

Parents TOGETHER PRIMER

Spring 2008

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

IN THIS ISSUE

14 Ways to Praise
page 2-3

Chores That Work
page 3

Spring Family
Calendar
pages 4-5

More Than Just Baby Fat:
What Parents Can Do
pages 6-7

Celebrating 30 Years!
page 7

PARENTS TOGETHER
PROGRAMS

March 3, 2008
"Underweight,
Overweight: Body Image"

April 7, 2008
"Essence of Adolescence"

May 12, 2008
"How to Raise Your
Parents: A Teen Girl's
Survivor Guide"

*Please refer to page 8 for
program details*

Our Heartfelt Thanks!

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The Supergirl Dilemma Managing Expectations

By Jennafer Kannengeiser

In 2006, Girls Incorporated® published a study conducted by Harris Interactive® that reported astonishing results. "The Supergirl Dilemma" summarizes the findings of girls grappling with the mounting pressures of expectations. Below is a short summary of our findings and how you can help the girls in your life to avoid feeling excessive pressures.

Girls today experience intense pressure, at ever younger ages, to be everything to everyone all of the time. While stereotypes about girls' leadership capabilities and math and science abilities appear to have diminished in the past six years, as compared to a similar study conducted by Girls Inc. in 2000, expectations about physical perfection, such as dressing "right" and being thin, seem to have increased simultaneously. Stereotypes about girls' needing to speak softly, not brag, and to play caretaker roles seem to persist. Society appears to be making some room for girls to transcend traditional expectations about abilities and aspirations, just as long as they also conform to conventional notions of femininity.

There are remarkable commonalities between the attitudes, experiences and aspirations of girls and boys. However, there are some critical gender-based differences: Girls and boys believe that girls are supposed to be kind and caring, while boys are supposed to

protect themselves and others. Girls are more worried than boys about their appearance and social pressures. Boys, on the other hand, are more concerned about having to fight in a war and about doing well in sports.

Girls can do anything. To encourage girls to challenge themselves, Girls Inc. provides innovative programs to help girls confront subtle societal messages about their value and potential, and prepare them to lead successful, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Girls Inc. has made it their mission to inspire all girls to be strong, smart and bold®. It seems that as a society we have moved to the point where girls are getting the message that they have to do everything all at the same time. Girls feel the need to be everything to everyone in their lives--parents, siblings, friends, boys and teachers. These unrealistic expectations of girls create intense pressure in girls' lives.

We need to address the challenges and limitations girls encounter earlier. These girls grow up to be women, citizens, employees, mothers, among many roles--and their success is our collective success. We must help girls to be super in the ways that feel right to them rather than perpetuating the idea that they must be "supergirls" in order to meet social expectations.

continued over

The Supergirl Dilemma *continued from page 1*

WHAT GIRLS WANT ADULTS TO KNOW

“Girls want their ideas respected. Girls want their future open to any dream they might have for themselves.” --3rd grade girl

“We are special even if we are not boys. We are smart and strong and don’t have to starve to death to be pretty...” --4th grade girl

“There are a lot of pressures and stereotypes we have to deal with to be who we want to be and at the same time live up to who you want us to be.” --6th grade girl

“Even though we are told we can be whatever we want to be, there is still pressure to do and become the same old gender roles...” --8th grade girl

“We are our own person and if given the right information will make the right choices” --9th grade girl

“Even today, society values beauty in girls over intelligence and talent.” --10th grade girl

“I want them [adults] to realize that there’s an insane amount of media and peer pressure on girls: to be thin, to be beautiful, to be air-headed and only care about shopping, to always be wearing the latest trends, to not care about grades or school, etcetera. They need to encourage girls to be themselves and find what they’re passionate about because otherwise, without adult support, most girls won’t have the courage to go against the media and do what they love, be it considered appropriately ‘feminine’ or not.” --12th grade girl

RECOMMENDATIONS

♦ **Listen to what girls have to say.** Whether you are a parent or another caring adult, ask a girl-or even better many girls-about what is on her mind and really listen, careful not to get upset or judgmental.

♦ **Empower girls to set priorities and make smart choices.** Support girls in learning to say “no” and in establishing boundaries.

♦ **Provide role models.** Introduce girls to a variety of career options. Share profiles of women who have overcome obstacles to achieve success.

♦ **Redefine notions of femininity, masculinity and what it means to be kind and caring.** Help girls overcome the pressure to please everyone. Teach them to how to say “no” in a kind and caring way.

♦ **Nurture the individual.** Tell a girl it’s okay to brag about something she is good at. Avoid rescuing girls. Encourage them to take healthy risks, make mistakes, and get dirty or disheveled in pursuit of a goal.

♦ **Address issues of body image.** Help girls develop a healthy body image. Teach them that beauty comes in different sizes, shapes, colors and abilities. Encourage girls to focus on health, flexibility and strength.

♦ **Educate yourself and raise awareness of stereotypes and their consequences.** Be aware of the signals and messages you are sending young children.

For a full Supergirl Dilemma report contact Girls Inc. of Southwestern Connecticut’s Greenwich chapter at (203)536-3322.



Jennafer Kannengeiser is the program director of the Greenwich Chapter of Girls Inc.

14 Ways to Praise Your Child

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers these tips to show love for your child:

- ♦ Use plenty of positive words with your child. Try to avoid using sarcasm with your child. They often don’t understand it, and if they do, it creates a negative interaction.
- ♦ Respond promptly and lovingly to your child’s physical and emotional needs and banish put-downs from your parenting vocabulary.
- ♦ Make an extra effort to set a good example at home and in public. Use words like “I’m sorry,” “please,” and “thank you.”
- ♦ When your child is angry, argumentative or in a bad mood, give him a hug, cuddle, pat, secret sign or other gesture of affection he favors and talk with him about his feelings.
- ♦ Use non-violent forms of discipline. Parents should institute both rewards and restrictions many years before adolescence to help prevent trouble during the teenage years. Allowing children of any age to constantly break important rules without being disciplined only encourages more rule violations.
- ♦ Make plans to spend time alone with your young child or teen doing something she enjoys.
- ♦ Mark family game nights on your calendar so the entire family can be together. Put a different family member’s name under each date, and have that person choose which game will be played that evening.
- ♦ Owning a pet can make children,

continued next column

especially those with chronic illnesses and disabilities, feel better by stimulating physical activity, enhancing their overall attitude, and offering constant companionship.

- ♦ One of the best ways to familiarize your child with good food choices is to encourage him to cook with you. Let him get involved in the entire process, from planning the menus to shopping for ingredients to the actual food preparation and its serving.
- ♦ As your child grows up, she'll spend most of her time developing and refining a variety of skills and abilities in all areas of her life. You should help her as much as possible by encouraging her and providing the equipment and instruction she needs.
- ♦ Your child's health depends significantly on the care and guidance you offer during his early years. By taking your child to the doctor regularly for consultations, keeping him safe from accidents, providing a nutritious diet, and encouraging exercise throughout childhood, you help protect and strengthen his body.
- ♦ Help your child foster positive relationships with friends, siblings and members of the community.
- ♦ One of your most important gifts as a parent is to help your child develop self-esteem. Your child needs your steady support and encouragement to discover his strengths. He needs you to believe in him as he learns to believe in himself. Loving him, spending time with him, listening to him and praising his accomplishments are all part of this process.
- ♦ Don't forget to say, "I love you" to children of all ages!

Chores That Work

"Far too many women in America are becoming sick with exhaustion and stress as they try to do things that can't- or shouldn't- be done". -- Judith Warner, Perfect Madness

Rather than trying to be a supermom, strive instead to be a healthy, balanced mom. Demonstrate your high self-esteem by protecting time to take great care of yourself and by sharing some duties with your kids. In turn, your children learn that mom is someone to respect. They also learn responsibility, independence and life skills that will last a lifetime.

Do your kids, and yourself, a favor. Take the time to create a chore system that works. Here are some suggestions:

- ♦ Designate two to four chores, for each child, every day. The number you pick is determined by the number and age of your children, and the amount of help you need to stay healthy and balanced. All children should be making their beds, putting clothes in the laundry basket, and clearing their plates, as part of the family. Beyond these basic manners, other chores can be rewarded with financial or other rewards.
 - ♦ Teach your fiscal values by paying for some chores. Sometime between age eight and ten, most kids are ready for some paid chores. Ask them to do chores with some real responsibility- such as feeding pets, taking out the trash or recycling, sorting laundry and vacuuming. Teach them to save a percentage of their income for bigger items, spend a percentage on more immediate activities or desires, and donate a percentage to charity. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach financial responsibility and fiscal values- something many kids sorely lack as they enter adulthood.
 - ♦ Reward younger children in other ways. Consider keeping a chore chart and awarding stars or stickers for completed chores. After three- seven days, they can earn a reward, such as time doing something fun with you or earning some "plugged-in time" (T.V., gameboy etc.)
 - ♦ Stay calm and be consistent. Creating a chore system that works requires persistence and consistency. Stay calm and clear with the rules- if they do the chores, they get the rewards; if they don't, they won't. Keep it clear and simple.
 - ♦ Don't buy them what they want other than on birthdays and big holidays. Older children will be motivated to earn money if, and only if, you don't buy them whatever they want. They need to earn money to go to movies, buy lunch out, and purchase expensive items. I recommend that you pay for basic clothes, but not expensive ones- let them pay the difference in cost. In doing so, you avoid overindulging them while teaching them to be self-reliant and more appreciative of their belongings.
 - ♦ Set some bigger goals that they need to work towards. Think of your values. What do you want your child to pay for, either because you can't afford it or because you want to keep them grounded? In our house, we've told our 7th grader that he needs to save money to pay for car insurance when he is older. Other ideas are the cost of a new computer or help with college expenses.
- Take the time to create a chore system that works. The short term pain of setting it up is worth the long term gain! It not only contributes to your balance and health, it promotes self-sufficiency, independence and gratitude in your children.



Bria Simpson, MA, is a life coach and parenting specialist. You can contact her at bria@briacoach.com for further information.

SPRING FAMILY CALENDAR



March

1

"Once Upon a Mattress" Musical
8 PM
St. Catherine of Siena Church, Riverside
Well-loved musical presented by St. Catherine's Players. Reservations recommended. Also 3/2 at 2 PM; 3/8 at 8 PM; 3/9 at 2 PM. \$15. 661-2942

2

"Architecture of the Imagination: The Lure of the Lego Brick" Exhibit
Museum Hours
Stamford Museum and Nature Center, Stamford
Fun-filled hands-on exhibit of robots, trains and other Lego-based creations. Thru 8/17. Included with museum admission. 322-1646 or stamfordmuseum.org



3

"Underweight, Overweight, and Body Image"
Parents Together Program
9:15 AM
Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall, Dr. Diane Mickley will focus on obesity, eating disorders, body image in boys and girls of all ages. All are welcome. Free. 637-7719 or 329-2243

4

8

"Together" Film
8 PM
Cole Auditorium, Greenwich Library
Story in which a father takes his 13-year-old prodigy son to Beijing to get him the best teacher. In Chinese with English subtitles. Sponsored by The Friends of Greenwich Library. Free. 622-7900

9

"Phenomenal Weather" Exhibit
Museum Hours
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Family-friendly interactive exploration of weather. Touch a tornado and listen to the sounds of it. Thru 11/30. \$7 adults, \$6 seniors and students, free for members and children under 5. 869-6786

Daylight Savings: Spring Forward
Don't forget to turn your clocks forward one hour

34th St. Patrick's Day Parade
2 PM
Greenwich Avenue, Greenwich
Annual event. Free. 661-2963

12

"Developing a Family Disaster Plan" Workshop
7:30 - 9:20 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
Learn about how you can be better prepared for any type of emergency. Sponsored by the Greenwich Chapter of the American Red Cross. Register with Greenwich Continuing Education. Free. 625-7474

13

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

15

48th Annual Pancake Breakfast
8 AM - 1 PM
Greenwich Civic Center, Old Greenwich
Sponsored by the Lions Club of Old Greenwich. Entertainment and door prizes. \$6 adults, \$5 children 6-12 in advance or \$7 adults, \$5 children 6-12 at the door, Children under 5 free. 637-9292

Easter Egg Hunt
10 AM
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich
\$10 to benefit local non-profit projects. Sponsored by the Lions Club of Greenwich. Raindate 3/16. 698-2595

22

4th Annual Easter Egg Hunt
10 AM - Noon
Stamford Museum and Nature Center
Children ages six and under can search the grounds for eggs. \$1 plus gate admission. 322-1646

24

"Parenting With Love and Logic" Program
7 - 9 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
Four-week parenting program that addresses how to create a home environment that stimulates responsibility, academic achievement, and builds character. Sponsored by Greenwich Continuing Education. Registration required. \$59. 625-7474

25

"Controversies Around Antidepressant Use in Children and Adolescents" Lecture
7 PM
Noble Conference Room, Greenwich Hospital
Part of the Yale Child Center lecture series. Registration required. Free. 863-3627

27

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting
7 - 10 PM
Central Middle School, Greenwich
625-7400

April

3

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

4

"The Pursuit of Happyness" Film
8 PM
Cole Auditorium, Greenwich Library
Moving true story about a man who
struggles to keep his family from sinking
into poverty. Rated PG-13. Sponsored by
Friends of Greenwich Library. Free.
622-7900



5

**"How to Develop Better
Communications with Teens, Part 2"
Fathers Forum**
8 AM
YMCA, Greenwich
High school students will provide
insights and examples of typical parental
communication. Role-playing and a panel
discussion. Sponsored by the Greenwich
Coalition to Combat Underage Drinking.
Free.
gccud@yahoo.com

7

**"Essence of Adolescence"
Parents Together Program**
9:15 AM
Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall,
Sonya Rencivitz, MSW, LCSW, will delve
into the physical, intellectual, social and
academic aspects of adolescents. All are
welcome. Free.
637-7719 or 329-2243

12

Kite Flying Contest
10 AM - 3 PM
Tod's Point, Old Greenwich
Sponsored by the Greenwich Department
of Parks and Recreation. Rainedate 4/13,
11 AM - 3 PM. Free.
622-7814



18

"The Simpsons" Movie
8 PM
Cole Auditorium, Greenwich Library
Homer attempts to redeem himself after he
pollutes the lake and is exiled from town.
Rated PG-13. Sponsored by Friends of
Greenwich Library. Free.
622-7900

24

**"The Power of Play: Raising Healthy
Children in a Stressful World"
Author Talk**
7 PM
Christ Church Nursery School, Greenwich
Author David Elkind will discuss his
book. Q & A will follow. Limited seating;
advanced registration suggested. \$20.
869-5334

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



28

**"Surviving Autism: Navigating the
System" Lecture**
7 PM
Noble Conference Room, Greenwich
Hospital
Part of the Yale Child Center lecture
series. Registration required. Free.
863-3627

May

2

62nd Annual "Pow Wow" Carnival
4 - 10 PM
North Mianus School, Riverside
Rides, games, live entertainment, food,
face painting and more. Also 5/3, Noon -
10 PM.

3

**"Becoming a Better Dad"
Father's Forum**
8 AM
YMCA, Greenwich Family therapist John
Hamilton will present skills and
awareness to improve relationships.
Sponsored by the Greenwich Coalition
to Combat Underage Drinking. Free.
gccud.yahoo.com

12

**"How to Raise Your Parents: A Teen
Survival Guide"
Parents Together Program**
9:15 AM
Cone Room, Greenwich Town Hall
Author Sarah Burningham will give tips
on communicating with children of all
ages. All are welcome. Free.
637-7719 or 329-2243

17

23rd Annual Outdoor Crafts Festival
10 AM - 5 PM
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Activities include music, entertainment,
artmaking. Fun for all ages. Also 5/18.
Free for members and children under 5;
\$8 for non-members.
869-6786

22

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

30

St. Paul's "Fair for All"
6:00 PM
Also 5/31

More Than Just Baby Fat

What Parents Can Do

By Molly Carmel

I “It’s just a little baby fat...”

When it comes to childhood obesity, many parents mistakenly assume that children will compensate for their weight with a growth spurt, or that the excess fat will simply disappear with age. With the latest research suggesting that by 2010 almost 50% of children in North America will be overweight, it’s time to recognize that the “baby fat” myth is just that.

The list of medical conditions known to be associated with obesity encompasses nearly every part of the body: pulmonary disease, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, gall bladder disease, gynecologic abnormalities, coronary heart disease, osteoarthritis, pancreatitis, hypertension, cancer, and type II diabetes to name a few. And these diseases are no longer waiting for later life to attack.

Perhaps less talked about, but no less significant, are the psychological and sociological impacts that obesity has on children. Childhood obesity is linked to decreases in self-esteem and body image, as well as to social isolation and depression. These psychological issues have severe, long-term ramifications. Studies show that an overweight child is less likely to graduate from high school, go to college, complete college, or get married, and is more likely to occupy a lower socioeconomic status.

“Weightism” remains one of the final socially accepted biases, and overweight children often are bullied and stigmatized by their peers. A recent study likens the quality of life of an overweight child to that of a child suffering from cancer.

The stigma does not end in a child’s social circles. In a study of 115 middle and high school teachers, 20 percent believed obese people to be

untidy, less likely to succeed, and more emotional than normal weight people.

With this kind of pressure in school and other social environments, it is alarming that one of the biggest (and least addressed) roadblocks to dealing with the epidemic of childhood obesity is parental denial. The National Poll on Children’s Health reveals that 40% of children aged 6-11 whose parents described them as “about the right weight” were actually obese.

Accurate assessment is very important for parents when it comes to childhood obesity, yet standardized measurement systems, most commonly Body Mass Index (BMI), define obesity differently for adults than for children. While a specific index number is used to determine if an adult is considered obese (30 or over), childhood obesity is determined by percentiles (obesity is defined as a BMI equal to or greater than the 95th percentile of the age- and gender-specific body mass charts; a child in the 85th percentile is identified as overweight and at risk for obesity). This information can be accessed on The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website at: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/.

It is normal for parents to be nervous regarding how to best approach the topic of weight with their children. Parents often feel powerless or ineffective in finding successful ways to intervene in childhood obesity, which can lead to procrastination and avoidance of a problem that requires immediate attention. Make no mistake: parental support and family involvement is an integral part of curbing this epidemic.

The best and most effective approach, for parents and children, is to lead with support and unconditional love. Focusing on the

behaviors that need changing and not the character of a child is key – it is imperative that a child does not feel reprimanded for unhealthy weight. A child with low-self esteem has far worse outcomes when participating in a weight-loss plan.

Involving the whole family in wellness helps an overweight child feel less stigmatized and makes wellness seem like a way of life and not a punishment. With parents (and siblings) leading by example, children are more likely to choose healthier food options and participate in regular exercise because they are surrounded by others who are doing the same. Normal-weight children also benefit, as poor eating habits developed in childhood can become dangerous later in life. It is imperative that all children in a family, even those who are normal weight, understand the scope of the problem and their role in the solution.

A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Make your home a “safe eating” place by removing all high-fat foods. Stock your home with healthy foods: fruits, vegetables, low-fat treats like frozen yogurt, pretzels, baked potato chips, etc.
- ◆ Involve your child in trips to the grocery store; it can be fun trying to find the lowest calorie version of a favorite food.
- ◆ Plan meals as a family and invite your children to help with the preparation.
- ◆ Visit hungrygirl.com for delicious low-fat versions of your favorite recipes.
- ◆ Buy pedometers for the entire family and initiate pedometer contests to encourage walking and other “invisible” and fun types of exercise.
- ◆ Make free time and fun time active. For instance, go bowling or mini golfing instead of the movies.

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 \$10 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

March 3rd: "Underweight, Overweight and Body Image" with Diane Mickley, MD, founder and director of the Wilkins Center, which specializes in treating people with eating disorders and weight control issues.

9:15 AM Greenwich Town Hall, Cone Room.

April 7th: "Essence of Adolescence" Sonya Rencivitz, MSW, LCSW and psychotherapist specializing in adolescents, will delve into the physical, intellectual, social and academic aspects of adolescence.

9:15 AM Greenwich Town Hall, Cone Room.

May 12th: "How to Raise Your Parents: A Teen Girl's Survival Guide." Author and speaker Sarah Burningham will give tips on communicating with our children. This program will focus on all ages, and boys and girls.

9:15 AM Greenwich Town Hall, Cone Room.

May 12th: Mother/Daughter Program. Sarah Burningham invites mothers and daughters to come together to discuss effective communication through her book "How to Raise Your Parents." Co-sponsored with Just Books.

7:30 PM Arcadia Coffee Shop, Old Greenwich.

Unless otherwise noted, all programs are free and open to the public. Call 329-2241 if you have questions.

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Parents  **TOGETHER**

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