



NORTHWEST PARENTS' CORNER

Fall 2007

*A quarterly newsletter of parenting tips,
reflections, and ideas*

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The Benefits of Play

'play\plā\ n: the spontaneous activity of children

When I was a child, my mother would send me outside with my younger brother and sister and lock the door behind us. Attempts to be let in would only be allowed if *a*) it was lunch time or *b*) we could convince my mother that we *really, really* had to use the bathroom. On the other end of the day, long after supper, the skies would be darkening, the mosquitoes biting – but until I heard the shrill of my father's whistle beckoning us in for the night, I was happy to be outside playing. Playing. Running, making forts, climbing trees, ringing door bells and hiding, playing hide and seek, dodge ball, jacks, cards, jump rope, trading baseball cards, putting on plays, writing newspapers, identifying shapes in clouds, or doing nothing at all (and then complaining about being bored). "Playdates" happened naturally with the kids on the block. We worked out our differences most of the time without the intervention of adults, goofed around, hung out, invited new kids into the fold as they visited relatives for the summer, developed first crushes and thought summer would last forever.

Today's world has obviously changed. In the nineteen fifties & sixties, many mothers were still home keeping tabs on everyone else's child as if they all were their own. Many things are better today. Kids get training at skills that weren't even taught back then. Organized sports, technology, music, hobbies and interests have become important in our kids' lives, shaping them for college, careers and adulthood. At the risk of sounding a bit, "In my day...": What was the cost of these gains? What have we given up? In 1981, Professor of Child Development at Tufts University, David Elkind, wrote The Hurried Child, warning parents and educators about the dangers of pushing kids too hard, and forcing them to achieve success early or be regarded as "losers". Part of his premise is that over-scheduling and pressuring kids to achieve can create chronic stress and steal their childhood.

"Play is a basic human drive" Elkind reports in his new book, The Power of Play. "It is simply shorthand for imagination, curiosity and fantasy." Through play children create for themselves new learning experiences. Yet the concept of "unstructured, self-initiated play" is vanishing from our culture. In addition, in the past 2 decades, childhood has retreated indoors. Kids' time has been supplanted by organized and more sedentary activities. Experts agree that increasing rates of childhood obesity is directly correlated with the increase in sedentary activities. According to a Kaiser Family Foundation study, children ages 8 to 18 spend an incredible 6.5 hours a day on television, electronic games, computers, music and other media. For many, the virtual world has become a more natural setting than the natural one.

We all know electronics are here to stay. But having children sit almost half their waking life in front of a screen is something we need to think about. The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued its recommendation that no child under the age of two should watch any television (videos included). In addition, there is evidence mounting that extensive T.V. watching by toddlers and young children can in fact be a contributing factor to the development of A.D.D.

It is ironic that major companies such as Disney, Sesame, DuPont, and the gaming industry are now launching "campaigns" to encourage children to spend more time out doors. Nickelodeon "went dark" just this past week for 3 hours as part of its fourth annual worldwide day of play – in part to help kids to "get in shape." Appreciating the importance of play, leaving kids unstructured time to be adventurous, to take risks, to learn to navigate the social world and see the power that they have – are all vital to their development. In addition, substituting "screen" time with play time can increase their physical fitness and lower their chances of developing obesity-related conditions.

- C. Bianchi

(Please visit our lending library for the books mentioned above as well as more!)

Siblings Without Rivalry

This summer HYSB “Family Solutions” offered a four week “Siblings Without Rivalry” course at Christ Church in North Canaan. Six parents joined facilitator Jill Gibbons, and contributed to lively discussions about what goes on between siblings of all ages. Based on the book by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, the curriculum highlighted what parents can do to shift their children away from a need to see the other as a rival for time and attention. Often, by changing the way they address their children, parents can avoid setting siblings up for conflict. The authors advise:

Resist the urge to compare one child unfavorably to another.

Speak to the child about the behavior that displeases you. Instead of, “*Why can’t you hang up your clothes like your brother?*” describe what you

see, what you feel, and what needs to be done.

“I see a brand new jacket on the floor. That bothers me. This jacket belongs in the closet.” Comparing

one child favorably to another also sets kids up for uncomfortable feelings, so instead of saying, “*You’re so much neater than your brother*” speak to the child who is present (don’t talk about the one who isn’t), and remember to focus on the behavior, describe what you see, and what you feel. *“I see you hung up your jacket. I appreciate that! I like our hallway looking neat!”*

“Fair” does not always mean “the same”. Parents will drive themselves crazy if they believe they must respond to complaints of “*It’s not fair!*” by keeping an equal tally in every interaction with their kids. Instead of giving equal amounts, “*Here, now you have the same number of grapes as your sister,*” give according to individual need, “*Do you want just a few grapes or a big bunch?*” Children don’t need to be treated equally, they need to be treated uniquely. “Fair” means each member of the family is having his/her needs met. So, instead of feeling obliged to

give equal time: “*After I’ve spent ten minutes with your sister, I’ll spend ten minutes with you*”, parents should give according to individual need: “*I know I’m spending a lot of time going over your sister’s composition. It’s important to her. As soon as I’m finished, I want to hear what’s important to you.*”

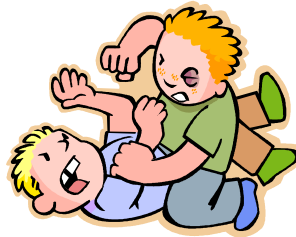
Avoid locking a child into a role. Children locked into roles may become self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead of saying, “*You hid your brother’s ball! Why are you always so mean?*” leave judgment and name-calling out of it, and simply state, “*Your brother wants his ball back.*” Words like “*always*” and “*never*” take away hope for change or improvement.

Children internalize what they hear others say about them, and begin to believe it is true. If a child says, “*I know I’m mean,*” a parent can promote a more positive self-image by responding, “*You’re also capable of being*

kind.” If his siblings complain, “*Johnny’s mean! He won’t lend me his scotch tape,*” parents can respond, “*Try asking him differently. You may be surprised at how generous he can be!*”

If Johnny attacks his brother, attend to the brother without attacking Johnny: “*That must hurt. Let me rub it. Johnny needs to learn how to express his feelings with words, not fists.*”

Siblings need to have their feelings about each other acknowledged. All feelings are acceptable. Parents don’t have to agree or disagree. So, when your son complains, “*I’m gonna kill him. He took my new skates!*” you can reply by naming his feeling, “*You sound furious,*” or by stating his wishes, “*You wish he would ask before taking your things.*” You might even suggest a creative action, “*How about making a ‘Private Property’ sign to hang on your closet door?*” While all feelings are acceptable, certain behaviors must be stopped, so when kids resort to physical harm, parents must act decisively, “*Hold it! People are not for hurting!*” and show children how to discharge angry feelings acceptably, “*Tell him with words how angry you are.*”



“I learned how to diffuse the fighting between my children without putting either one down or feeling ashamed.”

Tell him, 'I don't want my things used without my permission.' Kids feel more secure if they know there is an adult in charge who will not allow them to hurt each other.

When children disagree, allow them to work it out themselves. If kids can no longer get Mom and Dad to take sides, they will learn important skills in conflict resolution and compromise. If the situation is heating up parents can give support by acknowledging the children's feelings: *"You two sound mad at each other,"* reflecting each child's point of view: *"Sara, you want to keep holding the puppy. Billy, you want a turn, too!"* describing the problem respectfully: *"That's a tough one. Two children and one puppy,"* and expressing confidence in the children's ability to find their own solution: *"I have confidence that you two can work out a solution that's fair to each of you...and fair to the puppy."* Then, leave the room! If the situation has escalated to a dangerous level, adult intervention is necessary. Describe what you see, *"I see*

two children who are about to hurt each other," and separate the children, *"It's not safe to be together. We need a cooling-off period. Quick! You to your room, and you to yours!"* If it is still relevant, the issue can be discussed later. When everyone has calmed down, the children are more likely to come up with creative, cooperative solutions.

Parents enjoyed the "Siblings Without Rivalry" course, saying, "I learned how to diffuse the fighting between my children without putting either one down or feeling ashamed. Now they use words, instead of hands." and "My kids seem to listen more carefully because I can speak more confidently." Another mom said, "This class helped me understand how my son was feeling about his brothers. We talked about it and got his feelings out in the open. Thank you for helping me and helping my son!"

You can find out more about programs offered by HYSB at www.hysb.org. And remember, we have a lending library of helpful resources for parents!

Competition: It's Not About Winning

As part of a sports team, kids will learn about time management, self-discipline, and good sportsmanship. They'll also get in shape, spend time with friends, and learn to work with others. But when winning and recognition become a child's only goals, the fun quickly evaporates! To help your child develop a healthy attitude toward competitive activities, emphasize fun and effort, especially for kids age 10 and under. "Younger kids are likely to lose interest in activities that are overly competitive," advises Susan Newman a Rutgers psychologist. They are more likely to stick with competitive activities and enjoy themselves if they don't have parents pressuring them. Offer praise to a child whether he wins or loses, but keep your enthusiasm in check when he wins. "If you're overly excited, he may perceive you're disappointed when he loses," Newman explains.

If a child becomes angry or depressed when he loses, or if he attempts to cheat, tries to change the rules of the game, or refuses to play if he's losing, it's



likely he has too much invested in winning. "If kids are overly competitive, parents need to look at how they may be unknowingly promoting the idea of winning as the most important thing," says Christine Ziegler, a psychology professor at Kennesaw State University in Georgia.

Many parenting experts believe that children's activities focus too much on competition and too little on cooperation. "Competition is important, but so is cooperation," says Ziegler. Cooperative activities such as playing music together or collaborating on a science or art project build valuable skills. Non-competitive activities, such as bicycling, swimming and climbing allow each child to set a personal goal, rather than compete against another person. These kinds of activities are essential for all kids, especially for those who are become frustrated and distressed in highly competitive environments.

Above all, kids should learn to treat everyone with courtesy and respect whether they win or lose.

- excerpted from pta.org article by Ted Villaire

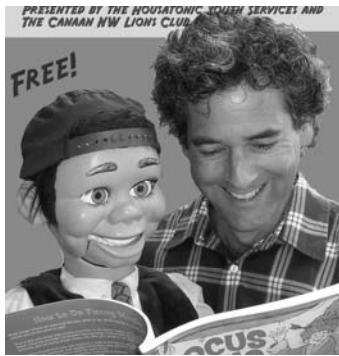
Coming October 28th
**Comedy! Magic!!
 Ventriloquism!**

With

**Steve Charney and
 Harry!**

3:00 pm at Geer Village

Bring the family and join the fun for this free event co-sponsored by HYSB and the Canaan Northwest Lions Club



Families are encouraged to bring a non-perishable food item, or used eyeglasses or hearing aids for donation to Lions charities.

More offerings from F.Y.I.

Our F.Y.I. (For Your Information) series continues this fall with an invitation for parents and children to enjoy two fun-filled evenings with artist and quilt-maker, Jill Gibbons, sharing a pizza supper and creating your own **Family Story Quilt** on October 19th and 26th, from 6:00 to 10:00 pm at the Falls Village Senior Center. No experience necessary. HYSB will provide pizza and soft drinks. **The workshop is free, but registration is required!** Enrollment limited to 8 parent/child pairs (grades 5 and up). To reserve your spot, call

Foothills Adult Ed: (800)300-4781

“Talk It Up!”

a parent forum for practicing positive communication with your adolescent will be presented on **Tuesday, October 16th at 7:00 pm at Kent Center School.** Join Jill Gibbons and Abby Palmer for an open discussion, highlighting techniques for keeping conversations with your child developmental, not defensive. Co-sponsored by KCS PTO. Babysitting available.

This fall, HYSB’s “*Family Solutions*” will offer a five week course:

“Raising Resilient Children”

through the

Foothills Adult Education Program at Housatonic Valley Regional High School **Wednesday evenings, 6:30 - 8:00 pm starting October 10th**

There is no charge for the course.

To register, call Foothills at (800) 300-4781

Childcare is available with advance request to HYSB at 824-4720

Housatonic Youth Service Bureau

P. O. Box 356 , Falls Village, CT 06031

860-824-4720

www.hysb.org

- Crisis intervention & counseling
- Parent support
- Information & referrals
- Resource library
- Seminars & workshops
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Special events & guest speakers

Located next to H.V.R.H.S. in the Pupil Service Center. All services are free. Consultations are confidential. Appointments are flexible