

Parents©TOGETHER PRIMER

Fall 2007

A Newsletter for Greenwich Parents of Children from Birth Through Fifth Grade ©
www.parentstogetherct.org

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PARENTS TOGETHER PROGRAMS

September 17th: "Eat Fit,
Be Fit"

October 1st: "Reading Aloud:
Motivating Children to Make
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October 9th: "What You Don't
Know Can Keep You Out of
College"

October 15th: "The Balanced
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November 5th: "Stress and
the Kids of Today"

Please refer to page 12 for
program details

Transition Points: Helping Students Move Through the Grades

By Anita Gurian, Ph.D, Robin Goodman, Ph.D. & Susan Schwartz, M.A.

As children progress through different grades in school they face different challenges. In addition to changing academic and social demands, students also experience physical and emotional changes. Although children are continually engaged in the process of adapting to new challenges, educators and mental health professionals agree that there are certain critical transition points which can be particularly stressful and require special support and understanding. Parents and educators can help children cope effectively with their varied school experiences in a number of ways.

WHAT PARTICULAR TRANSITION TIMES POST SPECIFIC CHALLENGES?

Preschool:

- ♦ *Physical and emotional challenges:* For many children, preschool requires the first prolonged separation from parents and other individual caregivers. Children may also be required to sit quietly for short periods of time at a table and listen to directions.
- ♦ *Social challenges:* The group nature of preschool means toddlers must learn to share activities, supplies, and attention, and relate to new children.
- ♦ *Academic challenges:* Preschoolers develop their listening, attention and memory skills by learning the names of colors and shapes, listening to and telling stories.

Early elementary school:

- ♦ *Physical and emotional challenges:* The transition to the grade school years may require moving to a new building and a longer school day. Learning to be a student also becomes important, involving adjusting to the routine and structure of the school day and the development of a sense of responsibility for completion of assignments and homework. Students face more structured, objective rewards and consequences for their behaviors.
- ♦ *Social challenges:* In the early grades, children are still adjusting to a world outside the home. They form new friendships, learn about teamwork and may find themselves developing special interests and skills.
- ♦ *Academic challenges:* Mastery of the fundamentals needed for the rest of their school careers is required. Children acquire basic reading and math ability; they learn computational skills, how to read words and how to read for meaning. They are required to answer questions about who, what, and where, which gives them information about character, plot and setting.

Upper elementary school:

- ♦ *Physical and emotional challenges:* In the upper elementary grades (grades 4 and 5) more independent functioning is required. Differences among students become more apparent with regard to abilities, and given the

continued on page 2

increased demands on all fronts, new problems may surface or existing ones may be more difficult to handle.

- ♦ *Social challenges:* Children have the opportunity to expand friendships, to work cooperatively with others, make their own social arrangements, join social groups outside the family, and plan independent activities. Cliques may form and bullies may cause difficulties, although these difficulties may happen at any point.

- ♦ *Academic challenges:* The academic emphasis is no longer on the acquisition of basic skills. Children are expected to be able to use basic skills to acquire information and solve problems, to be competent in reading comprehension, written expression, and knowledge in content areas.

Middle school:

- ♦ *Physical and emotional challenges:* Some communities define a specific period of time as middle school; the span can vary from 5-8th grade or 6-9th and usually entails moving to a new school building. Many children, as in New York City, change schools at 6th grade; independent schools may keep students in one location through 8th grade. The challenge to educators is to help children in these in-between years. Educators are responsive to the concern, for example, that 7th graders have very different needs than 4th graders, and additionally, the younger, newly entering students are unprepared to deal with pressures coming from the older students. During this time, the onset of puberty necessitates changes in the teen's perception of his or her body and feelings about those changes.

- ♦ *Social challenges:* In changing schools, students may be separated from friends with whom they have gone through the lower grades. In addition, the social context changes from the often supportive and individualized setting of a single classroom with a single teacher. Students have to adapt to a social climate that is usually more

impersonal as they rotate through departmentalized classes with a number of teachers with different teaching styles and expectations. Peer acceptance becomes critical at this age as do other social pressures such as religious ceremonies (confirmation, bar mitzvah, etc.).

- ♦ *Academic challenges:* More independence is now required. Children need to master several unrelated classes and assignments and utilize organizational skills, perhaps maintaining a daily or weekly planner for the first time. The exposure to diverse content allows them to integrate information from one content area to another, such as reading a book for language arts that directly influences their thinking on a topic in social studies.

High school:

- ♦ *Physical and emotional challenges:* For most, the move to high school means a move to a new building, with a greater number of students, new teachers, a new principal, new expectations, and a new, more rigorous disciplinary system. In addition, the adolescent also has to cope with the developmental task of establishing independence from the family while at the same time maintaining family connections. At this stage of life, parents have less direct input into school activities and academic decisions.

- ♦ *Social challenges:* Establishing new social connections, balancing work and social life, and, for some students, managing a part-time job, are some of the new demands faced by students entering high school. Pressure to experiment with or engage in alcohol, drug, and sexual activities is also often increased.

- ♦ *Academic challenges:* Students are expected to have developed an

assertive and efficient learning style, and good study and organizational skills. The transition into high school means entering into an academic environment which assumes that the student can take responsibility for

decisions regarding academic tracks and course selection. The pressure of what to do after graduation and for many, college decisions, is

Prepare your child for new school experiences by discussing the changes beforehand and phase in necessary adjustments

also present.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN HELP

- ♦ Teachers and other staff should be aware of the challenges typical at different points in a student's academic career. Anticipating the causes of stress and normalizing the experiences for parents and students can be a first step in minimizing any negative impact.
- ♦ When the new school year brings a change to a new school, schools can prepare children for the transition by arranging visits to the new school and scheduling meetings with new teachers and the new principal. Orientation to new buildings and new expectations should happen more than one time. And once the school year starts, a big sibling program can help — teaming up a new student with an older student.
- ♦ When changes in the structure of the school day will be involved in the next year, as in moving to a departmentalized program, practice experiences can be provided on a smaller scale the year before. For example, some elementary schools prepare children for the transition into middle school by providing more specific work on study skills and having different teachers teach courses. The impact of the transition can be softened by giving students plan books,

binders, homework folders, etc.

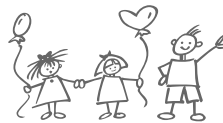
- ♦ Although homework expectations and the consequences for noncompliance are the school's responsibility, input from students and parents should be considered. If, for example, a majority of parents report that students are spending an unreasonable amount of time on assignments at home, homework practices should be reconsidered.
- ♦ Collaborate with parents. A child's parents can be a useful source of information about a child's academic history. Prior school experiences, both positive and negative, influence both children's and parents' expectations and should be considered when engaged in problem-solving.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- ♦ Be aware of the different age-related, social and academic challenges children face at various stages and that times of transition can be an added stress. Also know the specific needs of the child that makes transitions harder.
- ♦ Consider personal and family situations that may impact the child and make a particular year more difficult. Inform and collaborate with the school staff to obtain the best support.
- ♦ Prepare the child for new school experiences by discussing the changes beforehand and phase in necessary adjustments ahead of time. For example, at the end of a vacation gradually set an earlier bedtime to make entry into the new routine smoother.
- ♦ Young children can be helped to separate from parents and interact with new school-mates by providing them with opportunities to spend time with friends or relatives without their parents. Arrange play dates, play groups and other opportunities for socialization. Introduce some school-type activities at home, such as story time, snack time, and rest time.
- ♦ Form a partnership with the child's teachers and school personnel. In

meetings, listen to their point of view and let them explain their expectations. Children can behave differently at home than in school when under stress from academic and social challenges.

- ♦ Keep hands off assignments; act as a guide or resource for children. Discuss possible ways to do the assignment, but don't actually do the work.
- ♦ If homework keeps the child up well past the usual bedtime, despite the fact that the child is putting forth his or her best effort, discuss the issue with the teacher. The aim of both parents and teachers should be to prevent parent/child homework conflict and to help the child avoid feeling incompetent.
- ♦ Be alert to the specific situations or types of assignments that are particularly difficult for your child. Investigate the problem with the school and consider obtaining an educational evaluation.
- ♦ Consider both the student and teacher partners in the education process. If your child is experiencing social, academic or homework quandaries, include both the student and teacher in open discussions about the specifics of the problem and in developing solutions.



Source: Aboutourkids.org, the website for the New York University Child Study Center.

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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Back to the Woods: Connecting Kids with Nature

By Michael Brosnan

Every once in a while I let myself get deeply caught up in human events. I'll read the newspapers, listen to the news on NPR or TV. I'll formulate my views and debate the issues with friends. I'll get worked up—indeed, almost consumed—by the issue. And then something outside my window will catch my attention.

It may be one of those nights when a barred owl perches on a branch in my backyard and startles me with its deep call. It may be a V of southbound geese flying low overhead, or a bud opening into bloom.

When this happens, I stop what I'm doing and remember that there's a big, remarkable, complex world of nature out there. And I'll remember that we live in a time when it's all too easy to get distracted by human affairs.

Of course it's important for us to be engaged members of our communities, large and small, but research reminds us that we need to get outside on occasion. We need to connect with nature. This is true for adults, but the need is even greater for children, many of whom suffer from a disconnect with the natural world.

In his book *Last Child in the Woods: Out Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin, 2005), Richard Louv encapsulates the concern. "Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experiences with nature," he writes. We do this in all sorts of ways, through a narrow notion of education and an overreliance on homework for learning, through excess focus on organized sports as the primary way to play, through fear of litigation, through restrictive park rules and neighborhood covenants,

through an almost obsessive emphasis on consumerism and interaction with one form of media technology or another.

Louv points out that today's adults are more inclined to teach children all the ways to fear nature rather than the ways to enjoy it and learn from it. Most schoolchildren today know about threatened tropical rain forests, endangered species, and global warming, but they know next to nothing about the woods in their communities. It's all trouble, little joy.

This "nature-deficit disorder," as Louv terms it, describes the human costs of alienation from nature, including, "diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and high rates of physical and emotional illnesses." Louv argues that this disorder affects not only children, but also families and communities. In our cities, there is evidence that "the absence, or inaccessibility of parks and open space [correlates] with high crime rates, depression, and other urban maladies," he writes.

It turns out that a direct exposure to nature is essential for physical and emotional health. On a personal level, most of us understand the value of nature in our own lives. Yet we are also just starting to fully realize the ways in which the machinery of modern society has allowed us to do significant damage to nature over the last 50 years. And the destruction of habitat, loss of biodiversity through an accelerated rate of extinction, reduction of precious natural resources, introduction of invasive species, etc., not only are bad for the overall health of the planet, they are bad for our own health and happiness.

Perhaps it's best not to weigh down

our children with the knowledge of all we've done wrong. In time, the next generation will need to be better stewards of the natural world. But we can start that process simply by exposing them often to the natural world. As research points out, outdoor play helps children develop their sense of wonder and optimism about life.

Although our primary focus in schools still lies elsewhere, we're starting to see nature's role in quality education. Howard Gardner, a professor of education at Harvard University known for his pioneering work on the various forms of intelligence, includes "naturalist intelligence" in his list of eight kinds. Of late, there has been a fast-growing "green" movement in education, with many schools building sustainable campuses with the most energy-efficient technology available and then using these campuses for much of their studies. Even in urban areas, schools have planted vegetable gardens, established wilderness programs, and connected environmental sustainability to community outreach through environmental monitoring.

As writer and farmer Michael Ableman points out in an address at the Center for Ecoliteracy, the land is as good a teacher as any. "Every time I plant a seed and see it emerge," he said to the gathered educators, "it slows me down and allows me to experience one of the great mysteries of life, and each time I cannot help but be renewed."

My experience with my own children bears all this out. While there was certainly value in much of their formal schooling — arithmetic, writing, reading, understanding history — it was always the nature-related lessons that brightened their days most. With all my children, our small vegetable garden has been as engaging as any class in school. While we might have

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fought over homework, we never fought over garden “lessons.” They would ask questions, explore with their hands, fall in love with the dirt and all the strange and remarkable life teeming within. All my children have known what it is like to grow peas, pick them fresh from the vine, and eat them right there barefoot in the garden.

Every trip to a remote pond or lake or to the shore has also been rich in lessons and joy. My back would ache from the hours I’d spend in tidal pools with my seven-year-old son, as we flipped over “just one more rock” to see what life squiggled beneath.

Last summer, my older daughter, now 22, hiked the Vermont Long Trail with a friend. When I went to pick them up in a small town near the Canadian border 18 days after they began their trip, I found them sitting on a bench in front of the general store eating breakfast, dirty, happy and so clearly at peace with the world that I wished I could bottle that peace, knowing she would need it later in life.

Edward O. Wilson, the Harvard biologist and author, believes we all have an innate love of nature, which he calls “biophilia.” Indeed, our evolution has infused us with this love because it is so important to our survival. Evolutionary biologists can tell you more precisely why this is so, but I’m not sure I need to question it. With my children, all I need to do is look into their eyes and see that they are curious about the world, comfortable in their own skin, and less susceptible to the power of modern media than they might otherwise be. My sense is that a strong connection to nature may be the best legacy we can leave our children.

This inherent desire to be close to nature explains why Americans spend more time in zoos than at professional sporting events, or why, on vacation, so many of us seek out national and state parks and other wildlands. Some of our national heroes are the great defenders

of nature: Theodore Roosevelt, Henry David Thoreau, John James Audubon, Rachel Carson, and others. Even in our major urban areas, nature plays a central role. Try to imagine New York City without Central Park at its core.

“From the freedom to explore comes the joy of learning,” Wilson writes in *The Creation* (W.W. Norton, 2006).

“From knowledge acquired by personal initiative arises the desire for more knowledge. And from mastery of the novel and beautiful world awaiting every child comes self-confidence. The growth of a naturalist is like the growth of a musician or athlete: excellence for the talented, lifelong enjoyment for the rest of us, benefit for humanity.”

We don’t need to be fancy about this. Take your child into the woods or the city park regularly. Start a small vegetable garden in your yard or in a

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community plot. Explore any patch of wilderness. Go bird watching. Get to know the trees in your yard or neighborhood. Watch the stars. Collect rocks. Buy a microscope and explore the micro-

world. Your children will be happier for it — more connected, more engaged, more at peace—and that’s good for all of us, and for the planet.

If you would like to know more, or get involved in connecting kids with nature, the Children & Nature Network aims to provide children in every community a wide range of opportunities to experience nature directly. Visit them online at www.cnaturenet.org.



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Exploring Nature

Audubon of Greenwich

285 acres and 7 miles of walking trails located at 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich. The Audubon opened in 1942 as the National Audubon Society’s first environmental education center in the US. The trails lead to a hardwood forest, old fields, lake, streams and vernal ponds. Reminders of the past are the stone walls, an old apple orchard and original New England homestead buildings. For more information call 869-5272 or check out www.greenwichaudubon.org.

Babcock Preserve

Approximately 100 acres of woodlands and trails. Directions: US 1 to North Maple Avenue to North Street. Continue on North Street past North Street Elementary School on left. Continue approximately 2 miles; entrance on left just past the reservoir. Open to the public during daylight hours for hiking, walking, jogging, nature study, picnicking. Use of trail bikes prohibited. Trails range in length from 1 to 3.5 miles.

Greenwich Point, Tod’s Point, Old Greenwich

147.3 acres. From 6 AM until sunset the Point can be used for jogging, walking, cycling, and nature study, etc. A network of trails leads along the changing coastline and weaves among the woods, marshes, groves and gardens.

Mianus River Park

109.7 acres. There are two trails of note on the Greenwich portion of the Mianus Park property, the Pond trail and Oak trail. The Pond trail begins at the Cognewaugh Road entrance. It skirts the lowland area, which during the wet seasons may be readily identified as swamp. There is a wide variety of vegetation and wildlife habitat indigenous to soggy wetlands.

FALL FAMILY CALENDAR



September

11

Tuesday

RISE Task Force Community Forum
7 - 9 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
Update on the racial imbalance, space
utilization and declining enrollment in the
Greenwich Public Schools.
625-7400

12

Wednesday

Newcomers' Information Fair
10 AM - 1 PM
Eastern Greenwich Civic Center, Old
Greenwich
Information fair to introduce Town
organizations and services. Free.
637-0483

15

Saturday

Hawk Watch Weekend Festival 2007
11 AM - 5 PM
Audubon Center, Greenwich
Observe eagles, hawks and falcons on
their southward migration. Family fun
including games, activities, nature walks,
and more. Also 9/16. Call for cost.
869-5272

**Arts, Crafts, Antiques & Blues on
Bedford**
Noon - 9 PM
Bedford Street, Downtown Stamford
Outdoor festival. Also 9/16,
Noon - 6 PM. Free.
348-5285

"Life's a Beach" Annual Open House
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.
625-2643

16

Sunday

Septemberfest 2007
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

17

Monday

"Eat Fit, Be Fit"
Parents Together Program
9:15 AM
Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall
Dietician and author Linda Arpino will
discuss menu planning, nutrition,
marketing to children, body image. All
are welcome. Free.
637-7719 or 329-2243

20

Thursday

**Greenwich Board of Education
Work Session**
7 - 9 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich Avenue
625-7400

27

Thursday

**Greenwich Board of Education
Meeting**
7 - 10 PM
Old Greenwich School, Old Greenwich
625-7400

30

Sunday

**20th Annual "Puttin' on the Dog"
Show**
10 AM - 5 PM
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich
Dogs and cats for adoption. Also
demonstrations, contests, crafts, food
and children's entertainment. Sponsored
by Adopt-a-Dog. Rain or shine. \$8
adults, \$5 seniors and children ages 5
and up.
629-9494

9th Annual Teddy Bear Clinic
Noon - 3 PM Greenwich Medical Building
Parking Lot, 49 Lake Avenue Teach your
kids good healthy habits and put a
friendly face on medical care. Have your
child bring a favorite stuffed toy or doll
for evaluation and treatment. Sponsored
by Greenwich Hospital. Free. 863-3627

October

1

Monday

**"Reading Aloud: Motivating Chil-
dren to Make Books into Friends, Not
Enemies" with Jim Trelease**
7:30 PM
Cos Cob School, Cos Cob
Trelease will share ways to help your
child become a life-long reader. He will
also address common parent concerns,
such as reading comic books,
commercial phonics programs and
television. Sponsored by the Cos Cob
PTA, Friends of Cos Cob Library and
Parents Together. Free.
861-0910



4

Thursday

Preschool Exposition
9:30 - 11:30 AM; 6:30 - 8 PM
Christ Church, Greenwich
Learn about the numerous options for
preschool. Sponsored by the Greenwich
Early Childhood Directors Group. Free.
329-9112

6

Saturday

Townwide Fall Clean-Up
8 AM - Noon
All town firehouses
Annual event sponsored by Greenwich
Green and Clean. Free.
531-0006

26th Annual Outdoor Arts Festival
10 AM - 5 PM
Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Art, music and educational family
activities. Over 80 selected artists from
across the country, live music, family
activities, food. Thru 10/7. Rain or shine.
\$7 for non-members; members and
children under 5 free.
869-6786

9

Tuesday

**"What You Don't Know Can Keep
You Out of College" Parents
Together and Just Books Program**
7:30 PM
Just Books, Old Greenwich
Don Dunbar, nationally known expert of
the college admissions process will
discuss application mistakes.
637-7719 or 329-2243

November

10

Wednesday

Board of Education Candidates' Forum

7 - 9 PM

Town Hall, Greenwich Forum for the November election. Sponsored by the League of Women Voters. Free. 274-6668

11

Thursday

Greenwich Board of Education Work Session

7 - 9 PM

Wilbur Peck Court, Greenwich
625-7400



13

Saturday

Fall Festival

1 - 3 PM

Parkway School, Greenwich
Come and join the fun! Free.
869-7466

14

Sunday

Scarecrow Festival

Noon - 4 PM

Bush-Holley Historic Site, Strickland
Road, Cos Cob

Festival with crafts, activities and
games. Sponsored by the Greenwich
Chamber of Commerce and the
Historical Society. Call for cost.
869-6899

Greenwich Academy Admission Open House

1 - 3 PM Lower and Middle School; 3:30

- 5:30 PM Upper School

Massey Theatre, Greenwich Academy
Informational session about admissions.
625-8990

15

Monday

"The Balanced Mom: Raising Your Kids Without Losing Yourself" Parents Together Program

9:15 AM

Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall
Parenting specialist and author Bria
Simpson will conduct an interactive
workshop to help moms develop a
healthy balance in their lives. All are
welcome. Free.

637-7719 or 329-2243

21

Sunday

"Walk in the Park" for ARC

Noon

Greenwich Point, Old Greenwich
1-mile walk to benefit people with
intellectual difficulties. Route is
wheelchair and stroller accessible. Rain or
shine.
531-1880

25

Thursday

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting

7 - 10 PM

Parkway School, Greenwich
625-7400



26

Friday

"Halloween Happenings"

Time TBA

Location TBA

Family event for all ages including
dancing, prizes. Sponsored by
Greenwich Depart of Parks and
Recreation. Call for time, location and
cost.

622-6484

Enchanted Orchard and Animal Show

6 - 8 PM

Audubon Center, Greenwich

Prepare the family and join the fun in
Audubon's Historic Barn and orchard.

All ages welcome. Costumes
encouraged. RSVP required. Rain date
10/27. #25 per family.

869-5272

Drumming for Everyone

7 - 8:30 PM

Center for Integrative Medicine, 33 River
Road, Cos Cob

For thousands of years people
worldwide have joined together in drum
circles, a unique celebrative and healing
experience. All ages. Registration
required. Sponsored by Greenwich
Hospital. \$15
863-3627

1

Thursday

Greenwich Board of Education Work Session

7 - 9 PM

Havemeyer Building, Greenwich Avenue
625-7400

5

Monday

"Stress and the Kids of Today"

Parents Together Program

9:15 AM

Location TBA

Roni Cohen-Sandler, clinical psychologist
and author, will give strategies to help
reduce stress in our childrens' lives. All are
welcome. Free.
637-7719 or 329-2243

17

Saturday

Enchanted Forest 2007

9 AM - 5 PM

Hyatt Regency, Old Greenwich
Junior League of Greenwich's annual
family event featuring seasonal trees, a
gingerbread village, holiday boutique,
children's events and more. Thru 11/18.
\$10 for adults, \$5 for seniors and children
age 3 and over.
869-1979

24

Saturday

19th Annual Lunch with Santa

Time TBA

Location TBA

Visit with Mrs. Claus, Frosty, Rudolph.
Also entertainment, presents and prizes.
Sponsored by Greenwich Department of
Parks and Recreation. Call for time,
location and cost.
622-6484

29

Thursday

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting

7 - 10 PM

North Mianus School, Riverside
625-7400

Homework Blues:

Helping Your Child Gain Responsibility for Schoolwork

Does your child perform below his or her potential at school? Does she have average or better intelligence with no learning disabilities? Does he “forget” to bring homework home, or not finish it? Some children get into bad habits with their homework because they become preoccupied with playing sports or video games, or watching TV programs. Some middle school children become sidetracked by their peer relationships or by sports. Other children who find homework difficult would simply rather play.

If parents help their child cut back other activities to reasonable amounts, and count on the teacher to grade the child’s efforts on schoolwork and homework, most will improve. Motivation for good grades eventually comes from a desire to please the teacher and to be admired by peers, enjoyment in knowing things, an ability to see studying as a pathway to a future career, and her own self-reproach when she falls short of her goals.

When parents over-respond to this behavior and exert pressure for better performance, they can start a power struggle around schoolwork. “Forgetfulness” becomes a game. The child sees the parents’ pressure as a threat to his independence. More pressure brings more resistance. Poor grades become the child’s best way of proving that he is independent of his parents and that he can’t be pushed around. Good evidence for this is the child doing worse in the area where he receives the most help. If parental interference with a child’s schoolwork continues for several years, the child becomes a school “underachiever.”

Here are some tips to help your child regain responsibility for schoolwork:

GET OUT OF THE MIDDLE

Clarify that completing and turning in

homework is between your child and the teacher. Remember that the purpose of homework is to teach your child to work on his own. Don’t ask your child if he has any homework, and don’t help with homework except at your child’s request. Allow the school to apply natural consequences for poor performance. Walk away from any power struggles. Your child can learn the lesson of schoolwork accountability only through personal experience. Explain to your youngster, “After thinking about it, we have decided you are old enough to manage your homework. Schoolwork is your business, and we will try to stay out of it. We are confident you will do the right thing.”

The result of this sink-or-swim approach is that arguments will stop, but your child’s schoolwork may temporarily worsen; your child may throw caution to the wind to see if you really mean what you have said. This period of doing nothing but waiting for your child to find her own reason for doing well in school may be agonizing. However, children need to learn from their mistakes. If you can avoid “rescuing” your child, her grades should show an improvement in 2 to 9 months. This planned withdrawal of parental pressure is best done in the early grades, when marks are of minimal importance but the development of the child’s own personal reason for learning is critical.

AVOID REMINDERS

Reminding your child repeatedly about schoolwork promotes rebellion. So does criticizing, lecturing and threatening your child. Pressure is different from parental interest and encouragement. If pressure works at all, it works only temporarily.

Children cannot be forced to learn or to be productive. Learning is a process of self-fulfillment. It is an area that belongs to the child and one that

parents should try to stay out of, despite their yearnings for their children’s success.

COORDINATE WITH YOUR CHILD’S TEACHERS

Schedule a parent-teacher conference. Discuss your views on schoolwork and homework responsibility. Tell your child’s teacher you want your child to be responsible to the teacher for homework. Clarify that you would prefer not to check or correct work, because this has not been helpful in the past. Explain to the teacher that you want to be supportive of the school and could do this best if the teacher sent home a brief weekly progress report. If the teacher thinks your youngster needs extra help, be receptive to a tutoring program.

LIMIT TV UNTIL SCHOOLWORK IMPROVES

While you can’t make your child study, you can increase the potential study time. Eliminate all TV and video game time on school nights. Explain to your child that these privileges will be reinstated after the teacher’s weekly report confirms that all homework was handed in and the overall quality of work is improving. Explain that you are doing this to help him better structure his time.

CONSIDER ADDING INCENTIVES

Most children respond better to incentives than to dis-incentives. Ask your youngster what he thinks would help. Some good incentives for improved schoolwork are taking your child to a favorite restaurant, amusement park, sports event, or the movies. Sometimes earning spending money by working hard on studies will interest your child. The payments can be made weekly, based on the teacher’s progress reports. A’s, B’s, and C’s can receive a different

cash value. What your child buys with this money should be his business (music, toys, etc.). Rewarding hard work is how the adult marketplace works.

CONSIDER REMOVING OTHER PRIVILEGES FOR FALLOFF OF SCHOOLWORK

You have already eliminated school night TV-viewing because it interferes with studying. If the school reports continue to be poor, you may need to eliminate all TV and video games. Other privileges that may need to be temporarily limited should be those that matter to your child, such as talking on the phone, playing outside, visiting friends. For youngsters who have fallen behind in their work, no peer contact for one to two weeks may be required until they catch up.

Try to avoid severe punishment, however, because it will leave your youngster angry and resentful. Canceling something important, like membership on an athletic team, or taking away something they care about because of poor marks, is unfair and ineffective. Being part of a team is also good for motivation. However, you should let your youngster know that participating in something they enjoy is a privilege and not a right. The privilege should be earned and you may want to enlist the support of the team leader or coach to limit your youngster's involvement in practice/game time if the grades do not improve.

Call your child's teacher for a conference if your child's schoolwork and grades do not improve within two months; if homework is still an issue between you and your child, or if you think your child has a learning problem that makes school difficult. If you think your child is having trouble completing his homework because he seems overly stressed or depressed, call and make an appointment with your health provider.

Source: The Children's Medical Group, PC, Greenwich

Greenwich Alliance for Education by Nancy Kail

THE GREENWICH ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION focuses on supporting public school children on a town wide basis. The Alliance was formed in 2006 by a group of educators, parents and town leaders who believe that the community has a shared responsibility for ensuring that all of our students achieve educational success. Members feel that more could and should be done to provide enrichment so that more public school children achieve at acceptable levels, and those who are achieving are inspired to attain greater levels of excellence.

Even in a town like Greenwich, there are areas of need. The town has changing diversity and achievement gaps persist. Twenty percent of students in primary grades and at least 24% in secondary grades perform below the Goal Standard set by the Connecticut State Department of Education on assessments of core reading, writing and mathematics skills.

The Greenwich Alliance for Education is our town's first local education foundation. The group is an independent, not for profit, local organization, whose mission is: *to provide opportunities and services that foster educational success for all Greenwich public school students, birth to graduation.*

In providing a vehicle for community support of local public school education, it joins thousands of local education foundations nationwide and over 75 local education foundations in Connecticut. Members of the Alliance Steering Committee spent a year researching local education foundation best practices; establishing close working relationships with the education, public and private sector town leaders; identifying specific areas of need and developing programs to address those needs; recruiting a broad-based, diverse Board of Directors, and affiliating with the Connecticut Consortium of Education Foundations. Through careful laying of this groundwork, it was able to introduce three programs:

Tuning in to Music provides private music lessons for elementary school students who are otherwise unable to afford them. This past year, 37 elementary school students took weekly music lessons; this coming year the Alliance will expand Tuning in to Music to include at least 50 students.

Going Places with Books is an early childhood literacy program which uses a Storymobile to bring enjoyable, interactive bilingual literacy experiences to preschool age children where they live, learn and play.

Reaching Out Grants provides significant grants to community partners to develop inventive, sustainable programs that address identified areas of need among public school students. This past year the Alliance provided nearly \$90,000 in grants to the following programs: Greenwich High School Skills for success, EMS/WMS Adventure Racing Program, Soundwaters Coastal Investigation, and Greenwich Arts Council Minds in Motion

The Alliance plans to expand existing initiatives and develop additional programs that fulfill its mission. Each Alliance undertaking will address an area of identified need with a carefully developed program. The Alliance will collaborate with appropriate town groups and individuals, evaluate its efforts on an ongoing basis and produce measurable indicators of success for each undertaking.

Greenwich is a community with the will and the means to help every child achieve educational success and a promising future. If you would like to learn more or to volunteer please call 698-7730 or visit www.greenwichalliance.org.

Reading Aloud: Motivating Children to Become Lifelong Readers

By Laurel Scarlata

By reading aloud, you advertise the pleasures of reading instead of the work that children too often associate with reading.

—Jim Trelease

As a former teacher, I am frequently asked by mothers of school-aged children, what should I be doing for my child? I have given the same answer for the last fifteen years: “Read aloud to your child every day.” That’s it. It is quite simple. And I believe from my experience as an educator and as a mother, that it is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child. Early in my teaching career I came across a book that affirmed this belief, *The Read Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease. It has proven to be an invaluable guide. Its pages are dog-eared and paragraphs are underlined, and I often refer to its treasury for lists of “good” books to read to my children.

Trelease states that the most important subject in school is reading, as all subjects rest upon it. But more importantly, he believes that our objective as parents and educators is to create *lifetime* readers, not school time readers. Research shows that by senior year in high school only 25 percent of students will be lifetime readers. Trelease believes that our national scores are telling us that our children know how to read. But their behavior as children and adults tells us that they don’t like it enough to do it very often. We’ve taught our children *how* to read but forgotten to teach them to *want* to read.

What turns kids on to reading? Trelease believes there’s an inexpensive solution requiring just 15 minutes a day. There are no gimmicks or costly phonics programs to buy. According to Trelease, “What you need is parents

and teachers reading terrific books to kids every day. Kids don’t have favorite vowels, they have favorite stories. Who ever found a child in bed with a flashlight and a workbook?” The National Commission on Reading declared reading to children is the *single most important* factor in reading success.

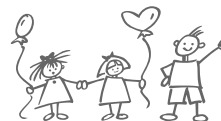
I remember when my first son was born and how eager I was to read to him. I could not wait to share my favorite stories and the many others that had lit up my classroom days as well as my own childhood. Mem Fox, author of *Reading Magic*, states “The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading.” I have had so much fun using different voices while I read *Charlotte’s Web* or *The Little Engine that Could*. I roar while reading *Where the Wild Things Are* and whisper while reciting *Good Night Moon*.

I truly enjoy myself while reading aloud to my children. I delight in this daily activity. The tradition of reading aloud has remained a wonderful family time for us. It is always a happy time in our house. The books we have read have served as wonderful conversation pieces for us while we share our thoughts and questions with one another. Fox states “reading aloud and talking about what we’re reading sharpens children’s brains. It helps develop their ability to concentrate at length, to solve problems logically, and to express themselves more easily and clearly. Reading is a process by which children learn the complexities of language, vocabulary, phonics and grammar.”

As I mentioned earlier, reading aloud is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child. One caution I would mention is to not stop reading aloud to your child just because he or

she is reading independently. I was falling into the pattern of letting my oldest read to himself at night. Trelease fears it is a mistake that many of us make. He writes, “Children can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own. The last thing you want first graders thinking is that what they’re reading in first grade is as good as books are going to get! First graders can enjoy books written on a fourth grade level, and fifth-graders can enjoy books on a seventh-grade level reading level.” I found that after reading to my son on a consistent basis for eight years, that I missed this time together. So we hit the library and got back into our routine.

I would strongly encourage you to pick up a copy of *The Read Aloud Handbook* but better yet, come hear Mr. Trelease speak at Cos Cob School on Monday, October 1 at 7:30pm. Mr. Trelease is a dynamic speaker who promises to inspire, inform and make you laugh. He also will address what parents can do about the TV problem and give you a list of the best books to read aloud. The program is for parents, caregivers, teachers, librarians and it is free of charge.



Laurel Scarlata is a former kindergarten and 1st grade teacher at North Street School. She lives in Cos Cob with her husband and three children.

2007-2008 *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 townwide 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
Jane Shang

Central Middle School

Mamie Lee

Convent of the Sacred Heart

Rhonda Morley

Cos Cob School

Lisa Edmundson

Eagle Hill

Mia Weinberg

Eastern Middle School

Christa Panny

Glenville School

Carol Fox

Greenwich Academy

Jenny Collins
Allyson Cowin

Greenwich Catholic School

Lisa MacCarrick
Susan Schuller

Greenwich Country Day School

Karen Marache
Jeannie Rose

Greenwich High School

Donna Arnold
Linda Layman

Hamilton Avenue School

Patty Reilly

International School at Dundee

Suzanne Deschamps

Julian Curtiss School

TBA

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

Carol Marinelli
McKenzie VanMeel

Parkway School

Stefanie Laroff Jampole
Vicky Newman

Riverside School

Cynthia Nelli

Stanwich School

Robin Brown

Westchester Fairfield Hebrew Acad.

Lisa Greenburg

Western Middle School

TBA

Whitby School

Emily Warren

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..... Polly Hyman

Dear readers:

This issue begins our twenty-eighth 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 parents thanks to the generous support of our contributors, both financial and editorial.

This is the first newsletter of the year; look for others in December, March and May. Please contact your school's delegate(s) if you have any questions about the newsletter or our upcoming programs, details of which appear on the back page. We look forward to seeing you at one of our programs!

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 through 12. We also publish two quarterly 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 mailed to parents of children in grades 6 through 12 in all Greenwich public and independent schools.

Newsletter Subscriptions and Correspondence: We invite parents and 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 \$12 for each subscription, in a check payable to **Parents Together**, to P. O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831-0417.

Contact Us!

Do you have a story idea, writer suggestion or comment for the *Parents Together Primer* staff? You may fax it to 698-3376 or e-mail it to ptprimer@optonline.net.

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Upcoming Parents Together Programs

September 17: "Eat Fit, Be Fit" presented by dietician & author Linda Arpino. Basic nutrition for children and teens will be the main focus of this program; topics such as body image, sports fitness, and food marketing will be discussed. This topic has been the most requested by PT families! **9:15 AM Greenwich Town Hall, Cone Room.**

October 1: "Reading Aloud: Motivating Children to Make Books into Friends, Not Enemies" with Jim Trelease. Event is co-sponsored with the Cos Cob PTA and Friends of the Cos Cob Library. **7:30 PM, Cos Cob School.**

October 9: "What You Don't Know Can Keep You Out of College." Don Dunbar, nationally-known expert on the college-admission process, president of Dunbar Educational Consultants and author will discuss 13 fatal application mistakes and how he believes **character** is the key to college admissions. Co-sponsored with Just Books. **7:30 PM, Arcadia Coffee Co., Old Greenwich.**

October 15: "The Balanced Mom - Raising your Kids Without Losing Yourself," presented by life coach, parenting specialist and author, Bria Simpson. Simpson will conduct an interactive workshop helping moms develop a healthy balance in their lives by clarifying values overcoming mommy-perfection, and becoming more organized. **9:15 AM, Greenwich Town Hall, Cone Room.**

November 5: "Stress and the Kids of Today," presented by Dr. Roni Cohen-Sandler, clinical psychologist and author. Dr. Sandler will give strategies to help reduce stress in our children's lives, a problem not only in Fairfield County, but throughout the country. Learn who is at risk, the symptoms to look for, and strategies to apply as well as those to avoid. **9:15 AM, Location TBA.**

This issue of Parents Together Primer was made possible by the donations of generous supporters

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