

Nursery School News

A Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School

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From Jane: Kindergarten Readiness

For many of you this is the time of year to think about kindergarten readiness. Some children are obviously ready to move ahead, in chronological age and all other areas of development. Others, though meeting the legal age for kindergarten entry, are not ready for the shift. It is only January and that is part of the difficulty. It is very hard to predict how much young children will mature in the months prior to September.

Children develop in unpredictable and uneven ways. This is further complicated by the fact that the average age of kindergarten entry has dramatically increased over the past 30 years. Along with the increase in age, not surprisingly, there has been a steady increase in the academics presented in the kindergarten year. What we have today is a typical chronological age spread in many kindergarten classes of almost two years.

In reality a group of young children cannot all succeed at the same time when pressed to learn on schedule especially when that group ranges in age anywhere between a young 5 year old and 6 & ½. It is unrealistic and unfair to assume that all students in the class will master the same concept or skill at the same time. Children need to be allowed to acquire skills at their own individual pace. Because of the diverse age spread and levels of development, those children who are the youngest and least mature may be at risk. The critical question that parents must ask themselves is whether or not behaviors of immature children or very young children will simply proceed forward with the passage of time. In other words, will another year in nursery school protect these children from the stress of possible over placement or will it be a waste of their time because they will naturally catch up later?

The research of Chess and Thomas in a longitudinal study of children found that high activity level, distractibility, and shy or slow to warm up behaviors are the result of inborn temperamental traits. While these traits tend to persist throughout childhood, they become less dominant with age and improve when children are thoughtfully cared for by adults. More mature behaviors can then emerge when children are provided with the needed time to grow in nonstressful situations. However, children who start school too soon often become stressed and turn inward, focusing primarily on their own concerns. Not only is this the case in kindergarten, but also with each additional year of over placement, the pressure increases and they are likely to become more self centered and less able to cope with the increasing academic demands.

So there are a number of complex issues that we must attend to at the same time when we consider what is the best decision for each individual child:

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1. We must consider the chronological age of the child.
2. We need to understand each individual child's strengths and weaknesses.
3. We must consider the expectations of the particular kindergarten that the child will enter in September.

This third issue has been less well defined and articulated in the literature than psychological readiness. In most of the communities in our area, there is a component of readiness which is primarily a cultural process through which members of the community develop their unique local meaning of readiness.

Another example of readiness that differs from one community to the next is the City of Pittsburgh, which distinctly differs from that of Mt. Lebanon and many communities in the South Hills. I have a nephew with a late August birthday who lives in Squirrel Hill. When my brother and sister-in-law decided to send him to kindergarten when he was a very young 5, I was frankly alarmed. But once I saw the diverse levels of maturity that were acceptable in the city, I understood their decision.

So, there are clearly defined formal elements of readiness derived from child development theory and informal elements generated in local communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families. What is interesting and of real concern is that by most standards one would think children from our population would be less likely to be at risk for kindergarten unreadiness. This thought is based on the fact that most of our children enter kindergarten with a rich base of quality preschool experience and strong parental support for their education. Thus, most parents have very high expectations for their children's kindergarten performance. The result is that our kindergartens have been caught in a system of ever increasing standards as children are held out of school and the entry age has increased over the years in an effort to make sure that they can meet the high standards

and expectations. It is a bit like the "tail wagging the dog!" The more we hold our children out of kindergarten in order to ensure readiness, the older the average entry age becomes. The final result is expectations and standards then escalate in response to the overall age of the children, thereby causing many children who are less mature or young to be at risk. Readiness for kindergarten is increasingly being recognized as a crucial component in the education of children. It would simplify matters if parents routinely sent any child of legal age to kindergarten, and schools would in turn *appropriately deal with and accept the wide range of young children's varied and unique patterns of development.*

According to David Elkind, parents tend to focus primarily on skills and academics when considering kindergarten readiness. He feels that this is not a very useful approach, and suggests that the following 3 abilities are the most important expectations that a child needs to have mastered prior to kindergarten entry.

1. The ability to listen to and follow instructions given by an adult.
2. The ability to start a task and bring it to completion.
3. The ability to work cooperatively with other children, take turns, stand in line, and generally follow the standards of reasonable behavior when in a group setting.

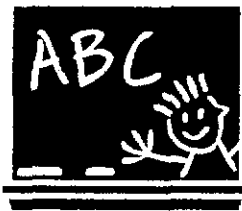
Elkind explains that, "These are all essentially social skills. It is important that parents read to children, talk about numbers and letters etc.; *but*, parents need to understand that all the research shows that children *must* have first mastered these skills in order to begin to learn academics."

As things stand now, there are distinct strengths, skills, and abilities that children need to have mastered for a good beginning in kindergarten. As long as we observe children closely, are aware of

From Jane: (Continued)

the issues, put our children's needs first, and keep an open mind about the best time for each individual child to move on; we are far more likely to make good decisions and send our children on when they are ready and able to succeed!

If you have concerns or questions about your child's readiness be sure to schedule a conference with your child's teacher. Our teacher's have observed many children over the years and really can help you make your decision about the best time to start your child in kindergarten. I am, of course, also available to answer questions and address your concerns.

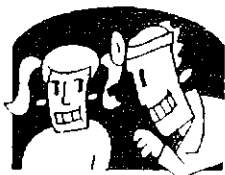


Is Your Child Ready for Kindergarten?

Gerriane Bobrosky, Ph.D., has developed the following guidelines for kindergarten readiness. You may be interested in them as you consider your own child's level of readiness

1. A child must be *physically* healthy and strong enough to enjoy the challenge of going to school and dealing with the increased stresses.
2. Emotionally, a child must be able to *separate comfortably* from his/her parents and spend a significant number of hours each day in an initially unfamiliar place with new adults and children.
3. A child must have a long enough *attention span* to be able to sit for periods of time such as listening during story time, or *persisting in the completion of tasks* such as simple games or puzzles.
4. A child must be able to *tolerate some frustration* in not getting immediate attention from the teacher and others, and be able to wait and take turns. This implies a degree of mastery and control over impulses so that he or she does not have to discharge or react to internal or external stimuli.
5. A child must be able to follow 2 or 3 component directions.
6. A child must be obedient in that she is able to take what is said and act on it.
7. A child must be able to do some table work (eg. Puzzles, coloring, cutting).
8. A child must be able to understand the concept of sequencing and have the ability to do and put things in sequence.
9. A child should have a solid self-concept and sense of competency, and not be unduly threatened by new or difficult tasks.
10. A child should be able to express herself verbally so that she can indicate needs and carry on reciprocal conversations. Examples are: baby talk should be given up; sentence structure should be basically grammatically correct; should be able to participate in group discussions.
11. A child must be able to *retain information*.
12. A child should be *socially mature*. This includes daily living skills, self-help skills, tasks around the home, school, and neighborhood, and socialization skills (not requiring an adult to help in solving all problems).
13. Developmental levels should be commensurate with chronological age. For example:
 Language (expressive and receptive): be able to answer questions about age, birth date, siblings etc.
 - Fine motor: print first name, copy a square, cross, circle, draw a person. Handedness is usually established by age 5.
 - Perceptual skills: ability to remember and differentiate forms, simple puzzles, etc.
 - Memory: verbal and nonverbal experience
 - Conceptual: ability to classify and generalize colors, animals, shapes, etc.
 - Gross motor: stand on one foot, hop, walk a straight line, balance, etc.

Significant deficits in any area should be evaluated.



Speech and Hearing Screening

On January 23 – 27 Easter Seals will be offering a speech and hearing screening for the children here at St. Paul's. Pam Sigfried is the speech and hearing pathologist who will be administering the screening. The cost will be \$12.00 per child. You have already received information including a permission form from Easter Seals in your mailbox. This is an excellent opportunity to get speech and hearing help for those children who need it at an early stage of their development. It is strongly recommended by Easter Seals that all preschoolers be screened so as not to overlook potential problems. Written results will be supplied to parents, and will include any recommendations for further evaluation if needed.



The Essential Need for Positive Touch

By Margaret Hooton

At a recent NAEYC Conference I attended a very interesting presentation by Frances Carlson, MA.Ed., which explored the essential need for touch among human beings. I thought I would share some of the valuable information with all of you.

Children form attachments to adults as a result of warm and responsive care, especially care through touch. When attachment fails to form, children exhibit many symptoms, among which are a lack of self-control, aggression, violence and oppositional behavior.

Historical studies, beginning as early as the twelfth century, showed that children who were not touched, despite being provided with adequate food and minimal care, failed to thrive, and in many cases, died. Studies of children who were rocked, petted, held, talked and sung to showed that those children continued to thrive, even if their environmental conditions were not as good. Premature babies who are massaged gain 47% more weight and are released from the hospital six days earlier than the non-touched babies.

Infants who receive massage show lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone which kills important immune cells when it is present at a high level. Sustained high levels of cortisol can also lead to cognitive and social delays. Reduced levels of

cortisol are seen with as little as 15 minutes of skin-to-skin contact a day.

Despite this research, cultural differences exist throughout the world in the amount of touch that is considered acceptable. A University of Pittsburgh research project observed families on the beaches of Greece, Russia, and the USA. The study noted that when it came to punishing or retrieving children, the amount of touch was very similar. But when it came to soothing, holding and playing, American children received significantly less contact than those of other cultures. One psychologist found that in San Juan Puerto Rico family members sitting together touched each other 180 times per hour, in Paris there were 110 contacts, in Florida there were 2.

It is interesting to note that the high touch cultures have relatively low rates of violence, while the low touch cultures have extremely high rates of youth and adult violence. A Center for Disease Control and Prevention report showed the homicide rate per 100,000 population in France was 1, and the United States 22.

In the United States we have become a society of untouchables. Young infants are placed in infant carriers for transporting and in bassinets or cribs to sleep. Wind-up rockers replace skin-to-skin rocking. We are becoming trained to touch babies only when they demand our attention. In the suspicious culture of fear of child abuse

...Positive Touch (Continued)

accusations, teachers are reluctant to touch children in their care. For many children, the only time they are touched in school is when a teacher intervenes to prevent aggressive or angry behavior. Aggressive touch through exposure to media and through actual physical aggression has increased in our country. Children who do not have enough positive touch will often seek out touch aggressively, by pushing, shoving and tripping.

What can parents do? Pick up your babies, and cuddle your children. Skin-to-skin contact reduces the stress hormone, so let's start reading books and watching TV together with kids in our arms. Make sure that there are plenty of positive touches, patting, soothing stroking on the parts of the body considered to be the most non-vulnerable – the back of the head, back, arms and hands. Give children plenty of opportunities to hold your hand, dance with your children in your arms, play some lap games, re-enforce positive verbal messages with an approving pat on the back. Rough-house and wrestle with your children, showing them that rough and tumble play doesn't have to become aggressive. Give your children clay and other art materials that encourage touch. Get a sand box. Let children play with the water in the bathtub. Stroking the fur of a pet, or stuffed animal can provide important skin stimulation.

Increasing positive touch is easily achieved when we focus on this essential need in our children. Payoffs will include less aggressive behavior, secure, happy and healthy children

Pink Eye

We have had lots of children with red eyes lately. There is always much confusion about bacterial vs. viral pink eye, what the difference means, and how long children should stay at home in order not to infect other children and adults.

I called Mercy Hospital Infection Control and they sent me the following information:

“Conjunctivitis means an inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is a clear membrane that lines the eyelids and covers the white of the eye. Conjunctivitis is sometimes called “pink eye.” Viruses that cause the common cold can cause conjunctivitis. Some bacteria, including staphylococci, chlamydia, and streptococcus, may also cause the same symptoms. Conjunctivitis can be spread easily from person to person. Most often it is spread by contact with contaminated items including hands, washcloths or towels, cosmetics, contaminated computer keyboards or telephones.

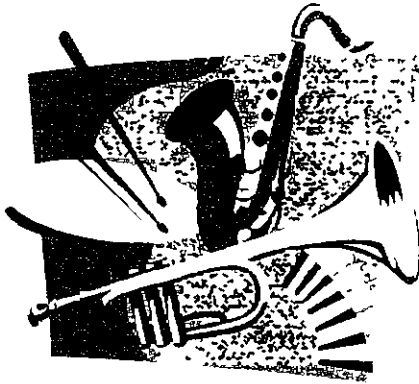
The symptoms may include: itchy or scratchy eyes, redness of the white portion of the eye or eyelids, sensitivity to light, swelling of the eyelids, watery discharge from the eye or a pus like discharge from

the eye. People often describe a crusty formation along the eyelashes from discharge.

It is impossible to determine the cause of conjunctivitis by looking at the area. A physician needs to examine the area and take cultures if indicated. Eye drops containing antibiotics are usually prescribed for treatment. Washing the affected eye gently with warm water and patting dry is recommended to remove the crusty areas.

Mercy Health System states that children and adults with “pink eye” should contact their physician and should not be exposed to others for 72 hours (3 days) after effective therapy is started. Bacterial conjunctivitis should improve within 2 days after beginning treatment with antibiotic drops. Viral conjunctivitis may get worse 5 to 7 days after the first symptoms. It can improve in 10 days to one month. If one eye is affected it can take up to 2 weeks for the other eye to become inflamed.”

Because “pink eye” is highly contagious I would ask you to keep your child away from school, other children and their teachers as long as their eyes are pink.



And All That Jazz!

On Saturday, January 21st at 7:00 pm St. Paul's Episcopal Church Women are holding a fundraiser to benefit the Gulf Coast. The evening will be similar to our wine tasting event. There will be many wonderful items to bid on, a fantastic Dixieland jazz band, and the menu will feature bouillabaisse. The cost of the event is \$25.00 per person with a cash bar. I have tickets here in the office and anyone who desires a ticket is welcome to stop by and purchase one. Again ALL proceeds will go to benefit the Gulf Coast.

Valentines Day

Please check with your child's teacher before planning valentines. In any event, **do not** put the name of the recipient on the outside of the envelope. Simply include the correct number of cards for everyone in your child's class. Names on envelopes add confusion to a hectic day and make it very difficult for the teacher. This is not only the case for the very young children who cannot read names, but even the older children who can read names tend to become confused in the midst of the excitement! Finally – *Please – no candy in the valentine cards. Many types of candy have hidden peanut products in them.*

Snow Days

So far so good! On snowy days check the local cable channel (channel 7) if you have cable and the status of our school will be listed. If you do not have cable check KDKA or WTAE for our school status. Typically we will be closed if the Mt Lebanon schools are closed and if Mt Lebanon has a late start time we will do the same.

We also have a phone chain that your child's teacher will initiate for each class when school is canceled. Sometimes the phone chain is ineffective, so listen to the radio or TV if it is snowing. Most important of all, whether we close or not – use common sense. This is preschool, your child will not receive an unexcused absence if they are not present. If you are not comfortable driving on the roads, please do not take chances!

Thanks to the Parents and Children of St. Paul's



Thank you to all of the kind families of St. Paul's Nursery School who donated hats, mittens, gloves and scarves to the *Tree of Hope*. Mindy and I were able to deliver 2 large boxes filled with warmth to children of Pittsburgh who have lost a loved one to a crime. Adriene Young, founder of the organization, distributed our donations at a Christmas Party for the children and wrote to thank us for our generosity. Thank you for making it possible.

Also, thanks to everyone who donated so generously with gift certificates from Giant Eagle and Wall Mart. Kathi Workman and Eileen Sharbaugh distributed the gift certificates to the Turkish Refugees who have relocated here in Mt. Lebanon from Russia and they were simply overwhelmed by our generosity.



Many thanks for all of your help and cooperation during a very busy time of the year!

Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities and Events



January 2006



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
1 New Years Day ★ 	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16 MLK Day No School 	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 Last day of Registration for the 2006-2007 school year.	31	February 1 st is the earliest postmark for <u>new student</u> enrollement.	<u>No school</u> February 17 th - Teacher Inservice	<u>No School</u> February 20 th Mid winter Break	