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# NURSERY SCHOOL

# NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL



### April 2009

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April 3 - Spring Break Last Day of School

April 14 - First Day Back

April 21 - Movie Screening 7pm  
"Where do the Children Play?"



### May 2009

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May 12 - Children's Art Show  
6:30 - 8:00pm

May 21 - Year End Picnic 6p

May 22 - Last Day of School

## ✘ Director's Dialogue ✘

by Jane Adams

### Understanding the Difference between Self Regulation and Obedience in Children

This can be tricky. In general when someone remarks that a child is obedient it is considered a good trait. Many parents approach parenting in such a way that high levels of compliance and obedience are the desired end product. Power and control are thought of as something to be dealt out or done to the child by those in authority. On the other hand the concept of self regulation is not given much consideration. A lack of empathetic awareness of children's needs coupled with allowing for precedence of own pressing adult needs, often leads to actions and words that tend to inhibit our children's independence and sense of self. The age old phrase "terrible twos" probably most adequately describes this construct. Sometimes parents become anxious that if children are permitted to use their power to explore their environment, or challenge parental authority, they will become totally out of control and disrespectful. And of course no one wants to raise that sort of child. But when children's power and independence are overly suppressed – when they are *never* allowed to challenge, voice an opinion, or have any choices, but are rather always told what to do – this sort of demand for compliance to parental authority can actually have many limitations. And if this orientation toward parenting is coupled with inappropriate expectations in terms of the child's age and overall development, there can be some pretty negative outcomes in the long run for the child. Here are some of the limitations that can be placed on a child when obedience is *overly* emphasized in a family:

- **Obedience breeds powerlessness.** When independence is not fostered as a state of growth, the feeling of dependence becomes a dominant personality trait. Independence fosters empowerment – a sense of self in comparison to one's environment. The young child who explores is learning about cause and effect relationships between concepts: the "if – then law" of logic and nature. For young children, the ability to say "no" is a way of establishing good boundaries and differentiating a sense of being a separate self, both necessary for success in life. Total unquestioned obedience to parental rule and authority, however, breeds a sense of helplessness and dependence at a time when learning to be a separate person is critical. emphasis on obedience to authority often struggle with their ability to withstand all types of peer pressure.

# EVENING ART SHOW

**Tuesday, May 12**

Our art teachers, Heather Herbay and Leanne Simmons, are currently putting together some exciting plans for an exhibition of the 4 and 5 year old children's art work. Plan to stop by any time the evening of Tuesday, May 12 between 6:30 pm and 8:00 pm up stairs in the main Parish Hall where the children's art will be exhibited. Everyone is welcome to come with their child and any other interested family members and friends. You can enjoy some punch and cookies while you view examples of all of the wonderful art that the children have created throughout the past school year. The children are all quite excited about their big event!

# YEAR END PICNIC

We will have a picnic to celebrate the end of the school year and for everyone to say good-bye to friends and teachers on **Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:00 pm** until dark at the Mt. Lebanon Main Park. We will be using pavilion #2 (the one closest to the parking lot). Everyone should bring their own family picnic dinner and drinks. The children can then play in the park after their picnic. See you there!



# SUMMER PLAY CAMP

Summer program registration forms will be available after the Easter Break. Summer program will be the weeks of **June 15 – July 3 and again July 13 – July 27**. There will be no program the week of July 6.

Tuition will remain \$60.00 per week. When registering for up to 3 weeks, your tuition payment is due at the time of registration. If registering for 4 weeks or more, the remaining balance is due by June 15, the first day of camp. In case of withdrawal, \$60.00 of the initial payment will be retained as a nonrefundable processing fee. There will be no refunds for withdrawal unless the request is received at least 3 weeks prior to the first day of the program. To participate in the 5 day program, children must have completed a 3 year old class or be 3 of age by September 1, 2008 and be toilet trained.



We will also offer a 3-day program for children who have completed the 2 & 1/2 year old class and are toilet trained. The cost of the 3-day program will be \$36.00 per week and the entire amount will be due at the time of registration.



# Director's Dialog

*continued from pg 1.*

- **Obedience breeds inadequacy.** Inadequacy is the perception that self or others are “less than capable or inferior.” By demanding obedience, parents model that power is something to be used on others to get them to do what you want. Power is equated to control and the more power you have, the more control you can exert on others. The sense of powerlessness described earlier fosters a personal sense of inadequacy. Being a decision maker for your own life is not an option. Powerlessness, excessive dependence, and a sense of personal inadequacy are common traits of many very obedient children. Later in life, when children should have gained the maturity to make their own decisions, they are either unable to do so and continue to depend on others to make decisions for them, or they simply make poor decisions. These are the children who constantly call their parents from school or college on their cell phones about every little detail of their life.
- **Obedience breeds rebelliousness.** The human spirit cannot be denied its existence. Power struggles, acting out behavior, extreme disobedience are all common behaviors resulting from years of complete conformity and yield to parental rule. If we always tell our children exactly what to do we are not asking them to think. Then rebelliousness simply becomes an immature imitation of the flip side of compliance, rather than I will do whatever I am told to do, it becomes I will do whatever I am told NOT to do.
- **Obedience breeds compliance – to all.** Doing only what one is told to do often teaches children a generalized learned response of compliance. When those in perceived power make a demand, like a child's peer group, once again, the learned response is to comply. In the experimental world of teenagers, common sense to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and other risky adolescent behaviors are overwhelmed for those who easily choose to comply with peer pressure. Simply, children who have been raised with an emphasis on obedience to authority often struggle with their ability to withstand all types of peer pressure.
- **Obedience breeds followers not leaders.** Always doing what you are told to do by others is not nearly enough to succeed in the world. Thinkers, problem solvers, visionaries, and leaders are made from early home environments that foster these traits. Obedience as a dominant parenting practice designed to oppress children's power and independence often has long lasting devastating consequences as observed in children and adults who are unable to make wise choices, take initiative, or provide the leadership critical to nurturing parenting themselves.

So...if we don't emphasize obedience do we simply allow our children to use their power in any way that they please and totally run the show? Of course not! What we need to strive to instill in our children is the ability to self regulate. In many ways this is much more difficult for children to do and more difficult for parents to teach, because first of all parents have to be mature adults with a good handle on their own self regulation – something that we ALL struggle with from time to time.

If we are to teach our children to self regulate we must approach parenting first and foremost from a position of non anxious and well defined principles, values, empathy, and care. If you find yourself getting into power struggles with your children around issues such as bed time, eating, dressing, and toileting etc., the first thing you need to do is look at yourself. Do you approach these parenting tasks thoughtfully and calmly from a teaching perspective or from a hurried, emotional and “stressed out” punitive perspective? If you seem to be using lots of bribing (we all do a little of this), and negative talk – “if you don't I will...” or “you can't have this until...”. You need to stop and think about your own priorities and then think about your child's feelings.

Even when you cannot allow something, do you at least take the time to validate your child's feelings? Do you take the time to listen to them and allow them to express their own wants and needs (it doesn't mean that you have to give in)? Do you allow them time and space to express feelings – even when those feeling are negative or perhaps make you uncomfortable?

## Director's Dialogue continued from pg 3

If you can slow down and lower your own anxiety enough to create an atmosphere of thoughtful empathy – even when the final answer is going to be no – everyone has a better shot at meeting their needs rather than constantly dealing with “melt downs” on both children’s and parent’s part. The other issue around self regulation is threats that are not followed through. If you set a condition for your child, then you need to be willing to make the sacrifice to follow through with it. You really need to stop and think about a threat to eliminate some pleasant activity or withdraw something of importance to your child if you are not willing to go through the misery of the punishment with your child.

As you can see – teaching self regulation is more about you, your own level of maturity, and your reactions to your child than anything else. Your child will learn to self regulate if you role model calm thinking about the issues and reflect upon them. Also, if you point out to your child how their behavior affects others and help them reach reasonable compromises without expecting them to consistently “give in” to others in order to gain the approval of others. And of course never tell your child that he or she is “bad,” when it is actually the behavior that is “bad.”

If we can regulate ourselves to put our children’s best interests first, it will not be easy, but it will be rewarding for everyone in the end. The old – I am going to have to punish you for your own good, is unfortunately too often an emotional release of anger or revenge on the parent’s part, as opposed to “good” discipline for the child. It doesn’t mean that we cannot point out the error of our child’s ways, but in doing so we need to regulate the intensity of our adult emotions and ensuing emotional tone around testy little situations that children so often lead us into.

Once we have encouraged and emphasized self regulation, as opposed to obedience, we will have children who can better delay instant gratification, make reasonable compromises, understand others feelings and reactions to their behavior, and overall make wise and thoughtful choices in life. These will be the children who will grow up to be willing to put forth more effort to learn and be curious about life and to focus on worthwhile goals for themselves. They will also not be afraid to take the risk of challenging themselves to find their passions in life, even when fulfilling those passions takes lots of time, dedication and hard work!

## Documentary Film Screening and Discussion

**Tuesday April 21**

St. Paul’s Nursery School is planning to show a screening of the PBS documentary film - *Where Do the Children Play?* on Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 pm in the Big Room. There will be an interesting discussion following the film. The film was created as an outreach project about the vital importance of open-ended creative play for the healthy development of children. The film was inspired by Elizabeth Goodenough’s book *The Secret Spaces of Childhood* (University of Michigan Press, 2003), and was written and directed by Christopher Cook and produced by Michigan Television. Goodenough, a scholar in the field of child development, noted that time outside school is increasingly filled with adult-organized activities and indoor screen time. Children no longer have the space or opportunity to organize their own play.

The film examines an issue of growing concern among pediatricians, mental health experts, educators, and environmentalists: more and more children are growing up today with little or no opportunity for unstructured play, especially outdoors.

A marked decline in children’s spontaneous and creative play is a key factor in their increasing mental health problems, according to a recent statement from an international group of educators and children’s advocates who have called for a “wide ranging and informed public dialogue about the intrinsic nature and value of play in children’s healthy development.”

These very issues are echoed in a recent warning from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) which states:

“Children have far too little time for unstructured play, which leads to increased stress in their lives. Causes of the demise of play are parental fears of “stranger danger” and the explosion of electronic entertainment – to the point of addiction for some – in the lives of today’s children.”

These and other issues are explored in the film. Plan to join us for dessert and a lively discussion following this very provocative and interesting film at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup> in the Big Room.



*Happy  
Easter!*



**ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL  
NURSERY SCHOOL**

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