



FALL 2009

# Nursery School News

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL

## Director's Dialogue

### How to Raise a Two Marshmallow Kid

## CALENDAR

### October

#### Monday, October 12

Open House  
7:00 – 8:00 pm  
MWF Classes &  
Pam/ Pat's AM 4Day

#### Saturday, October 17

Fall Clean-Up Day

#### Monday, October 19

Open House  
7:00 – 8:00 pm  
T-TH Classes &  
Erin/ Marianne's T-F Classes

#### Tuesday, October 27 & Wednesday, October 28

Conferences - No School

#### Saturday, October 31

Halloween Parade

#### Tuesday, November 14

Fall Fundraiser  
7:00pm

#### *Thanksgiving Break*

#### Tuesday, November, 24

Last Day of School

#### Tuesday, December 1

First Day Back

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Actually, if I had the definitive answer to this one I would quit my job and save the world! The phenomena of delaying gratification and the development of self regulation and self control is what the marshmallow experiment is all about. The thing that is so interesting about this simple experiment, which was originally done over 40 years ago at Bing Nursery School by Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel, is that he has followed his subjects over many decades. The results of his research point out some very interesting and significant correlations between those children who immediately gobbled the first marshmallow and those who were able to self regulate enough to delay the gratification of eating that first yummy marshmallow long enough to wait and get a second. This is the way the test worked.

Four year olds were put in a room containing a desk, a chair, and a bell. They were given one marshmallow on a plate placed in front of them and told that they could have two marshmallows if they waited and did not eat the first one until the experimenter returned. They were told that if they could not wait, they should ring the bell before eating the one marshmallow.

According to Mischel, "A few kids ate the marshmallow right away; they didn't even bother ringing the bell. Other kids would stare directly at the marshmallow and then ring the bell thirty seconds later. About thirty percent of the children, however, delayed gratification until the researcher returned, some fifteen minutes later. These kids wrestled with temptation but found a way to resist." The initial goal of the experiment was to identify the mental processes that allowed some people to delay gratification while others simply surrendered. After publishing a few papers on the Bing marshmallow studies in the early seventies, Mischel moved on to other areas of research.

But occasionally some years later, Mischel would ask his three daughters, all of whom attended Bing Nursery School at the time of his marshmallow experiment, about their friends from Bing. "It was really just idle dinnertime conversation," he says. "I'd ask them, how's Jane? How's Eric? How are they doing in school?" Mischel began to notice a link between the children's academic performance as teenagers and their ability to wait for the second marshmallow. He asked his daughters to assess their friends academically on a scale of zero to five. Comparing these ratings with the original data set, he saw a correlation. "That's when I realized I had to do this seriously." So starting in 1981 he sent out questionnaires to all reachable parents, teachers, and academic advisers of the six hundred and fifty-three subjects who had participated in the marshmallow study.

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**Stay Healthy!  
Don't forget to  
wash your  
hands at arrival  
and pick-up.**

## NiH1 Flu Concerns

Parents have continued to express their concerns to me about the flu, and particularly since we now know that it is in our community and that a case was recently diagnosed at Mt. Lebanon High School.

Just to let you folks know I have a health committee on our Board of Trustees that includes two physicians and a RN. These folks have been in contact with the Allegheny Health Department who will keep us up dated as to any need for school closures or other important information concerning the Nursery School. It is extremely important that you folks continue to WASH YOUR HANDS upon arrival with your child, and please wash your hands again before entering at pick-up. Also, I will again remind you to keep sick children at home.

I really think everyone is doing a good job so far of being extra careful, particularly with keeping sick kids at home, and I thank you all for your co-operation. I will keep you up-dated on any new information that you folks should be aware of concerning the flu. Thanks again for your cooperation in this extremely important matter.



## Open House

This year we are going to try something a little different for Open House. We invite everyone to come at any point in the evening between 7 and 8 pm that is convenient, and tour the entire school.

We will serve apple cider and treats in the Big Room as usual, but all classes, morning and afternoon, are welcome to visit their own class room as well as the other classrooms throughout the evening.

We also encourage everyone to visit our resource room and our art room. You are welcome to arrive at any time between 7 and 8 pm and you may leave whenever you have finished your visit.

Sibling, grandparents, and any other interested family members are welcome. The staff and I look forward to seeing you all at Open House.

## OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULE

**Monday, October 12<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 – 8:00pm**

**All MWF classes and  
Pam and Pat's M – TH am class**

**Monday, October 19<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 – 8:00pm**

**all T-TH classes and  
Marianne and Erin's T – F classes**



## Director's Dialogue cont.

Once Mischel began analyzing the results, he noticed that low delayers, the children who rang the bell quickly, seemed more likely to have behavioral problems, both in school and at home. They got lower S.A.T. scores. They struggled in stressful situations, often had trouble paying attention, and found it difficult to maintain friendships. The child who could wait fifteen minutes had an average S.A.T. score that was, on average, **two hundred and ten points higher** than that of the kid who could wait only thirty seconds.

According to this line of research self control may trump IQ scores when it comes to predicting overall success in many areas of life. How does this work? As parents of little kids we all know that every impulse, emotion, and desire pretty much bursts out of our young children immediately and unfiltered. We've all been victims of their whining, melt downs, and tantrums. This is because the part of the brain that brings under control all of those big emotional feelings, the frontal cortex, develops later than the more primitive part of our brain which is called the limbic system. This evolutionary "older" region of our brain gives us raw emotion and still overrides the newer "thinking" frontal cortex when we are young. Unfortunately for some people, even in adulthood, it seems that the limbic system is still too often in charge. People who cannot control their emotions, who lose their temper easily, and sometimes quickly seek relief from life's discomforts through substance abuse, are not using their frontal cortex very well. Rather than thoughtful, calm problem solving in daily life, they are anxiously and impulsively seeking quick relief from life's challenges.

So how does whether a child who can wait for a second marshmallow relate to our parenting or perhaps more importantly what we as parents can do to help our children learn to use their thinking brain over their emotional brain. Children first learn to self regulate through interactions with parents and caregivers. If we consistently react too quickly to relieve our children of all discomfort (because that is easier than listening to the tantrum), and/or try and control and over manage our children's lives so that there is no need for them to experience discomfort in the first place (this way we have already done all of the thinking for them), although there will be fewer chances for the inevitable moments of upset and meltdowns, we will not be helping them learn to self regulate by doing all of the hard work of problem solving and thinking for them.

The flip side of giving in too quickly to their demands would be our own emotional, angry response to the tantrum by dealing out random punishments and threats or offering rewards for compliance without any real explanation about the reason behind our expectations. This type of control is called "other directed regulation," as opposed to self regulation. Other directed regulation is imposed from external reinforcement systems such as the use of punishments and rewards. And the message that children get is that terrible things happen from adults if they don't control their impulses or seek the approval of others. Hence "good" behavior is the result of seeking the approval of others, avoidance of punishment, and/or seeking some sort of external reward such as a sticker or food treat. This type of constant external reinforcement actually serves to increase emotional anxiety in children. In the short term this sort of strategy may work on occasion, but long term this strategy does very little in the way of helping a child concentrate on a difficult mental task or improving the organization of their thoughts as a result of truly understanding how to function and problem solve in their daily lives. In other words short term gains for long term losses.



***“Children first learn  
to self regulate  
through  
interactions with  
parents and***

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## Director's Dialogue cont.

When our children tantrum and misbehave, rather than our reacting in an equally intense manner by scolding, giving angry time outs, and begging for their compliance by offering rewards, we should calmly assess the situation, think about it, and ask ourselves what mediators could help our child better understand the situation. A more thoughtful and calm approach such as this on our part is the most effective way to help our children do a better job of handling themselves the next time. It is our job to give our children the tools that they need to get along in life, rather than just focusing on ending, at any cost, the immediate emotionally charged situation that is so annoying. Unfortunately learning how to use one's thinking brain in order to control the emotional brain doesn't just happen overnight. It takes years, and it is the sum total of all the good and difficult times of our relationship with our children.

Our job is to help our children understand their world and the way that it works. And in the world they will inherit, they are going to need to understand "how" to think as opposed to "what" to think. One of the most effective things that you can do to help your children learn how to think is to role model that difficult challenges are not to be avoided, and can be met by exerting effort, showing some emotional constraint, and seeking your own positive solutions. By role modeling these behaviors, you will help your children self regulate on a daily basis through your own self empowering actions.

So folks – one marshmallow right away, or wait 15 minutes and get two? A few years later it becomes do I do my homework right now, or do I go out with friends and then panic (pure emotion) next week when I realize that I cannot possibly learn the math in one night for the test tomorrow! Granted, it is an uphill battle for children to get their emotions under control enough to even begin to use the thinking part of their brain. But the more we can delay our own gratification and calmly guide them to wait a few minutes before we relieve ourselves by "giving in" all too quickly; and thus actually make the effort to teach them some responsibility for their own actions, the more likely we are to raise a two marshmallow kid! Check out the marshmallow experiment on You Tube – it is absolutely hysterical – and sadly true!

*"Our job is to help our children understand their world and the way that it works."*

## Fall Teacher Conferences

This year our fall teacher conferences are scheduled for **Tuesday, October 27** and **Wednesday, October 28**. There is no regularly scheduled school on fall conference days.

During your conference the assistant teachers will be available in the Big Room to provide free childcare so that you do not have to take your child in to the conference with you. Please take infants and toddlers into the conference with you, as we are not equipped to safely watch babies and toddlers in the Big Room with the older children. Look for a sign-up sheet on your child's class bulletin board later in October and be sure to sign-up for a time slot.

The purpose of the fall conference is for the teacher to share how things are going and to make pertinent observations that may be helpful for you, as well as answering any questions that you might have about your child. If the allotted time turns out to be too short, another appointment can be made. We look forward to a fruitful interchange between parents and teachers.

## Daily Classroom Information

At the beginning of the year some parents typically ask if there will be information about classroom activities on a daily basis. It is certainly a logical request from a caring parent who is interested in knowing just what goes on with their child in the classroom. My answer is that we do not give a daily report of activities, and there are a number of reasons for this.

First of all, we simply do not have enough time to write out a detailed report at the end of each day detailing the specific activities that took place for 12 to 18 children. Certainly you are welcome to see each classroom's daily schedule which consists of art, free play, job chart, snack, music and stories. From within that framework each class studies different themes throughout the year. Some themes may last only a day or two (particularly in the younger classes). In the older classes the themes may last for a month or longer, depending on the interest of the children.

Because our curriculum is a negotiated curriculum that is individualized for each child, as well as one that offers many choices with a balance of teacher directed and child directed activities, the class as a whole does not necessarily do the same thing. Although the teacher may have the water table out, not every child will choose to play in the water table. The same for art; children are not required to participate in art (occasionally we have a "must do"), but if your child decides to make a collage out of the materials that are always available, as opposed to painting with water colors that the teacher has offered for that day, it is really fine. Even the overall flow of the larger class curriculum is often redirected in midstream in order to react and respond to the specific interests and questions of the children.

A good preschool curriculum is best described as more of a compass (general direction) than a railroad pass (specific rigid time tables and destinations). Young children need to be offered lots of choices and to be encouraged to use their own creativity throughout their day. This is not to say that they will not be exposed to a rich array of literacy, art, math, science, and social studies through their school experiences on a daily basis. It is important to remember that young children are learning all of the time. Just as children grow all of the time, they learn all of the time. They do not learn only during special group time or teacher directed activity times. In fact it is important to remember that pre-operational children (Piaget's term for preschool age learners) learn most and best through hands on trial and error activities of their own choosing. Children learn while they are eating, talking, playing, and getting dressed in the morning. One simply cannot and absolutely should not separate social, emotional, cognitive, and physical learning during the preschool years. Our job here is to offer a wide variety of interesting and challenging materials and activities, and to encourage lots of opportunities for rich socio-dramatic play.

Each classroom teaching team will send out a monthly newsletter that is in essence a reflection of what has occurred during the past month. You should all be receiving one of these soon if you have not already. So for those of you who are new to St. Paul's, be patient about feedback early in the year. The early days are really just a time for the children to adjust to a new setting, with new friends and teachers. As the year progresses, you will actually receive lots of general information about the classroom activities. And please be assured, if there are any concerns about your child in school, her teacher will let you know immediately.

*"A good preschool curriculum is best described as more of a compass (general direction) than a railroad pass (specific rigid time tables and destinations)."*





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# Fall Fundraiser Oktoberfest Party!

**You're Invited to St. Paul's Episcopal  
Nursery School's Annual Fall  
Fundraiser Party on Saturday,  
November 14, 2009 at 7:00 pm**

This year we are planning an entirely new Fall Fundraiser. We are having an Oktoberfest theme with a fabulous band - The Elliotts (see attached flyer)! Plans are in the works for a terrific party for everyone. The food and drink will include an assortment of delicious heavy hors d'oeuvres, Oktoberfest beers, and wine. Parents are assured a fun night out to meet other parents, mingle with staff, and enjoy all of the entertainment.

We already have an exciting array of live and silent auction items such as a family behind the scenes visit to the Pittsburgh Zoo, a private family visit with the penguins at the Aviary, a Mt. Lebanon fire truck ride for your child, birthday party in the Big Room, golf lessons at St. Clair Country Club, custom made golf clubs, fantastic tickets to sports events, concert tickets, dinners out, unique custom jewelry items and much more! We will also have a 50/50 raffle and basket raffle.

The evening truly offers something for everyone. If you have a contact or idea for an exciting auction item please contact our auction chair – Kari King at [kking13@comcast.net](mailto:kking13@comcast.net) or our Fall Fundraiser chair Melissa Stalder at [msstalder@comcast.net](mailto:msstalder@comcast.net).

The annual Fall Fundraiser is an opportunity to raise funds critical for maintaining the quality teachers and excellent educational programs that all of our children benefit from here at St. Paul's. Invitations will be given out to everyone in the next couple of weeks.

Reservations are needed and should be accompanied with the admission fee of \$45.00 per couple or \$25.00 per person. Plan to come and feel free to invite friends, extra invitations are available to anyone who would like one. All of the food and drinks are included in your admission fee!

So mark your calendar, get a babysitter for **Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm**. It's informal, so wear your jeans and come out to support the school and enjoy the fantastic music with The Elliotts and all of the wonderful food and beverages.

See you all there!



## The Elliotts

## Annual Fall Playground Clean-Up Day

Our fall playground clean-up day will be on **Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 – 11:00 am.**

Please consider donating an hour of your time to help us clean up the playground. Look for the Doodle link on the St. Paul's web site to choose a time slot and job.

Free babysitting will be provided.



## Santa Breakfast Reminder

**December is just  
around the corner!**

Mark your calendars for **Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>  
– 9:30 am – 11:30 am.**

There will be breakfast for the family, a visit with Santa, music with Margaret, and a puppet show.

Look for reservation forms in your mailbox in late November.