

August 2010

Check out what is happening at Wright Field North Child Development Center!

Twenty-Five Things I Know Now as a Parent

1. Silly string really is worth the unjustifiable purchase when you're being lobbied hard in the store.
2. Nothing good can come from leaving the cakebatter unattended, even for one minute.
3. Your example will be followed faster than your rules.
4. If you always say yes, it's probably time to say no.
5. If you always lean towards no, say yes.
6. Your intuition is a better guide than everyone else's opinion of how you should do it.
7. There's nothing like dancing in the living room to get everybody in a better mood.
8. Kids never stop needing you at bedtime, and it's never about the extra glass of water.
9. No matter what they say or how they act, your kids really know you care.
10. There's no such thing as too much time playing outside.
11. Regular bathing is way overrated.
12. Regular haircuts, however, do something mysteriously good for self-esteem and sometimes self-control.
13. Playing together is just as important as eating right and going to bed on time.
14. Your kids are on your side, willing to comply, more than you know.
15. Being tough is important, but you have to know how and when.
16. Mistakes will be forgiven.
17. Your presence is more important than any opportunity you could provide.
18. Kids aren't the only ones with too much screen time.
19. How you handle your own relationship troubles will teach your kids how to handle theirs.
20. No one is too old to be snuggled.
21. Listening is the most powerful way to get through to your kids, no matter what's going on.
22. If you buy the big thing of bubble stuff, it will get spilled in the first five minutes.
23. Without a doubt, a big cardboard box is the best gift they'll ever get, no matter what the age.
24. Telling stories about yourself at their same ages is an endless source of delight, especially if you tell the ones where you got it all wrong trying to get it all right.
25. Committing to your own personal growth and well-being reassures kids and creates a safe space for them to tackle their own challenges, without worrying about yours.

What is happening this month:

The fun day will be held on the preschool playground around the bike track.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>
Wright Field North Fun Day	August 12, 2010	300-530

Some of the activities will include: Ice Cream Social
Sports activities for children

Sorting out Scientific Studies



Increasingly, the news is filled with headlines that begin "Doctors claim..." or "A new study finds..." When these highlights from scientific research have to do with raising healthy children, they can induce fear in parents if something is said to be detrimental to young people's well being. Research-oriented news reports are quite popular, and journalists often relay only what will get your attention, devoting little if any consideration to the details of a particular study. Rather than presenting a thorough examination of a study — how it was done, who was involved and the implications of its findings — the fast-paced news cycle reports only a quick statistic or declaration, which may leave you feeling worried or defeated.

To counteract the way the news media tend to cover scientific studies — either too sensationally or too briefly — you can approach each report with a healthy skepticism. Remembering to be cautious about claims — even those from familiar information sources like the evening news or a morning radio show — will allow you to determine what each study means to you and your family rather than draw inaccurate conclusions. Not only is this process of questioning the meaning of a study a helpful habit for you to develop, it is a good one to pass along to your child.

5 Questions to Ask about Every Research Report

1. Is this only a small part of a much larger study?

Often the complete findings of a study are very different from the one or two aspects that a news outlet reports in a headline. Before accepting the news media's version as something worth believing and repeating, check out the full report or at least the executive summary, which often accompanies a newly released study. Talk to your child about how the news story was based on *something*, like a study or set of data charts.

One of the best ways to convey this is by looking at original documents, which you often can find online by typing the title of the report into a search engine. Then you can go to the report author or organization's website and read the report yourself. Admittedly, you may not want to slog through an entire report, especially one that is technical, dense and quite lengthy. However, viewing parts of an actual document — or simply remembering that you can — will send the message that scientific research can have many layers and therefore may be more complex than it initially appeared.

2. Who conducted the study and how was the research funded?

Researchers often begin a study with specific goals in mind. Likewise, companies and organizations that fund particular research often have a stake in these goals as well as a vested interest in the research findings. Consequently, knowing who did the research may help you determine where the study originated and how funding might have influenced its results.

For example, a team of university scholars supported by a grant from a government agency, a think tank that is part of an industry lobbying effort and a non-profit membership organization representing dues-paying constituents may have very different goals and ways of wielding influence. It is useful to know who stands to benefit from the research results and whether sources you consider credible have endorsed these results. Though your child may not be ready to decipher the intricacies of how funding may influence what research gets done and why, you can familiarize her with the notion that all research is done by real people and has real costs.

3. Does the study really apply to my family and me?

A single study is just that: one study. It may or may not be relevant to anything other than what went on in one scientist's lab or among a specific population of research subjects. A good way to determine how applicable findings from one study may be to you and your child's lives is to find out how the study was conducted and who was involved. Are the findings based on the responses of 10 people or ten thousand? Were the subjects affluent boys ages 13 –18 or girls living in urban environments? Were the research subjects selected from a wide range of experiences or did they all volunteer to be participants?

To get your child in the habit of thinking about these kinds of questions you can wonder aloud: "I'd like to know how those scientists figured that out: Did they mail a survey to people and ask them to fill out answers to questions or did they bring people into a lab where researchers watched them and wrote down what they saw?" Both self-reporting and observation are good methods but are appropriate for different kinds of situations, which is why you want to always ask, "Do the methods fit the research claims or are they mismatched?" In the end, there is no one magic methodology that makes for a perfect study, but knowing how the study was performed may reveal why it does not apply to situations and people different from the "test group." It also will help you know what is credible and what is suspect.

4. Did the study appear in a reputable publication?

Where the study appeared may indicate how rigorous the research was. Each type of publication has its own conventions. Was it a respected journal reviewed by the researcher's peers or a self-published report? News articles can be based on a variety of sources; some are mini-digests culled from academic journals whereas others are based on information from press releases that groups distributed to promote their studies.

For instance, the *New York Times's* Science section commonly highlights studies first printed in the journal *Nature*, which is a reputable magazine for science research as is *Science*. Help your child spot publication information, asking "What was the original source?" Also, discuss how a thorough publication indicates when a similar topic had been studied by others or includes a bibliography of related research. It has an interest in developing a "body of research" around a topic rather than pushing individual findings.

5. Were important elements left out of the study?

No study — even a 10-year experiment involving tens of thousands of people — can include everything in its research. Knowing what was *not* studied can be just as informative as knowing what was. You and your child can ask, "How does this study relate to similar research? Does it contradict what people have previously thought to be true? By honing in on one aspect of the topic did the researchers neglect to look at another part that was perhaps more important?"

Helping Children Prepare for Kindergarten

I remember well the mixed feelings I had as kindergarten approached for my sons. They looked forward to kindergarten with excitement. Going to school meant joining the big kids. Shopping for school supplies was right up there with getting a new pair of shoes. Being able to ride the school bus was a rite of passage. Naturally, I shared their excitement, but I also felt equal measures of anxiety, worry, and hope. I wanted them to be prepared to meet the challenges they were going to encounter, both academically and socially. I worried how they would adjust to a new routine, new faces and new expectations. I deeply hoped they would like school and do well.

If you are like I was, you're probably wondering what you can do during the summer - besides buying your child new shoes and a backpack - to help prepare him for kindergarten. What skills will he need? Or, how can you help him adjust to this new chapter in his life?

It's true that most kindergartens have become more academically rigorous than they were a generation ago. But that doesn't necessarily mean your child should enter kindergarten with a different set of skills than were needed in the past. When kindergarten teachers are asked what abilities they hope incoming students will have, they say social and emotional skills are equally, if not more important, than knowing letters, numbers and shapes. There are many components of kindergarten readiness, most of which are not generally considered to be "academic"; even though they directly influence how children learn. These include:

- Self-care, self-help and motor skills (for example, dressing oneself, holding a pencil, and cutting with scissors)
- Playing well with others, relating positively to adults, and using language to express needs and wants
- Curiosity and eagerness to learn
- Self-regulation skills (for example, controlling impulses, paying attention, following directions, handling frustrations, and negotiating solutions to problems)
- Letter, shape, color and rhyming word recognition, counting objects to 10, writing own first name

Given these skills, you'll be supporting your child's readiness when you:

- Talk often with her and respond to her questions.
- Encourage active play, especially pretend play, with other children.
- Read, read, read to her every day. Talk about the words in books, ask her to predict what will happen in the stories and to make up stories of her own.
- Provide pencils, markers, crayons, and blank paper for drawing and "writing."
- Make things together out of empty food containers, markers, tape and glue.
- Play guessing games with her.
- Go places together, encourage her to notice things in her surroundings, and talk about all the interesting things there are to see and do.
- Use everyday activities to point out words and numbers.
- Encourage her independence in managing daily tasks and helping with household chores like setting the table.
- Limit screen time (television and video games) to allow time for more active learning experiences.

You can also help your child prepare for the actual transition to kindergarten by talking about what will happen. What will his new routine be like? What friends will also be there? Reading library books about starting kindergarten can start conversations about this step in your child's life. Encourage his questions and expressions of feelings, but be careful not to transmit any anxieties you may have. Children easily "catch" adults' emotional responses.

Travel the route she'll take to and from school, and arrange a visit. Most schools encourage this. Many hold orientations or open houses to help children and families feel comfortable with school and classroom surroundings and to meet the teacher. Take your child to play on the playground. If possible, arrange play dates with other children who will be in her class. Knowing what to expect eases anxiety and will help her (and you) feel more secure.

Even as you anticipate the start of kindergarten together, take time to enjoy your child. Play together. Go places together. Read and talk together. In the process, you'll be encouraging his enthusiasm for learning and helping him get off to a great start!

Work It Out Through Play

Should Kids Play with Pretend Weapons?

"Many parents worry when their children play with pretend weapons. But this kind of play is one way children meet their needs to feel strong and powerful. Not all weapons play is the same, and it is important to look at the nature of the play to figure out whether it is harmful to children.

"For this play to have a positive effect, it needs to be controlled by the child, show creativity and imagination, and change over time. It then becomes important for adults to find ways to discuss the issues that come up in the play to help their children deal with the issues they are working on."

Diane Levin, Ph.D.

Professor of Education, Wheelock College. Co-Author, *The War Play Dilemma*.

Children — particularly those between the ages of three and eight — frequently bring events they've heard or seen on the news into their art and play. Watching this play gives adults a window into children's thoughts and feelings and opens the door for specific discussions.

"Young children play about anything they hear in the news that interests, puzzles or worries them," says teacher Jane Katch, M.S.T., author of *Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violent Play*. "If they hear about a bombing, they may make imaginary bombs and drop them on bad guys. If they hear about a school shooting, they may take turns pretending to be shooters and victims. If they hear about adoption, they may want to see what it feels like to be adopted. If they hear about endangered animals, they play games about hunters and their prey. Children play about issues that concern them in order feel safe and in control. It's similar to the way adults use conversations with colleagues and friends to help them understand events and put them in perspective."

While many parents and teachers find it fascinating when children act out their reactions to events, they worry when the play becomes filled with violent images and actions. After 9/11 parents wondered if they should let their children play-act the Twin Towers falling down. After Hurricane Katrina, some parents worried when their

children pretended to be hurricane victims in puddles at the playground. And there are ongoing concerns when children play with pretend guns, knives, and swords. A big fear is that if children's play is violent then kids will learn lessons about becoming violent. Many parents wonder if they should stop kids from play-acting in this way. "There is no simple answer," says Diane Levin, Ph.D., co-author of *The War Play Dilemma*. "Like it or not, children are exposed to violent images on the news and they bring these images into their play. And in these violent times, this means the play often turns into war play. Parents' and teachers' attempts to limit this play are frequently met with difficulty. Teachers who ban it talk about an underworld that develops anyway, just out of the teacher's reach. Therefore it's very important when this happens to watch the play, discuss its content, and make sure everyone is safe."

Parent Advisory Board Meeting

The next Parent Advisory Board Meeting is scheduled to be:

When: Tuesday, 17 August 2010 at 1130 AM

Where: Wright Field North Child Development Center



Keep Breathing

"If a parent gets hysterical when a child gets a cut, the child gets hysterical. If the parent radiates calm, the child feels more secure. Sometimes a child only starts screaming once he observes the parent getting upset."

Dr. Elizabeth Goldman

Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, Albert Einstein
College of Medicine, New York City