



WINTER 2010



# Nursery School News



THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL

## Director's Dialogue

### Helping Children Deal with Conflict

This is never a pleasant topic, yet it is something that each and every one of us must deal with on a daily basis. We all deal with conflict, not just with our children, but in our marriages, our work lives, and with friends and family members on a regular basis. Some of us are fortunate enough to have the self confidence to calmly know who we are and where we stand on issues in our life well enough to not find ourselves in the lose/lose position of either continually backing down and constantly accommodating and agreeing with others OR angrily disagreeing and engaging in heated upsetting arguments in our daily relationships. And of course one of the biggest and most disturbing areas that we all face conflict is our day to day parenting. Children want things their way, and we as adults cannot and should not always give in to their desires and demands. In reality, differing points of view are part of the human condition, not only between parents and their children, but in all relationships. So the big question should not be how can we end conflict, but how can we best deal with conflict, set reasonable limits and boundaries, and in doing so set a good example for our children.

One of the most important things that children learn while attending nursery school is a beginning understanding of conflict resolution. Nursery school and particularly the free play that transpires among children in the class room is the ideal environment for children to experience conflict and learn how to work out problems and to better understand how to deal with more than one point of view. The beauty of play among preschool children is that it is ambivalent enough to allow for all sorts of disagreement that will be followed by lots of creative problem solving if we take the time and energy to help children learn how to intelligently negotiate solutions to their own problems. "Over managed" classrooms that allow little free choice, little free play, allow no conflict or creative problem solving, and that only allow routines and a teacher directed atmosphere may seem appealing on the surface. This way all of the children appear to be "good." But the truth of the matter is that just because a child appears to be perfectly behaved in one instance or another or "good" does not mean that they are "good." It is only the case when they have been given the option to choose to be good AND THEY choose to do so. This type of behavior is what psychologists refer to as self regulation. If children are constantly regulated by others, they will not have the opportunity to learn how to "self" regulate. And one of the many difficult by products for children (and adults for that matter) who do not have good self regulation is the lack of ability to appropriately resolve conflicts in their relationships.

In reality any time that conflict and diverse views are expressed, we are bringing more intelligence into use as we think, talk about, and work through problems by understanding more than one point of view. Unless we allow a child to at least verbally express their thoughts (both at home and in school) we will have no idea who they are or what they are actually thinking. This is why the "terrible twos" tend to be so challenging. A normal two year old is just beginning to separate and individuate from their parents and significant others in their life. They have not yet developed any negotiation skills, or even the verbal skills to express themselves to reach any sort of consensus with others, and yet they are full of opposition. If we meet their fierce

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## CALENDAR

### February

Thursday, February 11

No School

Staff in-service

Friday, February 12

No school

Mid-winter break

Monday, February 16

No school

Mid-winter break

### March

Monday, March 29 –

Monday, April 5

No School

Easter Break

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## Director's Dialogue cont.

and sometimes angry demands for obedience from a position of power and control, we are not setting a good example or teaching them about ways to handle conflict and differing points of view. On the other hand if we simply give in to their every demand, not only will we be creating a potentially unsafe environment, we have again not taught them anything about differing points of view. So as you can see managing conflict is a very complex part of parenting, not to mention handling an entire classroom of preschoolers.

When children are denied something that they want and they protest, it is important that we follow through by giving them concrete options and consistent guidance. Often the first step in helping a child begin to come to terms with any sort of conflict is to acknowledge, in a nonjudgmental way, how angry they feel about not getting their way. Once we allow a child the freedom to honestly express their real feelings of anger and frustration, they can then begin to curb their impulsivity and think about how to resolve the conflict. Acknowledging a child's point of view and anger does not include allowing them to express it in an aggressive, out of control or hurtful way. What is key here is that our role needs to be that of helping our children find ways to constructively, thoughtfully, and calmly problem solve so that they can then rationally deal with their angry feelings. If a child grabs a toy from another child we need to give them choices such as – "you may wait your turn or play with something else." If a child tantrums for a new toy at the store we need to first acknowledge that we understand how much they would like to have that toy, but then calmly explain that we are not able to buy it for them today. First it is the parent or teacher who has the ideas for compromise; it is not until much later that the children themselves begin to resolve their own conflicts. The least helpful comment on a parent or teacher's part is probably to say – "be nice" when a child is acting out in a conflicting situation.



That absolutely gives the child no useful information or guidance whatsoever. And of course if we just tell them that they are "bad" for grabbing, hitting, or crying, again we have given no helpful guidance, only negative judgment.

Another very important piece of the dynamic is to encourage children to tell other children who may behave in an aggressive or out of control manner toward them how it makes them feel. They need to be allowed to assert themselves toward the aggressive child by telling them that they may not hit or use hurtful words or take their toy. Once children have been given reasonable choices and alternatives and they still cannot accept the situation and refuse to negotiate an acceptable compromise it is really ok for the adult to then set a firm limit. By calmly but firmly saying "no" or "you're done", you are sending a clear message to the child. In fact you would be surprised how quickly they get the message, particularly if you are consistent and continue to offer alternatives and choices in future episodes. Again, what is important here is to acknowledge their real feelings and wants without being judgmental, even if ultimately they cannot have their way. This way we have given them a clear message that they can live with the disappointment, and so can we, without their world coming to an end. And they have also been told that their perspective is not the only one that exists

So as we help our children navigate through life and its many conflicts and ups and downs it is important to remember that they do have their own separate and unique perspective of the world which is not necessarily the same as ours. It is also important to remember that we do not have to allow our children to act out impulsively, aggressively, or in any way that is hurtful to another. We can set limits and meet our children's emotional needs at the same time. And we can do this best by being motivated by a need to protect and understand our children as opposed to a desire to appease at any price or to punish and control.

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Once we give up the illusion that conflict is always wrong and should be denied and suppressed, we will then be free to help our children learn to live in a world of diverse points of view. It is important for children to understand that everyone does not always have to think alike and that it is also not necessary to be in complete agreement with others at all times for their world and their relationships to be ok. We can then help our children learn to choose, think, and negotiate without anger, which ultimately will lead them to learn how to self regulate in a manner that allows them to participate successfully in conflict resolution in their own lives. Our children will then be better at dealing with the inevitable conflicts and jumping through the hurdles necessary to enjoy a life of many rich and complex relationships.

## 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 a set schedule, especially when that group ranges in age anywhere between a young 5 and 6 & ½ year old. 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 non-stressful situations. However, children who start school too soon often become stressed and turn inward, focusing primarily on their own concerns and anxieties. 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 even more self centered and less able to cope with the increasing academic and social 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:

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 intellectual and social and emotional readiness. In most of the communities in our area, there is a component of readiness that is primarily a cultural process through which members of the community develop their unique local meaning of readiness.

A good 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.



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## Kindergarten Readiness Cont.

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 uneasiness. 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 our children 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 that 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 the kindergarten's expectations, 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 teachers 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.

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## 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 for a two year term.

We are 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 stop by the school office and speak with me or contact our nominating chair, **Kari King at 412-563-6161** or e-mail – [ksking13@comcast.net](mailto:ksking13@comcast.net).

### To Do List:

1. **Get more involved at St. Paul's!**

## 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 think about 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 (egg. writing letters, cutting, coloring, and drawing).
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, gender, birth date, siblings etc.
  - Fine motor: print first name, copy a square, cross, circle, and 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.



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## Valentine's 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.**

## Laurie E. Lust Foundation Scholarship

I am pleased to inform you all of a new scholarship which has been given to St. Paul's Nursery School by the **Laurie E. Lust Foundation** which was established in her memory by her brother Chris Lust. Laurie was the daughter of Fred and Dottie Lust. The funds will be applied toward St. Paul's financial assistance program.

Laurie was a student at Mt. Lebanon High School when she passed away due to complications of Juvenile Diabetes in the fall of 1994. Laurie over came the challenges of Juvenile Diabetes throughout her life time on many occasions, including being an honors student and outstanding student athlete. The Foundation initially established the Laurie E. Lust Achievement Award which is a scholarship given each year to a senior at Mount Lebanon High School for achieving their highest potential scholastically and/or athletically while facing a challenge in their life. The Foundation has now expanded and contributes to other local and national charities and organizations.

This year the Foundation has chosen to establish a scholarship program for St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School. Laurie attended preschool at St. Paul's as well as worked as a counselor in the St. Paul's Summer Program. She emanated exuberance for life, compassion and warmth, and had the ability to deal with obstacles honestly and maturely. Her family credits many of her wonderful personality traits as the result of the fundamental building blocks that St. Paul's Nursery School strives to instill within their students. As a result the Foundation and Laurie's family have chosen to provide the students/parents who are in need of financial assistance in order to attend St. Paul's the opportunity to apply for the scholarship so a child does not miss their opportunity to start building their own foundation. With the help of St. Paul's Nursery School's Board of Directors and Administration, the Foundation has provided its first award to two students for the 2009 – 2010 school years.

**Anyone in need of financial assistance for the 2010 –2011 school year is encouraged to apply for tuition assistance which has been greatly enhanced through the generosity of the Laurie E. Lust Foundation.**

## Snow Days

On snowy days check the local cable channel if you have cable for the status of our school. Typically we will be closed if the Mt. Lebanon schools and other nursery schools in the area 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 or delayed. Sometimes the phone chain is ineffective, so please check the cable channel if the weather is cold and snowy or call your child's teacher. 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!