

Nursery School News

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

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From Jane: Does Our Parenting Matter?



I'm reading an excellent book entitled The Nurture Assumption by Judith Rich Harris. Her thesis is very interesting – she believes that parents really have much less to do with the way children turn out than most parents have been led to believe by much of contemporary culture. She looks at the world of peer relationships and the ensuing role of self-socialization, and how important that is to a child's development. As a result of this thesis she looks at the complex transaction that nature and nurture play in the way our children turn out.

It has been very politically incorrect in the past 25 years or so to even consider that nature (heredity) might be much of a predictor of how children turn out. This is because the possibility that factors such as race and ethnicity might come into play once we consider that our children's genetic make up may play an important role in their development. As a result, during the past 25 years or so, social scientists have focused so much on nurture, which is the effects of environmental factors and particularly parental socialization of children that many parents now feel an unbelievable burden about their role in how their children turn out.

As a result we sometimes forget that our children are totally separate individuals. They have their own separate minds, desires, and agendas - and as a result they may know best what they want in life for themselves. We tend to feel so much pain when things do not go well - blaming ourselves, and just as quickly we often take far too much credit as though we have lived their lives ourselves – when things turn out well!

With that in mind I ran across an old article from the New York Times Magazine, by Anna Quindlen that I thought I'd share with you all. She reminds us so beautifully that as well-meaning parents we too often believe that we should make ALL of our children's

life choices. We often have the misguided belief that we somehow know our children better than they know themselves, and we can and should therefore make better choices about their lives than they can make for themselves.

My Child Belongs Only to Himself

Just as eight weeks ago the cat found a dark place and gave birth to her first litter: three pathetic miniatures of herself, their eyes sealed shut, their voices weak falsettos. For two weeks the new mother was manic; moving them from place to place because of imagined dangers. For two weeks more she was solicitous, slipping out for la meal and returning immediately to the writhing pile of fur and blunt faces, grooming them even when they were clean.

Then she was ruthless.

One morning she led them into the light, calling peremptorily as she marched down the hill to the dish of dry food, signaling that their use of her body was at an end. When two of them were placed in a cardboard box and driven away to new homes, she didn't even look up. She did nurse the remaining one, his paws kneading her slack underbelly, for all of that afternoon, but I was sure that I was reading more into that than was there. It seemed that in a month she would scarcely recognize her own offspring.

Just five years ago I gave birth to my first child, his head as lumpy as an overripe cantaloupe with our twin exertions to thrust him out into a (cont.)

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From Jane (continued)

world too bright for watery infant eyes. I was not meant to emulate the cat, casual in her ability to give life over and over again. I have always stalled at the solicitude stage, trying, always failing, to get tough and push him away.

In my case, it is the child who finds the strength to turn tail and walk: into the dentist's office, off to a friend's, to kindergarten, to life. This is because he intuitively understands what the cat knows about her young and what human beings can never quite accept about their own. That is, he is not and never has been mine. He belongs to himself.

I am proud of this, believe me, for he wears the weight of his own self as though he were standing atop an Olympic podium with a gold medal around his neck, listening to his own anthem: "Oh say can you see/ How stupendous is me!" It is not that he is deeply attached or even deeply dependent, upon the love and approbation of his parents; clearly he is, in that way eldest children have of turning their lives into one big report card.

But every day of the last five years he has made a mockery of my initial, egocentric impulses occasioned by his birth. I can remember looking at him one day, about four weeks after he arrived, and being terrified by the possessive pronoun, repeating to myself, "This is my child."

I can remember agonizing over the most predictable small decisions, over whether to wake him if he fell asleep at the breast, whether to arrange the stroller so that he faced me or the world. Always my subconscious was haunted by the role of the mother in literature and life, a felon, a despot, a nether-do-well: "Mr. Smith, who was not picked up as an infant when he cried..."

This is the way we proceed. All our lives we look for a universe to be at the center of, and finally we believe we have found it. We scan little faces, featureless as beach balls, for any resemblance to our own. We swear that a grip on a rattle bears the genetic trace of our mean tennis serve. And all else follows: the father who cannot bear the boy who reminds him of himself, the mother who wants the daughter to follow in her footsteps, the children who kick at the traces of being

just like someone else.

Because they never are. My son is, at 5, a plateau person, the kind of human being who likes to do things only when he is sure he can do them well. He is scrupulously honest and very considerate. He is a little bit of a nudge and occasionally hypersensitive. In all these ways he is different from me, and in most of them he is different from his father.

In a hundred other ways, too. When we start out, having a baby sounds like undertaking a personal project. But this is not a paint by number kit, a sampler, a bit of wood working on the lathe in the basement. We can treat it as accessorizing, with color-coordinated clothes and crib sheets and matching bumpers, and for a time we do.

The failure is if we continue to do so, for then we will miss the miracle of the whole process, which has nothing to do with us personally. We act as conduit for a totally distinct person here. Not a junior or a Daddy's little girl or a chip off the old block, but a whole new person.

Before I knew him, when he was small, I used to congratulate myself on the fact that I planned to love my son unconditionally, no matter how he turned out, no matter what his character was like. But that is because I really expected him to be a piece of me. Now the truth is that I love him quite conditionally, I love him based on who and what he is, and that has made loving him as easy as knowing him has sometimes been hard.

Like the mother cat, I have passed through some stages, and so has he, but in the end it turns out that it was only in the beginning that I did not recognize him anywhere. He is no hybrid of his father and me, even in the face, which we have to squint at to conjure the resemblance of which we humans are so pathetically fond.

I did think, in some sense, he would be a miniature me. But the reality is so much more splendid. He has turned out to be no more, no less, than him. It is a great temptation, not a sacrilege but a pride, to use the capital letter H.

St. Paul's Nursery School Annual Plant Sale

According to Phil, winter will be over on St. Patrick's Day, just in time to think about plants for spring and summer enjoyment. Master Gardner, Kathy Root, will kick off this year's plant sale with an informative presentation. Order forms, which will include plant name, color choice, light requirement, spacing and butterfly attraction will be in mailboxes mid March. Please return to Jane's office.

This year's vendor for hanging baskets and annuals will be The Hot House and the vendor for perennials will be Friday's Perennials. Plants may be picked up in the lower parking lot on Thursday, May 8th or Friday, May 9th with delivery and distributing orders. Signs up sheets will be posted outside of each classroom.

Please call Becky Brinich at 412-561-3641 with questions about the plant sale or plant selection/information.

Mayfair

SAVE THE DATE – SATURDAY, MAY 17TH - 11:00 AM TO 3:00 PM

Mayfair plans are moving along! Our first all school meeting took place on Friday, March 7th at 9:30 am in the church undercroft. All those interested were invited. If you could not make it, it is not too late to get involved! It's a great way to help the school, meet new people, and have some fun. Laurel Flaherty - 412-278-0301 and Katherine Doyle - 412-341-4732 are chairing the event. Any questions please give either one a call.

Mayfair Prizes

Once again we will be collecting fast food kids' meal giveaways to use for prizes, so gather them up from your house and drop them by in Jane's office.

Summer Program

Registration forms will be available for our summer outdoor camp by mid April. Summer program will run from Monday, June 23rd – Friday, August 1st. The program runs Monday to Friday from 9:15 am – 11:45 pm for children who are 3 by January 1st 2003. This year we will also have a program for children who are 3 by June 1st that will run Tuesday – Thursday from 9:15 am – 11:45 pm. All children must be toilet trained to participate in our outdoor summer program for health reasons. Children may sign up for only one week or as many weeks as you choose. Any questions about the program can be referred to Mindy Hudson, summer program director.

Strawberry Jam

Mindy's classes will be making strawberry jam to be sold at Mayfair. Contributions of sugar, liquid fruit pectin (Certo) and mason jars (1/2 pint and pint sizes) will gratefully accepted in the red box in Jane's office. The jars do NOT need to be new, just clean and unbroken. New rings and lids will be purchased. Any questions, ask Mindy. Thanks.

The Back Page: “Hot Topic” - Keeping Our Kids Safe

St. Paul’s Parent Partnership presented its second “Hot Topic” on Tuesday, March 4, with an always pertinent topic: Keeping our kids safe. The guest presenters included Kelly Riddle, a Mt. Lebanon Police Officer recently featured on the cover of Mt. Lebanon Magazine, and St. Paul’s own Eileen Sharbaugh who is a member of Safety Kids, a non profit organization educating families about child safety. For this “Hot Topic” we once again broke attendance records with 25 Moms/caregivers.

Kelly Began the presentation with alarming statistics: 1:4 girls and 1:6 boys will be sexually assaulted by age 18; abductions by family members account for the largest percentage of abductions; and in the large majority of cases the abductor/molester is known by the child and not necessarily a “stranger”. In fact, only 24% of perpetrators are strangers. And, in abductions by a non-family member there is usually an event that precedes the abduction. If the parent was aware of the incident the abduction may have been averted.

These facts make it clear that we, as parents, need to be proactive in keeping our children safe. The first and foremost is to be really keen listeners. Another example is to not use the word “Stranger” with your child. Remember that in a large majority of cases the child already knows the abductor/molester. So how do you go about educating yourself and your children about staying safe?

Kelly brought along a card game called “Tell Mommy,” which is an interactive game that can be played with your children as young as age three. Each card contains a question about either an appropriate or a non-appropriate behavior and then answers the question with either a true/false response or an OK/Tell Mommy response. Because the game is developmentally appropriate for children ages 3-10, some questions may seem to make more sense for the school-age child. Nonetheless, age three is not too young, by any means, to begin discussing topics such as good touching/bad touching, offers to help neighbors, offers for rides home, getting lost and much more. Here are some examples of questions used in the “Tell Mommy” game:

Q: When you are changing your clothes at dancing class, a janitor comes in the room. Is that OK or should you tell Mommy?

A: Tell Mommy. The dressing room should be a private place.

Q: A man asks you to help him find his lost puppy. Is it OK to help him find his lost puppy or should you tell Mommy?

A: Always check with Mommy before helping someone. If she says it is OK, then you may help. She may want to help, too.

Q: You can ask Mommy and Daddy for hugs and kisses whenever you want. True or False?

A: True. Mommy and Daddy will always take the time to show you love. Parents – think of ways to make sure your child knows he/she is loved.


In fact, one of the most important things outlined at the meeting is that we need to teach our children that we love them unconditionally. This will make it more difficult for a molester/abductor to convince a child that Mommy or Daddy won’t love them anymore should they report an incident.

Eileen presented a wealth of tips and case studies, which are all part of the “Check First” program. The main point driven home through all the facts is that our most important tool we have to keep our preschoolers safe is our constant supervision. At this age, nothing takes the place of our presence and attention.

Some other practical tips to remember: teach your kids to scream and to say “I don’t know you” or “you are not my mom/dad”. Many kids shout “NO” at the simplest request so this should not be a response taught to a child for this type of frightening situation. Also, if you are separated from your child in public, teach them to freeze and stay still. Let them know you will find them a lot faster by just retracing your steps. If they are really scared, teach them to flag down a mom pushing a stroller and ask that mom to stay with them until you arrive. Both Eileen and Kelly emphasized what may seem obvious to some: never leave you children alone in a vehicle—EVER. Not only is it illegal, but extremely dangerous.

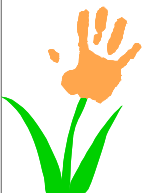
There are many more tips for kids and parents so we included safety check points with this newsletter. Both Eileen and Kelly reminded us that in all this world is made up of good people, but that is not a good reason to not prepare your kids for a worst case scenario. Stay tuned for more events/activities focusing on safety here at St. Paul’s. Also, “Tell Mommy” card games will be available to all parents—one per family— at St. Paul’s in the next week.

Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities & Events March 2003

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7 MAYFAIR MEETING 9:30 AM	8	9
10 CLASS PICTURES	11 CLASS PICTURES	12	13	14	15	16
17 	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						



Mayfair 2003
Saturday, May 17
11 AM-3 PM · Rain or Shine



St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School... 45 Years And Growing

