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Thank You!

Parents Together gratefully acknowledges the contribution from the Greenwich Coalition to Combat Underage Drinking to reprint *Guidelines for Teen Parties*.

Thanks to all of you who contributed to *Parents Together's* 2006 campaign. If you have yet to participate, please show your support and contribute today with a check to *Parents Together*, P.O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831.

What's Seen on the Social Scene

by Dr. Mel Levine, Co-Founder and Co-Chair, All Kinds of Minds

While learning represents a major challenge for all kids, it does not compare to the social aspects of school in terms of its potential to create unhappiness and maladjustment among students.

From early in the morning until well into the evening, kids labor under relentless pressure to gain the approval of their peers, to sidestep public embarrassment, and to form protective and supportive friendships. For some, the social campaign yields devastating, even tragic results; they are crushed by their personal inability to build a positive reputation with their classmates. Often these kids have social cognitive dysfunctions. They simply lack the brain wiring needed for social success.

We can divide social cognitive functions and dysfunctions into three general areas: verbal social ability, non-verbal social ability, and political skill. Let's take a look at how each of these skills affects children's success in the classrooms, corridors and playgrounds of our schools.

Verbal Social Ability

Kids need to talk appropriately with other kids. Socially successful students usually have good conversational skills. They pick their topics well and are able to regulate their tone of voice, choice of words, and sentence structure to resonate with prevailing moods. They know how to talk kid language credibly, and they are adept at using language that makes others like them and also, feel good themselves.

Children with social language dysfunctions may talk about the wrong things at the wrong time. They may sound angry when they're not angry. They may have trouble "reading" other people's feelings from the way they speak or sound. Socially rejected students are often boastful or verbally abrasive. When they try to converse with peers, their choice of language may make them sound too old or too young. In essence, they may be totally ineffective at using language as an instrument for social success.

Non-verbal Social Ability

The non-verbal aspects of socialization are just as relevant as the verbal aspects. Non-verbal social skills include the ability to resolve conflicts without fighting or resorting to verbal abuse. Knowing how to respond to the social behavior of others, for example, being able to interpret other people's facial expressions and body language is just as crucial. Finally, children who are socially adept also know how to "market" themselves, i.e., develop an image that is appealing to others (often reflected by the way they dress, act, move their bodies, etc.). Regrettably, some students seem to be socially clueless when it comes to these non-verbal interpersonal processes. They may have no idea how they are coming across, and why they keep hearing, "Sorry, this seat is saved."

(continued on page 2)



("What's Seen on the Social Scene" continued from page 1)

The Political Challenge

Success in school is, at least in part, a political affair. Different kids are more or less successful in pleasing their highly judgmental constituencies.

The group that students most need to win over is their teachers. Indeed, children learn political skills by getting their teachers to like and respect them. Once called "apple polishing," this is a practical part of real world education. Relating well to your teachers in school is the precursor to getting your boss to like and reward you as an adult!

Sadly, some kids have less than optimal relationships with the important adults in their lives, and seem unable to nurture positive interactions with those that supervise and evaluate them. Naturally, they suffer as a result of these weaknesses. They seem to miss the point that teachers are human beings, and have a need for students to compliment them, appreciate them as individuals, and also to show an interest in the subject matter they teach.

Some Helpful Hints

Parents and schools should monitor the social successes and failures of children and adolescents. Some kids need practical advice on how to succeed (or at least survive) socially. In severe cases, social skills training may be required, if available. In all instances, parents or caretakers need to serve as social sounding boards, so kids can confide in them about social setbacks endured during the school day. Such adults need to be very good listeners, avoiding the temptation to be overly reassuring (e.g., "don't worry about it, just ignore her"), and the impulse to preach a sermon.

Utilizing Verbal Abilities to Relate to Others

Jason demonstrated several verbal or language-related skills that contribute to relating to his peers. These included

the use of humor, precise interpretations and use of language specific to his peer group, and communication of emotions. Utilizing language-related skills to relate to others is referred to as verbal pragmatic abilities. Students who develop and use their verbal pragmatic abilities are adept at interpreting and expressing feelings, matching the moods and emotions of their peers, modifying language depending upon the audience, and monitoring and repairing verbal interactions.

Communication of Feelings

Jason used a key verbal pragmatic skill when he initiated the interaction with his peers, communication of feelings. Jason and his friends use the popular vocabulary of their group to share both positive and negative feelings about school, each other, and themselves.

Selecting the precise word or phrase and using the appropriate inflection or tone are fundamental abilities related to the accurate communication of feelings. These abilities involve using physical and social cues to identify one's current emotional state, reviewing known words or phrases in memory to label the emotion, and speaking the word or phrase that best communicates the emotional state to another person or persons.

Communication is facilitated when the speaker overlays a tone and inflection appropriate to the words and phrases being spoken. Here are some strategies to help students develop their ability to communicate their feelings accurately:

- ◆ Improve students' ability to communicate their feelings by enhancing their ability to recognize their different emotional states and

identify their own emotions. Help students develop the vocabulary words to label their emotions and thoughts, and improve their verbal expression of feelings.

- ◆ Recognize students' non-verbal attempts to communicate feelings (e.g., facial expressions, sighs, and gestures), and encourage them to express those feelings in words.

- ◆ Allow students to express themselves in ways other than through oral discussion (e.g., writing journal entries, matching pictures, answering true/false questions, role-playing).

- ◆ In particular, teach students to verbalize their feelings when they are becoming frustrated (e.g., "This work is hard," or "I'm not sure what to do here.").

Interpretation of Feelings

Jason and his friends cannot rely solely on the expression of their feelings to ensure effective social interactions. For every expression of emotion, another person or group must interpret the feelings and emotions being communicated.

The interpretation of another person's feelings is complex. In order

"Parents or caretakers need to serve as social sounding boards so kids can confide in them about social setbacks endured during the day."

to develop a valid sense of another person's emotions, the listener must devote attention to actively listening, and also, review his/her memory for similar social

situations.

Key neurodevelopmental functions underlying the accurate interpretation of emotions include: attending to and recognizing the type of words being used, and how the words are being said; identifying and labeling the feelings of the speaker; and waiting for more information to validate the listener's interpretation of the speaker's emotions. The following will help student develop their ability



to interpret the feelings of others:

- ◆ Use an advance organizer to focus student attention on how the targeted skill of understanding the feelings of others fits into the context of daily social settings, friendships, etc.
- ◆ Build students' ability to interpret the feelings of others by having them practice: inhibiting their initial responses or reactions and taking time to think about the situation, such as during a role-play activity; taking the perspective of others in an attempt to understand their feelings, such as in a story or role-play; reading the non-verbal cues in an interaction that help reveal a person's feelings, such as in a movie or role-play; understanding the image another person is trying to develop and project as a cue to his feelings, such as in a story or movie.

Matching the Emotions of Others

Joanna arrives at the door of her third period math class; she is enthusiastic about her potential to score well on today's math test. She is convinced that an 'A' is in her future, maybe even a perfect score. Jason moans, "I can't believe that I didn't start studying for this test until yesterday afternoon." Joanna knows at this point that it would not be a good idea to reveal her enthusiasm for the upcoming opportunity to excel. Joanna made a decision not to be exuberant with her friends. Doing so might have made her friends feel worse than they already did, and might have risked Joanna's standing with them. In order to avoid a bad interaction, Joanna decided to match her outward affect (or mood) with her friends' emotions, an ability known as affective matching. Like interpreting and communicating feelings, affective matching requires the use of sophisticated verbal pragmatic abilities, attention to processing the social situation, and retrieving past experiences and abilities from memory.

Here are some strategies to help students develop their ability to

match the emotions of others:

- ◆ Help students be aware of others' feelings and interests through role-playing activities. Promote students' ability to interpret feelings others display, as well as to communicate their own feelings. For example, have students "read" each other's cues in a role-play, integrating both verbal expressions and non-verbal cues (gestures, facial expressions, etc.).
- ◆ Provide opportunities for students to improve their greeting skills (e.g., learning to match the affect of others to effectively approach an individual or enter a group).
- ◆ Reinforce students for using appropriate non-verbal signals and verbal phrases during conversations, group activities, etc.
- ◆ Guide students in self-monitoring during social situations (e.g., to be aware how their affect or mood changes within an interaction).

More than anything, kids with social difficulties need adults who can be sympathetic to their situations, and who are able to offer practical advice. Sometimes, for example, a mentor in the community can help advocate for a child with social cognitive dysfunctions. At other times, when a child is being actively bullied by peers, parents may need to intercede with school administrators. Whenever possible, however, adults should provide consultation and advice only; the child should attempt to solve his own interpersonal difficulties. Learning the best ways to function in our social world is a critical skill for all students.



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Our Heartfelt Thanks!

Your donations are continuously needed to fund the 8 newsletters (4 issues of *Parents Together* and 4 issues of *Primer*) we publish each school year. Our sincere thanks to the contributors listed below.

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List complete as of July 31, 2006. Our apologies for any errors or omissions.



Parent-Teacher Communication:

Tips for a Successful Year



Effective communication between parents and teachers is vital to student achievement and a successful school experience. Research shows that children do better in school when parents are involved in their children's education. Parents and teachers share the responsibility for creating a working relationship that fosters children's learning and development.

Everyone benefits from improved communication. Good parent-teacher communication helps the teacher do a better job, helps parents feel better about their involvement with the school and the educational process and, most of all, helps children be successful in school.

Meeting with your child's teacher(s) can and should build strong parent-teacher partnerships. Parents, however, are often unsure of whom to speak to when a situation or question arises regarding their child's education. Below is a guideline we hope you will find helpful.

Who to Contact

- ◆ The first questions should be addressed to the teacher. The teacher is closest to the situation and can offer insights into the issue. He or she can also do the most to change the situation.
- ◆ Keep in mind that you and the teacher have the same goal in mind: a resolution to the situation. Both are on the same side!
- ◆ If you have a concern, don't delay in talking about it. Meet with your child's teacher before the problem escalates. Have specific questions prepared to discuss with teachers and administrators.
- ◆ Exercise your right and responsibility to voice your questions. Express them in constructive ways and compare observations.
- ◆ Set goals and expectations

together and ask for ways you can work with your child at home to reinforce what the teacher does in class. Effective communication is a team effort.

- ◆ Some parents fear reprisal from the teacher toward their child and, therefore, would rather talk to the principal. However, the teacher will only feel more uncomfortable if the principal gets involved before the teacher is even aware of a problem. Teachers are professionals and will handle themselves accordingly.
- ◆ If a parent discusses the issues with the teacher and is not satisfied, then he or she should go to the principal. However, for the situation to get resolved, the teacher will have to be made aware of the issues.

How to Contact a Teacher

- ◆ The best way to set up a meeting with a teacher is to call the school and leave a message. Other options are to send in a note with your child or send an e-mail. No one wants to be surprised by a meeting in the hallway before or after school. An unannounced meeting may lead to an unsuccessful or unsatisfying discussion.
- ◆ The message should include times over the next two days when you are available and appropriate phone numbers for those locations.
- ◆ Do not call when you are upset or angry. Allow some time to investigate and process the situation so that it can be discussed rationally and without misinformation.
- ◆ Teachers' planning times are limited and getting back to a parent may take time. A return call should reasonably be expected within 48 hours of the initial contact.

Tips for Successful Discussions

- ◆ Discussions should be held in a private, comfortable place that is free

from distraction.

- ◆ When discussing matters in the classroom, the parent and teacher should sit at a table or desk; conversations across the teacher's desk makes talking more difficult.
- ◆ Face-to-face conferences are more effective than telephone conferences or e-mail; facial expressions and body language often say a lot.
- ◆ The person calling the meeting should direct the conversation.
- ◆ Identify what helps. Make sure your concerns are clearly delineated and have one or two solutions in mind or written down.
- ◆ Make a plan. End a conference with a brief recap of what is expected of the child, what the teacher will do to help, and what the parent will do.
- ◆ Schedule a follow-up conference to review the effectiveness of the plan and to formulate a new plan, if necessary.

Helpful Hints

- ◆ Establish a positive relationship with your child's teacher and work to maintain it. Previous communication between a parent and teacher can be very helpful when a problem arises.
- ◆ Keep an open mind. Approach an issue with a problem-solving approach. Listen and reflect what has been said to ensure the message being sent is the one received.
- ◆ Inform teachers about your child's home life, personality, concerns, habits and other things you feel the teacher should know about that might help in working with your child. In addition, provide information to the teacher about major changes in circumstances at home that may affect your child.
- ◆ Thank school personnel when they are doing a good job; contact should not only take place when there is a concern.



Preparing for a New School Year:

Back-to-School Pointers

After a summer filled with a lot of leisure time, adjusting to the beginning of a new school year can be challenging. Back-to-school fears, new routines, structured schedules and separation anxiety affect millions of students each fall. Whether children are attending school for the first time or greeting different classrooms, teachers and subjects, many of their experiences will be new. Add that to a child's developmental changes, from exploring different interests to testing family relationships, and every child faces the challenge of transition. The following pointers can help parents make the transition into the new school year easier for themselves and their children:

◆ **Help your child unwind once the school day is over.** Give your child focused attention every day. Talk about the school experience. Listen for underlying feelings of anger or fear along with the positive feelings of excitement and satisfaction.

Because your child's time at school is quite structured, plan time for unstructured activities once school is through for the day. Allow your child to let off steam through active outdoor play or sports.

While one or two after-school commitments like piano or soccer lessons are beneficial, be careful not to over-program your child. The inevitable result is stress-overload—for you as well as your child.

◆ **Help your child get organized.** Arrange study space. Reserve one corner somewhere in your home for your child's quiet concentration. Provide a table or desk, good lighting, reference materials and school supplies. If possible, keep the study area far from tempting distractions like a

television set.

Plan for the next day. Help your child get into the habit of organizing such things as clothing, lunch money, permission slips and homework the night before. Nerves are bound to be less frazzled in the morning.

Note important dates. Buy a giant wall calendar with large boxes. If your youngster is too young to read or write, draw pictures symbolizing important school activities. Help an older child jot down dates of exams, reports, field trips, after-school events and other upcoming commitments.

◆ **Establish a regular homework routine.** Daily attention to school work for short periods of time is superior to night-before panic and agony over a project or examination. While maintaining some flexibility, set a fixed time each afternoon or evening for school assignments. Your child's homework schedule should be in accord with other extracurricular activities. Depending on age, 15 minutes to an hour before or after dinner is usually sufficient.

◆ **Be available to encourage your child.** Show your child you are interested by being consistently available at predictable times each day. Do not, however, play the role of teacher by attempting to teach your child specific skills. Your time together is apt to be frustrating. If your child is having problems with a certain subject, talk to the teacher about supplementary activities you could do together at home as well as tutoring or other special attention at school.

In addition, do not attempt to protect your child from negative consequences by actually doing the homework assignment yourself. This

will seriously detract from your child's confidence to cope successfully with future school demands.

◆ **Display a love of learning at home.** To fuel your child's natural interest and curiosity, celebrate learning. Ask questions, exchange ideas and allow your child to arrive at personal conclusions. Provide a home environment rich in books, games and projects.

◆ **Become involved in your child's school.** Studies show that children whose parents are involved in their education do better in school than children whose parents are not involved. By joining a parent-teacher organization or volunteering your time, you share more of your child's world. You are also in a better position to understand and make suggestions for improvement. In addition, establish effective communication with your child's school. Start communication when things are going well. Share concerns while they are small and ask how things are going.

Books for Children

Ages 5 to 9:

◆ *Arthur's Teacher Trouble* by Marc Brown; Econo-Clad Books, 1999.

◆ *Flunking of Joshua T. Bates* by Susan Shreve; Random House Childrens, 1999.

◆ *Miss Nelson Is Missing* by Harry Allard and James Marshall; Econo-Clad Books, 1999.

◆ *Today Was a Terrible Day* by Patricia Reilly Giff; Econo-Clad Books, 1999.

◆ *The Beast In Ms. Rooney's Room* by Patricia Reilly Giff; Econo-Clad Books, 1999.



FALL FAMILY CALENDAR



September

7 Thursday

**Greenwich Public Schools
Open House: Middle Schools**
Call specific school for time.

8 Friday

Bats Around Us
7 - 8 PM
Audubon Center, Greenwich
Observe bats and their twilight behavior
and learn about these interesting
mammals. Ages 5 and up.
869-5272

10 Sunday

19th Annual "Puttin' on the Dog" Show
10 AM - 5 PM
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich
Bring your dog and enjoy demonstra-
tions, contests, crafts, food and children's
entertainment. Sponsored by Adopt-a-
Dog. Rain or shine. Free.
629-9494

13 Wednesday

Newcomers' Information Fair
10 AM - Noon
Old Greenwich/Riverside Community
Center, Old Greenwich
Information fair to introduce town
organizations and services. Free.
862-9812

14 Thursday

**Greenwich Board of Education
Work Session**
7:00 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich
625-7400

16 Saturday

Hawkwatch: Weekend Festival 2006
11 AM - 5 PM
Audubon Center, Greenwich
Observe eagles, hawks and falcons on
their southward migration. Family fun
including migratory bird games, nature
walks, wild life movies face painting and
more. Also 9/17. \$7 adults, \$5 children;
non-members \$10 adults, \$7 children.
869-5272

**Community Day at the Cos Cob
Library**
1 - 4 PM
Cos Cob Library, Cos Cob
Everyone welcome for a celebration
including arts and crafts for kids, music,
games. Fun for all ages. Free.
622-6883

17 Sunday

8th Annual Teddy Bear Clinic
Noon - 3 PM
Greenwich Hopsital
Have your child bring a cherished stuffed
toy or doll for diagnosis and treatment.
The event offers hands-on experience with
real doctors, nurses and technologists.
Sponsored by Greenwich Hospital. Free.
863-3627

Septemberfest 2006
Noon - 5 PM
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park,
Greenwich
Annual event featuring rides, crafts,
entertainment, exhibitions, food and
family fun. Sponsored by the United
Way. Rain or shine. Free.
869-2221

21 Thursday

**Greenwich Public Schools Open
House: Elementary Schools**
Call specific school for time.

24 Sunday

"Goin' to the Dogs" Family Day
1 - 4 PM
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Educational hands-on activities, a gallery
hunt and 3 PM appearance by a 3-year-old
Arctic gray wolf. Free with museum
admission.
869-6786

28 Thursday

**Greenwich Board of Education
Meeting**
7:00 PM
Julian Curtiss School, Greenwich
625-7400

30 Saturday

Townwide Cleanup
8 AM - Noon
Town firehouses
Townwide event sponsored by
Greenwich Green & Clean. Free.
531-0006

October



4 Wednesday

Preschool Expo
9:30 - 11:30 AM; 6:30 - 8 PM
Christ Church, Greenwich
Learn about the numerous options for
preschool. Sponsored by Early
Childhood Council of the United Way
869-2221

7 Saturday

Outdoor Arts Festival
10 AM - 5 PM
Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Art, music and educational family
activities. Over 90 selected artists from
across the country will be represented.
Thru 10/8. \$7 for non-members; members
and children under 5 free.
869-6786

Make a Scarecrow: Family Fun Day
Noon - 2 PM
Bush-Holley Historic Site, Cos Cob
Fun for the whole family. \$12, \$10 for
members.
869-6899



11 *Wednesday*

Discussing Danger and Personal Safety with Children, Ages 4 to 12
7:00 - 9:20 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
Presentation regarding bullying, Internet crime, child molestation and kidnapping. Sponsored by Greenwich Continuing Education. \$29.
625-7400

12 *Thursday*

Greenwich Board of Education Work Session
7:00 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich
625-7400

14 *Saturday*

Pumpkin Patch Festival
11 AM - 4 PM
Old Greenwich School, Old Greenwich
Enjoy a family festival with traditional fall activities. Free.
698-1152

15 *Sunday*

Scarecrow Festival
Noon - 4 PM
Strickland Road Cos Cob; Bush-Holley Historic Site, Cos Cob
Festival with crafts, activities and games. Sponsored by Greenwich Chamber of Commerce and the Historical Society. \$10 for adults, \$5 children 3 and up.
869-6899

22 *Sunday*

Walk in the Park for ARC
10:30 Check in; Noon Walk
Greenwich Point, Old Greenwich
1-mile walk to benefit people with intellectual difficulties. Route is wheelchair and stroller accessible
Rain or shine.
629-1880

23 *Monday*

Parents Together Program: Collaborating to Foster Resilient Minds
9:15 AM
Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall
With Dr. Angela Chan, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician. Free.
637-7719 or 329-2243

26 *Thursday*

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting
7:00 PM
Parkway School, Greenwich
625-7400

27 *Friday*

Halloween Bash
6 - 8 PM
YMCA, Greenwich
Come in costume with the whole family for tricks and treats. Prizes. Parental supervision required. \$5 per child.
869-3381

29 *Sunday*

Fire Safety Day: Family Day
1 - 4 PM
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Fire safety demonstration and other informational activities. 3 PM "Fire Safety Show." Free with museum admission.
869-0376



November

2 *Thursday*

Greenwich Board of Education Work Session
7:00 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich
625-7400

12 *Sunday*

Beachfront Bushwack Run
10 AM
Greenwich Point, Old Greenwich
5 mile race, 1 mile for kids. Tickets may be obtained at Threads and Treads, Greenwich. Sponsored by Greenwich Department of Parks and Recreation.
661-0142

16 *Thursday*

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting
7:00 PM
North Street School, Greenwich
625-7400

18 *Saturday*

Enchanted Forest 2006
9 AM - 5 PM
Hyatt Regency, Old Greenwich
Junior League of Greenwich annual family event. Seasonal trees, a gingerbread village, holiday boutique, children's events and more. Also 11/20. \$10 for adults, \$5 for seniors and children, children under 2 free.
977-0700

25 *Saturday*

Family Fun Day
Noon - 2 PM
Bush-Holley Historic Site
Fun for the whole family. Topic TBD
869-6899

Ongoing Events:

Preschool story hours at Greenwich Library, 622-7940; Byram Shubert Library, 531-0426; Cos Cob Library, 622-6883; Perrot Memorial Library, 637-8802.

The Den, Center for Grieving Children & Families. Call 869-4848, for schedule.

Events subject to change. E-mail calendar information to ptprimer@optonline.net.



Play Therapy:

Much More Than Play Dough and Finger Painting

by John Samanich, M.D.

In play therapy the couch is traded in for the toy chest. The origins of play therapy can be traced back to Sigmund Freud and his work in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Sigmund's wife, Anna Freud, was a pioneer in child psychiatry as well as play therapy, and applied much of her husband's work as well as her own independent ideas to children. The early theory on play therapy was that it allowed the therapist to analyze and interpret the unconscious mind of the child and bring this material to the conscious active mind. There are numerous offspring of this theory. Probably the most studied and practiced is the concept of children working through conflicts in their lives as well as gaining empowerment over the helplessness they experience secondary to past trauma. Therefore, play therapy is much more than just play dough and finger painting, as it is often commonly perceived. These misperceptions often undermine the true value of play therapy, and the great benefit it can provide to a child who is suffering and in need.

Although the roots of child psychiatry and play therapy were developed by Anna Freud, it was Virginia Axline, the protégé of Carl Rogers, who really put play therapy on the map. In 1947, she published *Play Therapy* which focused on helping children work through their conflicts, without much interpretation by the clinician. The focus of her work was that empathizing with the child, understanding the child's problems, and communicating and expressing that awareness to the child could be of immense help to young patients. She proposed that interpretation by the clinician was not particularly necessary for a positive outcome.

Axline noted that play is "the child's natural medium of self expression." In this more concrete, and hands-on approach, the therapist allows the child to express his emotions through play, as opposed to talk.

According to Axline and other play therapists, play by children is a natural and spontaneous activity that children use to negotiate internal and external problems in their world. Children not only express their inner worlds in play but also incorporate their own real world into this play; play is a representation of a child's perception of themselves and their surroundings.

Adults may have difficulty expressing themselves and their emotions, particularly in times of depression and anxiety. Think of a five or six-year-old child who is going through an anxious time. Their problems do not seem as complicated to an adult, but their way of expressing themselves is more limited. They often use more concrete ways to express themselves; for example, a feeling of sadness may manifest as a stomachache and intense worry as a headache. During symbolic play a child may not be able to explain the way she feels after a parent has died, but through play in a dollhouse with figures that represent the family, the child can express the sadness and confusion caused by this loss and gain more control of her fears.

The role of the therapist is to provide a safe and warm environment where the child can be her true self. The content of play is adjusted to the developmental age. Young children most benefit from the use of dolls and dollhouses to represent their life within the home. They can use these dolls to represent

their parents, siblings, and themselves. With these tools they are able to re-enact the drama of their home life. As children grow older, their social and interpersonal skills progress as well. They reveal their internal and external worlds through drawing, games and other shared activities. These activities allow them to interact with the therapist and create a dialogue through play where they can receive feedback and guidance in a more concrete way. During pre-adolescence and adolescence, the child may begin to move away from toys and other medium to convey themselves verbally. This varies from child to child. In addition, there is no hard and fast rule that dictates which medium is used at which developmental stage. Sometimes older children prefer to express themselves through play and younger children verbally, or there can be a combination of both.

Play therapy can be a powerful tool in the hands of an experienced clinician. It can be used in the treatment of most psychiatric disorders including depression and anxiety. What play therapy has been found most useful for is in the treatment of trauma related psychiatric problems including physical and sexual abuse as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Generally the biggest impediment to treatment is getting the child in need of treatment in to see a psychiatrist. It may be difficult for parents to recognize and admit that their child needs help. Often the parents are unaware that their child has experienced a traumatic event because the child does not verbally express this to them. In addition, parents may not recognize the signs of depression and



anxiety in children, again because children do not say, or do not know how to say, that they are depressed or anxious.

Children do not always express depression and anxiety the same as adults. Often they manifest these symptoms in the form of somatic complaints that they express to their parents, such as aches and pains, disrupted sleep and appetite, and most notoriously, changes in behavior including agitation and aggression. If a child is exposed to a traumatic event they typically re-experience traumatic events through distressing intrusive thoughts or memories such as dreams, and sometimes flashbacks in which the child actually relives the event in their mind. Children with PTSD also make conscious attempts to avoid the thoughts, feelings and activities that lead them to remember the event. They will avoid people or places that they associate with the event or have problems remembering the details of the events. Finally, the child may have sleep disturbances, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle responses and outbursts of aggression that indicate a heightened state of arousal.

It is the therapist's job to work with the child in the form of play therapy to help the child express himself and identify his needs, and the therapist's goal to help the child regain a sense of power and control. Through repetitive play the child is able to gain some mastery over the things that are bothering him now or have happened to him in the past. By taking away the feeling of helplessness that the child feels but cannot express through words will help make the child feel whole again.



Dr. Samanich recently opened an office in Child, Adolescent and General Psychiatry at the Wilkins Center in Greenwich.

Did You Know About A New Vaccine for Human Papilloma Virus?

The Food and Drug Administration recently approved the use of Gardasil, a vaccine that helps protect against diseases caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). In 2005 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that 20 million people in the United States had some form of the virus. There are many variants of the virus, some of which are harmless but others cause genital warts, pre-cancerous lesions or cervical cancer. Anyone of any age who takes part in sexual activity that involves genital contact is at risk for catching HPV and may not show any signs or symptoms and can pass on the virus to others without knowing it.

Gardasil protects against the four types of HPV that cause approximately 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts and it is most effective before the patient has any contact with the forms of the virus contained in the vaccine.

The recommendation is that girls and women ages 9 through 26 years old should receive the vaccine which is given as an injection in three doses a few months apart. Parents should discuss the vaccine with their daughter's health care provider to determine whether it is right for their daughter and at what age she should receive it. For more information, visit www.gardasil.com.

Parents Together Welcomes New Superintendent

Parents Together extends a warm welcome to former Connecticut Commissioner of Education Betty Sternberg who was named as Superintendent of Greenwich Public Schools in June. In accepting the position she remarked that it was "a dream come true" and she plans to continue the work of her predecessor, Dr. Larry Leverett, in closing the achievement gap.

In her previous role Dr. Sternberg spoke about five ways to close the gap: providing high quality pre-school for every three- and four-year old in the community who needs it; addressing literacy issues of parents whose children need help; ensuring children from lower income families have access to high quality medical care to enhance their ability to learn; establishing a high-quality curriculum that provides teachers with the ability to test how well their students learn the material; and considering a longer school day and a longer school year. No small feat, she plans to tackle the challenge in stages.

Dr. Sternberg has expressed the importance of an open dialogue with parents and communicates regularly via e-mail. Once classes begin Dr. Sternberg will tour all the schools to meet the faculty, staff, students and parents. We wish her every success in her new role.



Video Games: Cons and Pros

An Interview with Richard Gallagher, Ph.D.

The impact of television, both positive and negative, on children has been a subject of both heated opinion and scientific research for the last several decades. Professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association have weighed in on this topic and have confirmed the link between television and violence and aggression. The typical American child watches 28 hours of television a week and by the age of 18 will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence.

In the last several years the television debate has been extended to video games, many of which involve aggression. Because the popularity of video games is relatively recent, only limited research has been conducted on its effects. However, several articles have recently reported that video games may have negative effects on children's aggression and desensitization to violence. For reactions to these studies *About Our Kids* interviewed Richard Gallagher, Ph.D., Director of the Parenting Institute at the NYU Child Study Center.

Does your experience bear out the general conclusion of these studies that we should be concerned about the kind of video games available?

Yes. A large number of children and teens are playing increasingly violent games. Most youth are able to recognize the difference between reality and fantasy, so they see the games as pointless entertainment. But, some kids get immersed in the violence, which may contribute to a cold-hearted view of other people. It may make them prone to aggressive thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Do you think that violence in video games may actually be more harmful than violence in television or movie scripts?

Some aspects of video game violence are worrisome. "First-person" games in which the player sees the action as if he or she was the shooter can desensitize the player to violence. These games are actually used in military training to help soldiers become used to the process of harming others.

What is the appeal of video games that leads some children to become addicted?

The games provide a high level of quick gratification. You are almost constantly being rewarded and, when you lose, you get to easily start over to work on your goal.

It has been suggested that playing video games has advantages. For example, it may enhance a child's motor coordination and ability to think quickly and analyze a situation. Do these possible advantages outweigh any negative impact?

Used in moderation, the advantages can be very helpful. The negative affects are found with excessive play, so the benefits may outweigh any possible negative impact if the time spent is kept within reasonable limits.

Do you see any other advantages to playing video games?

If the games are viewed as a form of light entertainment, they can have advantages. As part of a balanced entertainment diet, the games can provide stress relief for kids, they can help with aspects of coordination and concentration on visual details, and they help kids relate to one another in some forms of healthy competition. As long as this part of the entertainment diet is not overdone, video games can have useful purposes.

Does a child's predisposition affect his/her experiences with video games?

We don't know that information right now. However, it seems that kids that are prone to get excited by violence are often over stimulated by games. They may have an increased reaction to the content of the games when compared to others. Several of the teens responsible for school shootings were highly invested in "first person" games.

In a 1982 report by the Surgeon General of the United States and a follow-up report by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) listed concerns that children might become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others; become more fearful of the world around them; be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways towards others. Are these concerns relevant today?

They are even more relevant because of the increased reality in video games. First person shooting games with realistic or exaggerated depictions of gore seem likely to have an even greater impact than the images being reviewed over 20 years ago.

Should parents limit their children's access to video games and if so, how?

Parents should limit their children's time on video games. As noted before, it is helpful to consider a child's leisure time diet and parents should think about how well balanced it is. Video games that are violent or of limited instructional value can be thought of as treats or guilty pleasures. Children can enjoy them in moderation while they are also participating in leisure activities that enlighten them, provide physical and mental exercise, and enrich their experiences.

Source: Aboutourkids.org, the website of the NYU Child Study Center



2006-2007 Parents Together Delegates

Parents Together's strength as an organization stems in large part from its two-pronged effort to address broad parenting issues on a town-wide basis, and narrower topics specific to individual schools.

Making sure this happens on a timely and relevant basis are delegates from every public and independent elementary, middle and upper school in Greenwich. Please share with your delegates the parenting issues that are on your mind so that they can tailor programs to best fit the needs of your school community. Parents Together thanks the following parents who have generously volunteered to serve as delegates in their schools:

Brunswick School

Jackie Keeshan
Anne Marie Reilly

Central Middle School

Mamie Lee

Convent of the Sacred Heart

Donna Hascher

Cos Cob School

Lisa Edmundson

Eagle Hill School

Karen Cahill

Eastern Middle School

Christa Panny

Glenville School

Carol Fox

Greenwich Academy

Jenny Collins
Virginia Marzonie

Greenwich Catholic School

Jennifer Ho
Jennifer Ingallinera

Greenwich Country Day School

Nancy Better
Carla Edson

Greenwich High School

Linda Layman
Lori Niehaus

Hamilton Avenue School

Patty Reilly

International School at Dundee

Suzanne Deschamps

Julian Curtiss School

Lisa Manaster

Mead School

Susie Lindenberg

New Lebanon School

Andrea Vaz

North Mianus School

Emma King
Siobhan O'Connor

North Street School

Denise Fava

Old Greenwich School

May Jaffe

Parkway School

Marcie Braver
Michelle Litt

Riverside School

Patty Hopper
Erica Tubridy

Stanwich School

Debby Clark

Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Acad.

Sally Shore-Wittenberg

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Parents Together

2006-07 Programs

October 23

Dr. Angela Chan, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician, presents "Collaborating to Foster Resilient Minds."

November 13 TBA

February 12 TBA

March 5 TBA

April 9 TBA

May 14 TBA

Programs are held in the Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall, from 9:15-11 AM unless otherwise noted, and are free and open to the public. Weather related cancellations are announced on WGCH 1490. Call 637-7719 or 329-2243 for further information. Please note child care is not provided.

Who We Are

Parents Together is an independent, nonprofit organization in Greenwich, CT, that offers ongoing opportunities for parents to communicate, share, support and learn together. We work in cooperation with the Parent Teacher Associations of the public, private and parochial schools in town. The *Parents Together* organization and delegates from Greenwich schools plan programs for parents of children in grades K-12. We also publish two newsletters: *Parents Together Primer*, for parents of children from birth through fifth grade, and *Parents Together*, for parents of adolescents.

Distribution: *Parents Together Primer* is distributed to parents through their children's preschools and elementary schools. *Parents Together* is sent to parents of children in grades 6 through 12 in all Greenwich public and independent schools.

Newsletter Subscriptions and Correspondence: We invite parents and all other readers interested in local parenting issues to subscribe to either or both newsletters.

For an annual subscription, please indicate which newsletter you wish to receive, and send your name, address and \$10 for each subscription in a check payable to *Parents Together*, P. O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831-0417. Correspondence may be mailed to the same address.

Contact Us!

Do you have a story idea, writer suggestion or comment for the *Parents Together Primer* staff? Please e-mail it to ptprimer@optonline.net.

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Dear Readers

This issue begins our twenty-seventh consecutive year publishing this unique resource for Greenwich parents. *Parents Together Primer*, a nonprofit, advertising-free newsletter, is able to focus on issues of interest to local parents thanks to the generous support of our contributors, both financial and editorial.

We invite you to become involved! Let us know your concerns — come to our presentations — and read our newsletters!

Sincerely,



Betsy Benenson and Polly Hyman, Editors

Parents Exchange

Parents Exchange, offered through Greenwich Health at Greenwich Hospital, provides a variety of parenting classes and support groups that are divided according to the age of your child, from 4 months through high school. Led by qualified child development specialists. Pre-registration required. Space limited. Groups run in 14-week semesters: Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Riverside. Call (203) 863-3780 or (203) 863-3794 for information and registration form, plus schedule. Registration now open for Fall session which begins on Sept. 18. Fee.

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