicing mindfulness on a regular basis to foster positive emotions and happiness. Practicing gratitude with my family before dinner at night is one that works well for us. "In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships"

(Harvard Health Publishing: Harvard Medical School).

Playing peek-a-boo with a stuffed animal can provide fun and laughter when it's needed. Practicing kid-friendly yoga poses will develop focus and confidence and can be a way to practice deep belly breathing, which helps with stress management. Learn more about how to keep our brains healthy here: tinyurl.com/healthybrainskids

When I experience uncomfortable emotions at home and in my classroom, I pause and breathe deeply, sometimes leaving the room for a moment. I share how I am feeling so the kids around me will understand what is happening. I might say "I can't talk to you right now; I need a minute to cool down because I am feeling frustrated. Can you give me three minutes to do some deep breathing so I can get ready to come back to our activity?" I also engage in relationship repair by regularly apologizing to children after I experience a difficult emotion that results in yelling. I work hard to avoid this but it does happen at times. After all, I am not perfect!. This can be difficult, but again, it models the behavior we want to see in our own children and our students. This also lets them know that even adults can lose their cool, and that it's OK if this happens. Read more about some powerful,



real life experiences I've had, just like this, here: tinyurl.com/wendyturner

There are many creative, fun ways to support emotional regulation in young people! Some include eating pizza or drinking hot chocolate, breathing, mindful coloring, focusing on a good memory or a happy place, or simply using energy to switch focus and do something else. In my classroom we use a cool down corner that has items students can self select to help them when they are upset. A bin holds a jar of glitter and water, a small can of play dough, a small 24 piece puzzle, a large magnifying glass, a sheep horn (yes a sheep horn is fascinating, especially when you look at it with a magnifying glass!), and a colored liquid drip timer. You can have a similar area at home to support emotional regulation and even use it yourself to model the behavior.

These options may not always work, so I will also ask "What do you need right now?" when a child is struggling with self-management. I'll never forget the day I did this with my very upset young son, and, unable to speak, he wrote on a piece of paper "I need a hug." Kids will let us know what they need, if we set up a safe, supportive environment for them to do so. Other strategies include taking a walk to get a drink of water, doing 25 jumping jacks or running in place for a minute or tossing a ball while naming favorite colors, foods or games. We can model this approach by sharing with our children and students what we need when we are upset.

How can you start working on your own self-management? Take a quick inventory of how you are doing with it right now. Then pick a strategy to practice and share very intentionally with your young ones. Young people benefit from seeing adults work on self-management. You will

benefit from increased time and practice staying regulated, and you will learn to manage yourself proactively. Soon your strategy will become a habit. Start today! ●



Wendy Turner teaches 2nd grade at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School in the Brandywine School District in Wilmington, Delaware. She is the 2017 Delaware Teacher of the Year and an Associate with EducationHall, providing trauma-invested and social emotional learning professional development for Kristin Souers and Pete Hall. Contact her at wendymturner@gmail.com or follow her on twitter @mrswendymturner.

Wendy Turner presented "Trauma Is a Word; Not a Sentence," "We Matter, Unlocking Self-Awareness to Support Resilience in the Classroom," and served on the expert panel at our 5th Annual Preschool Summit on February 6, 2020.



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EXAMINING QUALITY TIME

By Megan Carrick, MOTR/L

MANY OF US THINK of “quality time” as a special outing or event with the family or maybe a little one-on-one parent child date. Maybe it means vacation, stay-cations in the city or a professional sporting event. No reason these examples can’t be fun, unique and high “quality time” experiences for your child. But, consider this, it’s not the event that makes it a high quality experience. The quality is found in the relationship, presence and connection within the time spent together. This is obviously confounded by things like traffic, delays, surprise upsets to the plan, transitions and let’s not forget the greatest culprit to all human interaction, our smartphones.

We have all been there. You are having a nice conversation with a friend, colleague or spouse. The two of you are connected, engaged and attuned to one another. Then, suddenly, something on the phone grabs your loved one’s attention. “Oh, hang on just one second.” they say as they redirect their whole being to their phone. You believe them, they will be just one second. But then they start to click away, maybe giggle, make a remark that indicates value, “Wow!”. Just like that you feel invisible, unimportant and

forgotten. This can take place in a matter of seconds, but the social emotional impact it can have on you may compromise your sense of self, your mood and your relationship with the distracted loved one. When we do this to our kids the result can be far more damaging.

In our current age we have so much right at our fingertips: shopping, socializing, media, music, banking, the list goes on and on. If we honestly ask ourselves how often we look at our phones, the numbers may do more than surprise us, they may terrify us. For years there has been much talk about screen time for kids, but much of the current research compels us to turn the question on ourselves. Are we spending too much time on screens while our kids are present and competing with the phone? Is that screen time perhaps time better spent engaged in valuable, immeasurable and intimate moments with our precious little ones who are so in need of what we can provide: human reciprocal interaction. The small little moments at home, in a waiting room, at the park, in the car, the grocery store, the library etc., are millions in number, and many are lost to our children. These subtle and random opportunities to connect and share in our kids’ lives are



being compromised too often by our phone. The current research suggests that when one has to compete with a phone/screen for attention; the feelings he is left with include sadness, anger, loneliness and shame. What feels like a moment to look at a post, send a quick text or reply to an email mounts to many thousands and millions of moments, and we accidentally drizzle small amounts of junk into the hearts and minds of our loved ones.

As a working parent of a swiftly developing two year old, I appreciate how difficult it is to get to everything. But I also appreciate that I made a conscious decision to become a mom. I deliberately chose to bring him into this world and in doing so I made him many promises. I swore to love him unconditionally, promote his development across the board

to the very best of my abilities, encourage his autonomy and sense of self and above all to keep him safe. What I know for certain is that I cannot do any of that for him if I am not paying attention. When we put away the phones and really pay attention, we will still make mistakes. None of us will be perfect and that should not be the goal, as we will most certainly fail. But, when we are deliberate in how we spend our time with our kids, and truly attuned, they will feel known, understood, and loved.

When I talk to parents and ask what they want for their kids, the answers tend to be, “happy, confident, successful, independent, resilient and well-liked by others.” All of these outcomes are dependent on the secure attachment of a primary caregiver. Secure attachment is defined as “the

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relationship a child has with a sensitive, attuned caregiver.” It involves “interpersonal attunement, a form of communication that involves a parent attuning to a child in an open and kind way.” The attunement from a caregiver is the foundation to helping your child reach and achieve all the hopes and dreams you establish for him, her as loving, committed parents. Researcher and author Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D. argues that we humans only exist in these high level, sophisticated and complex ways, just so we can connect to other humans.

Research in many areas, including attachment, trauma, relationships and the many effects of screen time, all confirm that attuned caregivers are imperative to support the development of a confident, happy, connected and kind person. Someone who values others can empathize and think collectively as part of a community. This is what we strive for as parents. So, how do we make space for this quality time in such a dizzying array of activities and demands? My suggestion is simple, but not so simple. Put your phone on airplane mode, hide it, ignore it, turn it off, silence it, turn on the “do not disturb” setting, etc. Just get rid of the phone and you will minimize significantly the distractions. Consider the many places and spaces where you can commit to more time away from the screen, and fill that time with intentional,

deliberate and quality time with your kids. Your time and attention is the very best gift you can give them. ●



Megan Carrick, MOTR/L is a Pediatric OT and the Clinical Director of Kids In Sync. She is very passionate about her work with children and their families. She loves finding unique ways and changing settings to support progress in all areas of life. Megan also enjoys engaging in speaking events with teachers, parents and other members of the community to share her knowledge, connect others with her favorite resources and support the development of a more compassionate society.

Megan Carrick presented “Understanding and Supporting the Regulatory Mechanisms for Young Children” and served on the expert panel at our 5th Annual Preschool Summit on February 6, 2020.

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Playing and Learning Together 2020 CALENDAR EVENTS

MAY 2020

#LetsPlayAtHome

Ongoing
 All ages welcome. A core value of The Alliance for Early Childhood is to adapt to the needs of our community. While we are asked to stay at home, The Alliance will invite families to engage in Let's Play! experiences together without leaving the house. Be on the lookout for community engagement opportunities on our Facebook and Instagram pages soon. We are excited to play and learn with you!



National Teacher Appreciation Week

May 4-May 8
 Our teachers shape and influence our children every day. Honoring an educator with a Teacher Tribute is a long-standing tradition of The Alliance. Recipients receive a personalized letter, recognition on our website, and an invitation to our annual Networking Dinner. To nominate an educator who has made an impact, visit our website theallianceforec.org/support-the-alliance.

Early Childhood Directors' Round Table Luncheon

May 28, 1-3pm
Let's Play! is The Alliance for Early Childhood's 2019-2020 Ongoing Community Program, inviting families to engage and interact with their children in child-directed, creative, free play. We are grateful to share our vision in partnership with our 12 Member Schools and 15 Community Partners. All of these events are listed in our Let's Play! Guide on our website theallianceforec.org/lets-play.

For more detailed and up-to-date information about our upcoming Calendar of Events and registration information please visit theallianceforec.org.

Symbol Key:

- Parent
- Family
- Educator
- Parent & Educator

DEAR ALLIANCE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY,

This issue continues to explore the theme from our fall issue of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Caring for our own and our children's social emotional well-being is critical during a time where we are being asked to stop our normal routines and stay at home.

Many of us are being faced with challenges, as we take on new identities and roles in this unprecedented time. Serving as a parent, teacher, soccer coach, therapist, entertainer, and (I could go on and on)... can be wearing and overwhelming while trying to maintain our own work commitments.

With the extra pressure of facilitating school at home, I find comfort in reminding myself that learning and development are being shaped by all experiences, including those that happen outside of the school doors.

Our children will learn and continue to grow. Although we've been asked to stay socially distant and apart from many of our loved ones and daily routines, I am trying to focus on positive outcomes. The first, is that I have never observed my neighborhood to be so alive. Families are connecting with each other in new ways, such as taking daily walks without devices to get fresh air. I've even seen teens on rollerblades, playfully exploring sports equipment their parents once viewed as a staple of their youth. Sidewalks have been colorfully decorated with positive affirmations and creative designs. I have heard from many friends that family dinners are a highlight since they often are missed due to the hustle of everyday schedules. These observations are just a few of a simpler, slowed down life... And maybe, just maybe our children will look back on this time and fondly remember extra family time and a slower cadence of life while we stayed at home.

I am proud of the strong commitment to early childhood in our community. I am excited to share how The Alliance for Early Childhood is supporting the development of social emotional skills in our community through playing and learning together.

PLAYING

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 to:

- bring our community together.
- unplug and connect families to experience learning through play together.



Pictured above: The Alliance for Early Childhood's 5th Annual Preschool Kindergarten Summit Planning Team. From left: Gina Mathews, Paige Goettel, Tracey McDowell, Dr. Trisha Kocanda, Kendra Wallace, Kathryn Martin, Missy Parks, Mari Pagone-Franklin, Maureen Chertow Miller, Megan Lichterman.

- provide children the opportunity to engage in child-directed free play, allowing them to follow their own instincts, ideas and interests.

- engage parents in experiences with their children that build understanding of the importance of child-directed play.

This year, The Alliance has hosted an Ongoing Let's Play! Community Program in partnership with our Member Schools and Community Partners. We are thrilled with the engagement from our community and visible impact. *If you haven't joined us already, we hope to play with you and your family at this year's upcoming Let's Play! Programs.* Visit our website, theallianceforec.org/lets-play, to view our program offerings for the rest of the year!

LEARNING

On February 6, 2020 The Alliance for Early Childhood held our 5th Annual Preschool-Kindergarten Summit, Bringing Social Emotional Learning to the Surface, Teaching with Intent at the Chicago Botanic Garden. It was an inspirational day of hosting 200 local and national educators for a day of professional learning and networking. Many of our Member Schools closed their doors to dig in with their staff around this very relevant topic. Social Emotional Learning is the essence of early childhood learning.

The keynote address, "The Resonant Classroom: Attuning to Young Children's Social and Emotional Development", was delivered by Jennifer Miller, M.Ed. She highlighted the developmental urges that drive children's play, in order to support educators to deepen learning in the classroom. She also uncovered how educators can shape language,

environments, and daily routines in ways that exercise children's self-awareness, empathy, kindness, impulse control and a sense of responsibility. Educators had the opportunity to dig deeper into SEL by attending concurrent breakout sessions, hosted by both local and national experts.

Our vision is that 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. As an organization, we treasure human interaction and the power of relationships. This is challenging during a time when we are being asked to distance ourselves from one another. More than ever, we need to rely on our community for support and care.

We believe in the power of playing and learning together and hope you join us.

In partnership,

Stefanie Maiuri · Executive Director
stefanie@theallianceforec.org



Stefanie, husband Matthew, and brother Dominic Maiuri welcomed baby boy, Rocco, to their family on January 29, 2020.



Highlights from 2019–2020



Let's Play! Fort Building, October 5-6, 2019



Let's Play! Block Building, January 11, 2020



Let's Play! Winter Woods Exploration, February 22, 2020

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How do you get your kid to open up in a situation that you foresee as a big deal and maybe your child doesn't?

Getting your child to open up and communicate with you throughout his/her childhood and beyond is so healthy. And, it can be quite nuanced for the parent: when should you push and when to lay back? First, be clear as to what you are trying to accomplish. Are you gathering information for a discussion, a consequence or a teachable moment? Your child may be asking himself/herself; "what's the cost/benefit to me sharing?"

At an early age, children learn there will be a response, verbal or action, to their disclosures. This is where you want to set the stage for open communication. When your children predict that they will get a punishment for their disclosure, they'll be more reluctant to share. If they perceive that the conversation

will have a positive outcome, then they'll open up.

Why does your child feel the issue is not a big deal? Are they trying to dismiss that topic and move on in hopes of avoiding it? Perhaps your child is not picking up on social cues and may not realize that others view the situation negatively? There can be emotional and/or attentional issues that make it difficult for your child to accurately read the situation.

Knowing why your child doesn't feel the issue is a big deal is a great place to start the conversation. Ask, "What happened?" "How did you feel?" "How did the other person feel?" Resist the temptation to tell your child the answers to those questions. Your job is to help your child enhance his/her inner dialogue and increase social awareness. That gets accomplished when you parent socratically—asking questions to elicit insights.

Socratic parenting is the best tool to get your child to open up. You may remember from your early days in school about the four types of sentences: interrogative, imperative, declarative, and exclamatory. Most parents overuse the imperative statements—those are essentially demands. They grossly underuse the interrogative questions—but this is where much of your great parenting and communication will live.

There are appropriate times for the imperative or demanding approach; especially when it's a safety issue. For example, "Don't run across the street!" "Don't play with fire!" and so on. However, the Socratic parent will guide his/her child through questions to stoke an inner dialogue and increase intrinsic motivation. The quick lesson on how to be a Socratic parent is to essentially put a "why" "what" "when" "where"

or "how" before each sentence. And, always ask about the cost/benefit to their choices.

For example: "Do your homework now!" is the demand. "Why is it a good idea to do your homework now?" is the Socratic approach.

When you ask more questions, when you listen more, you'll find communication will flow and then issues that are small or big can weave into that connection.

How do you talk about realistic issues without provoking more anxiety or a longer lasting fear?

This question is really useful for both children and adults. You want to have a talk about "realistic issues" with your child, which you're concerned may elicit anxiety. Those types of issues for a child would mostly center on safety: physically and/or emotionally.

When you have this

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discussion, your child may begin to realize that the world is not absolutely safe. They may wonder, and then worry, that those scary things may happen to them. From a parenting standpoint, we want to soothe our children's anxieties, not cause them. Thus, you may be reluctant to have this conversation with your child.

Preserving the joys and wonder of a safe, carefree childhood may seem attractive but may not be the best lesson for your child. Personally, when I had this conversation with my son, we talked about the balance of being strong and kind. "Most of the time," I said to Jacob, "people are really nice, and we are kind to each other. But sometimes another person may try to hurt us, and then you need to defend yourself."

I believe in teaching children to be kind, gentle warriors. To have a blend of compassion and power is a warrior mindset. Speaking to your concern, I would say that we empower our children to face issues, not run from them. We tell our children that we are always there to support and help them, and they do not have to deal with these issues alone and to always tell us their concerns.

Remember that the purpose of anxiety is to protect us. It's healthy to have a mild amount of anxiety (called concern) to keep us vigilant and ready. If your child is worrying too much, have the conversation and teach them that a little worry can be a good emotion to keep us safe. If they want to reduce their worry, then there are ways to do that. (See the next Q&A.

How do you calm down your kids' anxiety if, as a parent you are anxious yourself?

Quick Answer: Not easily done!

Let's do a quick review of anxiety...

- It's a normal healthy

emotion that everyone needs to survive

- When anxiety is too intense or high, it can disrupt the flow of our lives ... that's when it's called a "disorder".

- The essential question that anxiety asks of us is, "What if the bad thing happens?" This is intended to help us prepare to stay safe either by fight or flight.

- You only need to reduce anxiety (i.e. calm down) if you find it is leading you to have avoidance, emotional distress or if your performance is reduced because of it.

- Two types of self-talk often lead to anxiety problems:

A. Catastrophizing—that's when you think the problem is catastrophic, horrible and/or terrible. Now some problems actually are that bad, but most people with anxiety are worried about non-life threatening issues. Essentially, the anxious person rates the circumstance too high or worse than it actually is.

B. Overestimating the Probability of a Bad Thing Happening—you may think it's a certainty about the bad outcome when it's actually much less probable.

The good news is that the new, healthy, rational self-talk that you need to reduce your own anxiety is basically the same that you would teach your child. I offer an entire section of worksheets and life skills to Reduce Worry in my book Student Life Skills.

To reduce your catastrophic thinking, ask yourself, "If the bad thing actually happened, how bad would it be on a scale of 1-10?" or "Could I tolerate the bad outcome?"

To reduce your overestimating the probability of a bad thing happening, ask yourself, "What is the real chance of it happening?"

So much of heightened anxiety comes from our irrational thinking. Once we become aware of the self-talk that's causing our

anxiety, we can respond to it, or even disagree with it.

Self-talk that helps reduce anxiety (repeat often to become automatic)...

"Even though I don't like it, I can stand it."

"The chance of the bad thing happening is really small."

"With some time and distance, I'll feel less anxious."

"Feeling anxious is a normal healthy part of my brain."

As your anxiety reduces, it will better enable you to: A. Model how you deal with anxiety, B. Enable you to more calmly deal with your child's anxiety, C. Know that anxiety is very treatable. ●

Paul Sweetow, LCSW, is a graduate of the University of Chicago and has been in clinical practice for thirty years. He specializes in the study and practice of enhancing happiness and reducing unhealthy emotions. He teaches social, emotional, and organizational skills in a structured environment that emphasizes positive thinking. Paul is the author and creator of Student Life Skills and The Heroic Adventures of Miles and Maria. He is also a father, as well as a karate world champion and seven-time consecutive national champion.



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FOREST BATHING: BIG MEDICINE FOR BIG AND LITTLE PEOPLE

..... • By **Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD, FACOG, ABOIM**



AS A CHILD, I remember lying in the grass looking up at the clouds, losing myself in an imaginary storyline. I remember watching ants and other insects for long periods of time, becoming fascinated with their tiny, busy worlds. To this day, I can conjure up the fragrances of a pile of autumn leaves, the peas and zinnias in my grandmother’s garden, the sap from the gnarly evergreen my friends and I used to climb. I can bring back the feel of that same sap when it was stuck to my fingers, the sensation of wading in a cold creek, and the tickly way it feels to hold fireflies in my hands. Unstructured nature play experiences, throughout my childhood, rooted me in nature from a young age.

Today’s children spend a minute amount of time in unstructured play, and even less of that takes place outdoors. A colleague shared with me that he had recently taken a group of urban kids outdoors. One of them was shocked to notice that there were clouds in the sky ... and that they MOVE! Many kids today are disconnected from the natural world, and the myriad health benefits time outdoors offers us all.

I’ve seen the benefits of nature firsthand, as a mom and as a physician who prescribes nature. Through my own healing from physician burnout, from fighting a broken system for my son with autism, and from the grief of losing a spouse, I rediscovered my love of nature. I rediscovered my love of outdoor adventure, and I rediscovered the magic of slow, quiet time outdoors. I discovered the practice of shinrin-yoku, or Japanese forest bathing, and nothing has been the same since. I offer the practice to my patients and have found very often that greater healing occurs in two hours of forest bathing than with any pharmaceutical drug.

Forest Bathing Encourages Us to Lose Ourselves in Nature

Forest bathing is a practice that was started in the 1980s in Japan, where the fast-paced, bright-light, noisy, frenetic lifestyle in Tokyo has been linked with severe mental health problems and high rates of suicide. Doctors Qing Li and Yoshifumi Miyazaki offered urbanites the opportunity to leave the city to experience the sensory effects of mindful, quiet, contemplative time spent in a forest. They took

blood and saliva samples and checked various health parameters (blood pressure, heart rate variability, and so on), before and after people took part in this practice. Later, Amos Clifford brought the practice of forest bathing to the United States, founded the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy (ANFT), and set about training guides who would share it with others.

Distinct from a hike in the woods or a nature identification walk, guided forest bathing walks are slow and silent, with the guide using a series of techniques to lead the participant out of the active “monkey-mind” state and into a deeper level of consciousness, known as the liminal state. In other words, guides are reminding us how to lose ourselves, as children inherently do, in the wonder and awe of nature!

The Physical and Mental Benefits of Nature

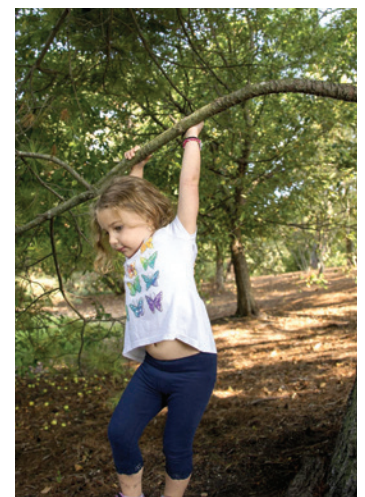
Among the many health benefits of forest bathing is the discovery that plants in the forest (and especially evergreen trees) emit chemicals called phytoncides. These phytoncides serve to protect plants and trees against invasion by viruses, bacteria and fungi, and are inhaled and ingested by humans who are simply spending time in a forest. It turns out that they offer these antimicrobial features to us, then, as well. Time spent in nature therefore reduces our chances of succumbing to infections—quite a bonus for young kids!

Dr. Li also discovered that when people participated in a three-day and two-night forest bathing excursion that they had a boost in their Natural Killer (NK) cells: cells in our immune

system that locate and destroy cancer cells. Dr. Li’s team was excited to find that the number and activity of these NK cells remained elevated after this three-day experience by not only seven additional days, but for thirty days after the forest bathing excursion. This means that when we spend time in nature, the health benefits—specifically the cancer-fighting benefits—last for up to a month afterwards.

In terms of brain health, a number of studies have found that time spent in nature is beneficial. One such study found that a form of bacteria in soil called mycobacterium vaccae seems to make us smarter when we ingest and inhale soil particles, just by being outdoors. Mice that were exposed to these bacteria were found to navigate a maze twice as fast as those that were not exposed to it.

Another study (that I constantly quote to my kids), found that memory and attention span increased by 20% after just one hour of interacting with nature. The benefit was found to occur even if the participants in the study did not enjoy their time outdoors.



So, whine all you want, kids—it's still good for you!

Forest Bathing Invites 'Embodied Awareness'

ANFT-certified forest therapy guides use a specific system of “invitations” known as the Standard Sequence. This sequence brings the participants into a state of embodied awareness by guiding them through the senses in a prescribed and replicable fashion. As participants begin to leave the stressors of the day behind and immerse themselves in nature, I have witnessed both mental and physical transformations occur. I highly recommend experiencing forest bathing with an ANFT-certified guide for everyone, at least once, and guides can now be found all over the world. (Visit www.natureandforesttherapy.org and navigate to “Find a Guide”.) Meanwhile, here are some invitations to try on your own:

Pleasures of Presence

Although it is often much easier for children to mindfully “drop in” than it is for their parents, there are some simple standard invitations that work well for adults and children to do together. The Standard Sequence always begins with the invitation known as “The Pleasures of Presence.” A simple way to do this with kids might be to invite them to pick up an object such as a rock or a pinecone, ask them to sit or stand with their eyes closed, and walk them through silently becoming aware of their object through the various senses. One might guide them to silently notice the weight, texture, temperature and other tactile characteristics of the object, whether it has any kind of smell, what it sounds like if it is manipulated with the hands, and on and on through as many sensory characteristics as one can come up with. This can take up to ten minutes before inviting the children to open their eyes and look at the object as if they have never seen

anything like it before. You can enhance this idea by suggesting that they are a creature who has just arrived from another planet and is witnessing this object for the very first time. After completing this “Pleasures of Presence” invitation, ask the child or children to share what they noticed during the experience.

What's In Motion

Children (adults, too!) tend to become lost in the invitation, “What's in Motion?” To do this, simply walk slowly and silently for a set period of time (perhaps ten minutes) looking for things that are in motion. Look up, look down, look under leaves and rocks and just concentrate on seeking things that are moving. At the end of the time period, the group may share what they noticed about what, in the forest, is in motion.

Deer Ears / Owl Eyes

The sky is the limit when it comes to creating forest bathing invitations. Children enjoy walking silently with their hands cupped around their ears as “deer ears,” noticing how the sounds of the forest are altered by walking this way. They enjoy placing their hands on the sides of their faces and seeing the world through “owl eyes,” taking in a larger field of vision than we often experience when walking in the woods.

Tactile Invitations

Tactile—or sense of touch—invitations contain special magic. Try removing shoes and socks and walking barefoot on a dirt trail or shallow creek. Invite children to hug a tree (yes, literally!) and to share a story, a secret, or a worry with a tree of their choosing, while hugging, sitting or leaning against it. After each and every invitation, come together and share (and this is always optional) something of the experience.

Tea Ceremony

Forest bathing is traditionally concluded with a tea ceremony. Before foraging for plants for consumption, however, it is



absolutely IMPERATIVE that one has adequate knowledge of plant medicine, that foraging is permitted on the land in which you are forest bathing, and that chemicals such as herbicides and pesticides have not been used there. There are a number of resources, including my book, *The Outdoor Adventurer's Guide to Forest Bathing*, that teach basic herbal medicine and explain how to conduct a tea ceremony. Children often enjoy the “tea party” aspect of tea ceremony and it is a great time to reflect upon the forest bathing experience and to pay respect to the plants, trees, animals and insects of the more-than-human world, as well as to the ancestral humans who tended the area long before us. An easy way to learn the ancestral name(s) of the land is to use the interactive app found at www.native-land.ca.

I often imagine what the world would be like if all children were taught practices such as mindfulness, meditation and forest bathing. Not only would the world be filled with more tolerance, but a sense of commitment to the more-than-human world and to the beautiful outdoor spaces of our amazing planet would be fostered at an early age. It gives me great hope and happiness that Free Forest School exists today because of parents who know this in a deeply visceral way. Continue believing in both the teachings and the healing properties of

the forest. As you know in your heart, the medicine is real. ●

This article was originally published by Free Forest School. Free Forest School ignites children's innate capacity to learn through unstructured play in nature, fostering healthy development and nurturing the next generation of creative thinkers, collaborative leaders and environmental stewards. To learn more, visit www.freeforestschool.org.



Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, M.D. is an OB-Gyn and Integrative Medicine physician. Dr. Bartlett Hackenmiller led our educators in the practice of forest bathing at last year's Pre-K Summit. She is board certified by both the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the American Board of Integrative Medicine. She holds additional certifications in herbal medicine and is a certified forest therapy guide. She currently serves as medical director for the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy and as medical advisor for the organization, AllTrails. More information is available on her website, integrativeinitiative.com.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Due to COVID-19, please check individual websites about the status of upcoming camps and programs.

CAMP PROGRAMS

Baker Summer Discovery Camp

June 15-August 7. Hands-on, inquiry-based classes led by our caring, experienced staff. Located close to Lake Michigan for weekly trips to the beach. For campers ages 3-15.

French Immersion Summer Camp

June 1-July 10. Ages 2-7. Weekly themes, engaging activities, art, music, cooking projects, and daily outdoor play make learning French easy and fun! Our nurturing and experienced French School teaching staff creates a rich environment of imagination, creativity, and socialization. Camp meets five days a week, Monday-Friday from 8:30-11:30am.

St. Francis Xavier School Crusader Camp

June 15-July 24. Day camp from 9-11:30am. Crusader Camp has something for everyone! Campers range in age from 3 years old to 6th grade and are grouped according to age and interest. Campers engage in outdoor play, arts and crafts, sports, snack, and have the option to stay for lunch till 12:30pm. Prices

vary depending on number of days/weeks attending. Please email camps@sfx-school.org for more information.

St. Joseph School Happy Campers

June 15-July 24. Day camp for campers 2.5-5 years old. 9am-12:30pm. Campers enjoy play time outside, crafts, and stay for lunch. Contact Dana McKenna, Camp Director, at dmckenna@ssjfx.org.

North Shore Country Day School Summer Programs

June 15-August 7. For 70 summers North Shore Country Day School has offered summer camp programming for children ages 3-13. From our traditional Day Camp program, Language Immersion program, Expedition Camps, and 3-year-old focused Little Explorers camp, our programs provide safe, fun, and diverse activities for all. Flexible scheduling and transportation available. Now enrolling for 2020. Call 847-441-3350 or check us at www.nscdscamps.org.

Winnetka Park District Summer Camp — Almost Anything Goes

June 15-August 14. 9am-1pm, 9am-3pm, 12-3pm. Field trips, beach days. Selected

week options available.

Winnetka Park District Summer Camp — Happiness Is

June 15-August 14. 9am-1pm, 9am-3pm. Ages 4-6. Selected week options available.

Winnetka Park District Summer Camp — Kiddie Camp

June 15-August 14. Ages 34 months to 4 years old. Extended day options available.

May 26-August 31. All ages. Even babies and toddlers can join Summer Reading Club and earn free books just for listening and looking at books. Sign up at the Youth Desk.

Summer Drop Ins at The Chicago Botanic Garden
June 6-August 23. 10am-1pm. All ages. Free nature play activities on select days at The Chicago Botanic Garden.

Nature Nights

June 6-September 12. 5-7:30pm. Chicago Botanic Garden. Ages 4-10 with adult. Evening garden adventures with s'mores and campfire on select summer Saturday nights. Registration required. \$28 members/\$35 non-members.

Winnetka-Northfield Chamber of Commerce Farmers' Market

June 6-October 17. 7:30am-12:30pm. All ages. Come listen to music while shopping the many vendors for fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, cut flowers and plants, cheese, eggs, gifts and more!

Musikgarten® Early Childhood Music & Movement classes

June 9-July 31. 9am-5pm. Ages birth to 6 years old. A

ONGOING

Tot Time

January 8-June 10. 10:45am-12:15pm. Infants to 5 years of age with caregiver. Come and play in our gymnasium. We provide balls, scooters and a bouncy house.

Musikgarten® Early Childhood Music & Movement Classes

January 27-June 1. 9am-5pm. Ages 0-6. A comprehensive, sequential plan for the musical development of children, birth to age seven, in a joyful and stimulating educational environment.

Summer Reading Club at Wilmette Public Library

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MAY 2020

2-3 Malott Japanese Garden Spring Festival
10am-3pm. Chicago Botanic Garden Nichols Hall. All ages. Learn about Japanese culture and enjoy musical performances, tea tasting, and crafts at this free family festival.

3 Winnetka Park District's Mother/Daughter Tea Party
1-2:30pm. Ages 4-10. Assorted teas; tea sandwiches; bite-sized desserts; simple crafts; photos. Registration required.

4-5 Mom & Me Tea
1-2pm. Chicago Botanic Garden. Ages 3-5 with adult. Combines stories, songs and cooking. Registration required. \$19 members/\$24 non-members.

5 Early Childhood Tour & Explore
9-10am. Baker Demonstration School, 201 Sheridan Road, Wilmette.

7 Build a Project with Mom
7-8:15pm. Community House Winnetka. Grades K-5 with Mom. Work alongside your child and build a project for Mother's Day.

8 Moms & Tots
8:30-10:00am. St. Francis Xavier School, 808 Linden Ave., Wilmette. Free drop-in playtime for young toddlers accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

15 Moms & Tots
10-11:30am. St. Joseph School, 1740 Lake Ave., Wilmette. Free drop-in playtime for young toddlers accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

22 Moms & Tots
8:30-10:00am. St. Francis Xavier School, 808 Linden Ave., Wilmette. Free drop-in playtime for young toddlers accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

22 Glencoe Public Library Concert
10-10:45am. Glencoe Public Library Johnson Room. All ages. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult. Join Miss Carole of Macaroni Soup for an energetic, enthusiastic concert with music that gets kids and adults alike wiggling and giggling, hopping and stomping, and singing along! Admission is free and no tickets or registration is required.

JUNE 2020

2 Moms & Tots
10-11:30am. St. Joseph School, 1740 Lake Ave., Wilmette. Free drop-in playtime for young toddlers accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

3 JG's Reptile Show
10-11am. Community House Winnetka. Come and see JG's Reptile Show! Pet an actual snake or lizard.

12 Meet the Violin with MIC's Erin Cano
10-10:45am. Indian Trails Library, 99 E Palatine Road, Suite E, Prospect Heights. Ages 3 years and up.

12 Glencoe Public Library Concert
10-10:45am. Wyman Green. All ages. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult. Acoustically rock your kid's world! Join musician, Laura Doherty, for a fun, high-energy concert with songs from all five of her albums. Admission is free and no tickets or registration is required.

18 Build a Project with Dad
7-8:15pm. Community House Winnetka. Grades K-5 with Dad. Work alongside your child and build a project for Father's Day.

19-21 Winnetka Music Festival
All ages. Try some yummy food and drink outside in Winnetka while listening to different genres of music that the young and old will enjoy! Four different stages including a kids' stage Saturday morning!

JULY 2020

1 A Grand Time in the Garden
10-11am. Chicago Botanic Garden. Ages 3-6 with grandparent. Special grandparent/grandchild story time with gardening activity. Registration required. \$19 members/\$24 non-members.

15-18 Winnetka Northfield Chamber Sidewalk Sale
All ages.

17 Glencoe Public Library Concert
10-10:45am. Wyman Green. All ages. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult. Catch the award-winning, kid favorite musician,

Little Miss Ann. Admission is free and no tickets or registration is required.


AUGUST 2020

7 Glencoe Public Library Concert
10-10:45am. Wyman Green. All ages. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult. Join us for a humorous, high energy concert that entertains, educates, and empowers all little rockers. Get ready to sing along to familiar hits and some movin' and groovin' original songs! Admission is free and no tickets or registration is required.

15-16 Malott Japanese Garden Summer Festival
10am-3pm. Chicago Botanic Garden McGinley Pavilion. All ages. Learn about Japanese culture and enjoy musical performances, tea tasting, and crafts at this free family festival.

Congratulations to Alliance Staff Member, **Megan Lichterman** and her family on the birth of their son, Julian, in March. Proud Big Sister, Sloane, and new baby Julian pictured below.





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