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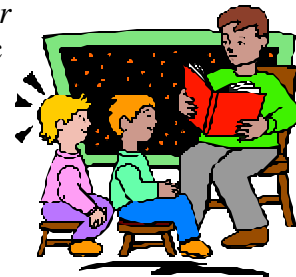
Young Families Newsletter

The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt marsh and shore mud, these became part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and will always go forth every day.

--Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

Dear Young Family:

As a typical parent, you have the hopes and dreams that your children will go forward each day to learn a little more that will put them on the road to a successful happy life. Recent studies support that young children's minds are like little sponges picking up bits and pieces from all their experiences. The "Better Baby" movement has built upon this. The Better Baby Press has published books that include *How to Teach Your Baby to Read*, *How to Teach Your Baby Math*, *How to Give Your Baby Encyclopedic Knowledge*, and *How to Teach Your Baby to Be Physically Superb*. This approach promotes specific academic skills beginning in infancy and is one of the programs coined, "hothousing," a term by Irving Sigel of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. In the hothouse approach, the adult is in charge and the child is engaged in practicing word or number skills, reciting and printing letters, and using workbooks and flashcards.



There are also in-between approaches that balance child-initiated activities with adult-directed lessons that are supported by child specialists. These approaches incorporate more play and less structured academic learning.

David Elkind, author of *The Hurried Child* and *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk*, opposes the "hothouse approach" and advocates self-directed activities. He expresses concern that pre-school children who are over-stressed by structured learning will have "less ability to work independently and to judge their own progress."

So what approach do you take? The remainder of this newsletter provides information and resources that will help you make the decision.

Sincerely,

Cyndy Jacoby
Family Living Agent

What should preschoolers know?

The National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC) recommends kinds of learning and teaching in their publication, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. The following suggestions are recommended for children ages three through 5 and represent an in-between approach to learning.

Three-year olds:

- Play alone and with friends.
- Explore both indoors and outdoors with active running, jumping, chasing, tricycling, and catching balls. Hands-on activities should include construction sets, art materials, puzzles, and games.
- Experimentation with objects in their environment such as blocks, sand, water, bubbles, seeds, animals, and other objects in their world.
- Language and music skills are to be explored through conversation, stories, songs, rhymes, and simple instruments.

Four-year olds:

- Field trips to zoos, puppet shows, etc.
- Learning centers where a child can choose books, puzzles, math games, science games, blocks, music CD's, art, and dress-up (make-believe) props.
- Problem solving centers for math, science, social studies, and health. Tools and devices related to wood, water, clay, cooking, and building.
- Additional stories, poems, playacting, drawing, copying letters, singing, and playing instruments.

Five-year olds:

The above activities continue; and theme learning is introduced. Theme learning takes a topic such as pets and then works on reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, and music around the topic.

The NAEYC has many resources on their website at <http://www.naeyc.org/>. The following learning tips are from over twenty-five articles at their link on *Play and Learning*, at <http://www.naeyc.org/ece/eyly/default.asp>

Starting Children on Science

- A magnifying lens lets the child get a close-up view of the miracles of nature.
- Share in the wonderings of your child. Don't always jump in with the right answer. Explore the answers together.
- Encourage investigation.

Children are Born Mathematicians

- Offer objects to compare concepts such as larger, smaller, more and less.
- Ask your child to divide snacks so each of two people gets the same amount.
- Count things the child encounters.



Making Children Excellent

The objective of the well children program at The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, (Source of Better Baby books) is “to make children intellectually, physically, and socially excellent.” On the website home page (<http://www.iahp.org/>) the institute describes itself as a “nonprofit educational organization that serves children by introducing parents to the field of early child development. Parents learn how to enhance significantly the development of their children physically, intellectually and socially in a joyous and sensible way.”

Authors of *Magic Trees of the Mind*, Marian Diamond, Ph.D., and Janet Hopson, share the results of one family who has chosen to dedicate themselves to this approach. The mother shared that their five-year old had learned to play stringed instruments, to speak French and Italian, to read, to swim, and to perform various physical activities and ‘loved it all!’

Diamond also shares the view of other experts who are less supportive of this approach. A few examples follow:

- J.H. Bernstein of Harvard Medical School: “Children need the freedom to explore in order to maximize their brain power.”
- Fischer of Harvard: “The research evidence does not support that babies can learn that stuff meaningfully in a way they can build upon.”
- Hirsh-Pasek an education researcher at Temple University found that academically pressured preschoolers tended to show some performance anxiety, and felt less positive after kindergarten than before.

The debate about early learning will continue. In the meantime, you must decide what best fits your family values and the goals you have for your children.

Sources:

Diamond, M. Ph.D., and Janet Hobson, **Magic Trees of the Mind, How to Nurture Your Child’s Intelligence, Creativity, and Healthy Emotions from Birth Through Adolescence**, (1999)

Elkind, David, **The Hurried Child**, 3rd Edition (2001)

National Association for the Education for Young Children, **Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Early Childhood Programs**, (1996)

Other Newsletters Featuring Learning

Other UW-Extension Newsletters focusing on learning and school readiness are available at

www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/

This Parenting Newsletter series is authored by Joan LeFebvre, Family Living Agent serving Vilas, Forest, and Florence counties.



The “School Readiness” link features nine newsletters including:

- Help Children Learn Social Skills
- Help Your Child Become a Better Reader
- Making Friends
- Motivation to Learn
- Preparing Your Child for Kindergarten
- Promoting Reading Readiness
- Rhyme and Alliteration
- Self-Regulation
- Boost Kid’s Brain Power (This newsletter follows.)

Boost Kid's Brain Power

Adapted from Better Kid Care, Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension

Does Your Child Drive You Crazy with “Why” Questions?

You don't want to discourage your preschooler's curiosity, but you can come to really dread hearing “Why?” over and over again. One of the best ways to handle the dreaded why questions is to ask a question back. “What do you think?” Your preschooler's ideas may surprise you, and will often help you understand what your child really knows. Then you can use what your child says as a way to start talking about the topic. Often you discover that what your preschooler wants to talk about is not what was asked about, so take your time to listen before you answer a question—it may not be the real question at all.

Help Learn Problem Solving

All kids squabble from time to time. Instead of struggling to play judge and jury, try something new. Make your children responsible for finding a way to work it out. You will have to supervise to make sure that older children don't take advantage of younger children, but even children as young as three can learn how to solve problems with a brother or sister.



If they are arguing over a toy, put the toy out of sight and say, “You can have the toy when you have figured out a plan to play with it that you both agree to.” Most often both of the children want the toy enough that they are willing to work together to get it back. Even young children will work out plans: “She'll play with it for five minutes and then I'll play with it for five minutes.” As long as they both agree to the plan, you can give the toy back. If children agree to taking turns, you might offer them a kitchen timer to help. This is a simple trick that really helps them succeed. Sometimes they enjoy using the timer as much as the toy!

Sometimes one child doesn't want it enough to work out a plan and walks away or refuses to talk. If this happens, give the toy to the child who was willing to try to work it out. Say, “Since she doesn't want it enough to talk about it you can use it now.”

For reluctant problem solvers you can set a timer. “If you won't work out the problem in five minutes then I'll decide for you.” It is always best to make the solution in favor of the child who was willing to work out the problem and less favorable for the child who did not put in real effort to work out the problem. This is a great consequence for not problem solving—kids learn that it is better to work with others than to refuse to try to work things out.

Encourage Your Child's Thinking

- **Restrict viewing of TV or videos and time spent at a computer or playing video games.** Children learn best by doing. The American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending no

television for children under two years and restricted viewing of only one to two hours a day of quality programming for children three and above.

- **Family Game Night.** Some families have a regular Family Game Night each week, for board games or card games. It's fun, makes your family feel close, helps children learn to think, and keeps the TV off.
- **Have a family dinner time regularly.** Talk with your children at the table. Mealtime conversation helps children learn words and can be the most important way to prepare your children for school.
- **Give your children time for play.** With our busy schedules it can be hard to find time to just relax at home, but make sure your child has time regularly for satisfying play time.
- **Read, read, and read some more to your child.** The wonderful world of books will open up to your child with daily reading. Pick stories about things that are interesting to your preschooler.
- **Explore your child's interests.** If you have a child who is interested in trucks, visit a construction site, read books about trucks, talk and wonder about trucks together, and play trucks. All of this helps children learn many things about the world while developing their unique talents and abilities.



- **Ask your child questions such as “What do you think?” or say “Tell me about it,” and**

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answers will also help you understand what your child does and doesn't know.

- **Treat problems as opportunities.** You lost some pieces of a game? Make up a new game. You don't have tape—what else could you use? This makes your children resourceful and good at coming up with fresh ideas.

Let Your Child Make Safe Mistakes and Experience Some Failure

Sometimes we protect our children from failure because we don't want them to be hurt or disappointed, but failure is a wonderful teacher for those brave enough to take the lesson. If your child wants to try out an idea that is doomed to failure, don't stop your preschooler. Let your child create the raft that will sink, or the plane that won't fly. Discovering that it doesn't work is worth far more than a lecture — it's a lasting life lesson. As long as the mistake puts no one in harm's way, let your child learn some lessons from the best teacher, the school of real life.

Encourage Your Child's Thinking

Watch your child—what interests your preschooler?

Listen—really listen—to your child's ideas.

Take what you know about your child to further stretch your preschooler's thinking with conversation and activities.

Source: Parents Count. Better Kid Care, Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension, March, 2005.

This document can be made available in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, or audio tape, by contacting your county Extension office. (TTY 1-800-947-3529)

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu December, 2005