



# Nursery School News

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

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## From Jane: Helping Young Children Deal with Conflict and Anger

This time of year I find myself spending lots of time showing visiting parents around the school who are interested in enrolling their children in St. Paul's for preschool. One of the most frequently asked questions is what do we do when children "misbehave?" They also often phrase it by asking how we "punish" children when they're "bad."

What a loaded question! I think what parents are really asking is what do we do when conflict between children or between a child and her teacher arises. First of all, we *never* punish children here. Although, we may need to help a child get control of herself or remind a child that hitting, pushing, or grabbing toys is not allowed or a good way to solve problems. But here is the real issue. *Children actually need to experience conflict in the classroom in order to learn how to work out problems.* If we simply suppress all conflict, and never allow it to play out among children in the classroom, how can we empower children to learn to be competent problem solvers on their own. Otherwise they will always depend on more powerful adults to problem solve for them, and be far too dependent on outside approval for their basic sense of self and self esteem.

In our post 9/11 world we are living in a somewhat fearful world where security and safety are paramount. In terms of education and what goes on in classrooms there is a paradox that often occurs when adults are scared and view the world as unsafe. During times of unrest and uncertainty teachers and adults often emphasize obedience and as a result over pressure children to conform. "Over managed" classrooms that allow for little free choice, little free play, allow no conflict or creative problem solving, that only allow set routines and a teacher directed atmosphere may seem appealing when the larger world seems chaotic.

Any time conflict and diverse views are expressed, we are bringing more intelligence into use as we think and work out problems by understanding more than one point of view. This ability begins in the preschool setting. In fact, helping your child deal with conflict and anger during their day is one of the most important things that we do here in preschool.

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## From Jane: (Continued)

Allowing conflict and handling children's anger can be puzzling, draining, and extremely frustrating for adults. Anger and conflict are something that most adults would simply like to see go away in terms of handling children. It is never a good idea to make a child feel that if she brings in conflict or disagrees she is being "bad." Rather, the goal should be to help children understand how to deal appropriately with disagreeable or angry feelings. Our goal here at St. Paul's is not to deny or suppress angry feelings in children, but to help them find ways of accepting their honest feelings and to then help them channel their conflicts toward a constructive resolution. Admittedly that is a lofty goal! And one that we must realize cannot be mastered quickly, but something that takes years of growth and development.

And tolerating some conflict is not an excuse to allow children to behave like tyrants. Children must be taught to empathize with others and to respect the rights of others, but at the same time they should be helped to find reasonable and thoughtful ways to express their honest feelings.

One of the most useless things to say to a child when they assert themselves in a negative manner is "be nice." I only wish I had a nickel for every time I've heard a parent say this to a child. The problem with "be nice" is that it is first of all essentially meaningless to a small child, and secondly they are not given any information about the necessary skills to help them deal with the conflict, anxiety, and disappointment that they may be feeling when they are not "being nice." What we need to do is first set limits, if a child for instance hits another child and grabs their toy. Then we need to give some suggestions for alternatives or compromise such as, "You may ask Billy for a turn when he is finished," or "You may play with the blue car while you wait for Billy to finish his turn." There are no silver bullets in the world of conflict, and it takes young children many years to learn the art of sharing, compromise, and conflict resolution.

Once children have been given reasonable choices and alternatives and they still cannot accept the situation and refuse to negotiate an acceptable compromise, it really is OK for the adult to set a firm limit. They get the message, particularly if you are consistent and continue to calmly offer alternatives and choices in future episodes. You'll be surprised how quickly most children turn it around and become good citizens once we acknowledge and validate their real feelings, and then both model and give them constructive ways to problem solve.

So as we navigate through our rather out of control world we might begin by giving up our illusion of total control where our children are concerned. We need to allow children to express honest conflict, make some choices with our guidance, and we must respect their genuine feelings (even when they are feelings that we do not like). And we can also feel reassured that we do have some control in the fact that we are the grownup in the situation. We do not have to allow our children to act out impulsively, aggressively, or in any way that is hurtful to another when they do not get their way. We can set limits and meet our children's emotional needs at the same time. We can best do this by being motivated by a need to protect and teach our children as opposed to a desire to punish.

Once we give up the illusion that conflict is always wrong and should be denied and suppressed, we will then be able to help our children learn to live in a world of diverse points of view. We can then help our children learn to choose, think, and negotiate which ultimately will lead them to learn how to participate successfully in conflict resolution. And we will know that we are providing essential skills to help our children jump through the hurdles necessary to build a solid sense of self and to successfully survive in today's complex world.

## Lenten Parenting Programs

St. Paul's Nursery School and Church are presenting two interesting programs on parenting during Lent entitled, "Strengthening Family through Spirituality." Gerda Moul, director on Noah's Ark Preschool in McMurray and The Rev. Martha Eilertsen, Rector of St. Steven's Episcopal Church in Washington, PA and former St. Paul's Nursery School parent will be the program presenters. The programs will be presented in the Church lounge from 7 – 8 pm on the evenings of Tuesday, March 7<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>. A free dinner will be served at 6:30 pm for anyone interested, as well as free child care from 7 – 8 pm during the program.

Plan to join us for interesting presentations and discussion on these Tuesday evenings in March.

### "The Culture of Perfectionism"

Speaking of spiritual growth and families, I recently came across an excellent article written by The Rev. Peter G. Cheney, executive director of the National Association of Episcopal Schools that reflects on spirituality and how our obsession with perfectionism and the resulting competition in today's society often makes a negative impact on our lives, our families, and our spiritual health in general. I thought it was worth sharing with you all so here is The Rev. Cheney's article:

"Do you struggle with perfectionism? Do your school's students, parents and faculty? Do you find that it is difficult for you and them to allow yourselves the luxury of simply being human – of not getting "it" right all the time (or at least appearing to)? You are indeed a rare human being, serving a rare school community, if your answer to these questions is an unqualified "no." In a speech given at Fairfield University in 1991, Fay Vincent, then the Commissioner of Baseball and a trustee at Deerfield Academy, said the following:

*"Baseball teaches...how to deal with failure. We learn at a very young age that failure is the norm in baseball and, precisely because we have failed, we hold in high regard those who fail less often – those who hit safely on one out of three chances and become star players. I also find it fascinating that baseball, alone in sport, considers errors to be part of the game, part of its rigorous truth."*

Substitute the word "spirituality" for "baseball" in Vincent's statement and consider again the matter of perfectionism. Episcopal Schools are dedicated to human formation – academic, spiritual and physical. They are founded on the belief that all humans are created in God's image and that our

essential goodness and worth are gifts from a loving and empowering God. Yet too often the standards we apply and reward are those of perfectionism and "works righteousness." People are infinite, fallible creatures. To be human is to be inherently imperfect. That is okay: It's the way life is. We do ourselves and those we serve a great disservice if we try to deny this truth or hide from it. The ethic for a satisfying, dare I say, joyous, existence must transcend the notion that we can work everything out ourselves and become a completed package or finished product.

Spirituality is a lot like health. We all have health; we may have good health or poor health, but it's something we can't avoid having. The same is true of spirituality; every human being is a spiritual being. The question is not whether we "have spirituality" but whether the spirituality we have is a negative one that leads to isolation and self destruction or one that is more positive and life-giving...Spirituality involves learning how to live with imperfection...[and] the core paradox that underlies spirituality is the haunting sense of incompleteness, of being unfinished, that comes from the reality of living on this earth as part and yet also not-part of it. For to be human is to be incomplete, yet yearn for completion; it is to be uncertain, yet long for certainty; to be imperfect, yet long for perfection; to be broken, yet crave wholeness.

All these yearnings remain necessarily unsatisfied, for perfection, completion, certainty, and wholeness are impossible precisely because we are perfectly human – which is to say humanly imperfect."

## Faculty Appreciation Lunch

Many thanks to Diane Riley and Linda Shapiro, our home room parent coordinators, for organizing a wonderful luncheon for our entire staff after our in-service day on Friday, February 17<sup>th</sup>. It was delicious and we were all very appreciative for the delicious food.

I'd also like to thank each and every parent for the monetary donation for bricks for our side walk in the teacher's honor. We have a wonderful group of parents at this school and you all do so much to make St. Paul's Nursery School the very special place that it is for your children. Thanks again for all that you do!

## Board of Trustees Nominations

Our Board nominating committee is currently looking for parents and community members who would be interested in serving on our Nursery School Board of Trustees. We are always particularly interested in people with backgrounds in education, law, finance, medicine, communications, psychology, and child development. If you or anyone that you know would be interested in serving on the Board, please contact Lauren Bloch at 412-531-9226 or e-mail her at

## Mayfair Picnic

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 am – 2:00 pm! We will have our annual Mayfair picnic. Families should plan to come and bring a picnic lunch to eat on the playground.

We will once again have our pony rides, moon bounce, train rides, and the teachers will all be here to help out with the other little games. We will also have plants for sale. If you have McDonalds Happy Meal toys that you'd like to get rid of now is the time to clean out your closets. We use them for prizes for our games, and everyone is a winner!

Julie Maselko and Sharon McCarthy are our chairs this year so if you have questions or would like to help out, you can contact Julie at 412-831-5872 or Sharon at 412-343-6384.

## Spring Break

Just a reminder that Spring Break is April 10 – 14. So the last day of school before the break is Friday, April 7 and the first day back is Monday, April 17. Happy Easter!

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

# March 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7 Lenten Parenting Program 7:00 P.M. Dinner 6:30	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 Lenten Parenting Program 7:00 P M Dinner 6 30	15	16 Parent Partnership meeting 11:30-12:30	17	18
19	20 First Day of Spring 	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

