

Safe Start Parent Pages (PDFs)

Department of Human Services - Safe Start

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 3 Issue 2

2008

BEDTIME BATTLES

Sleep is a vital need, essential to a child's health and growth. How much sleep should a child get? It is recommended that children ages 1-3 get 12 to 14 hours of sleep while children ages 3-5 get 11 to 13 hours of sleep a day. Sleep promotes alertness, memory, as well as helps children grow and develop. On the other hand, lack of sleep can cause a host of problems, including poor behavior, an inability to concentrate, and frequent nighttime waking. Children who get enough sleep are more likely to function better and are less prone to behavioral problems and moodiness. That is why it is important for parents to help their children develop good sleep habits and follow a regular bedtime routine. Here are some dos and don'ts to following and establishing a bedtime routine:

DO:

- * Begin the routine at about the same time every night and stick with it! Your child's body clock will adjust much more quickly to the routine if it follows a natural and consistent pattern.
- * Give a warning. Just before bedtime, give your child advance notice that the day is winding down and that it is going to be time to go to bed. Your child may be too young to judge time yet, so saying something like "five more minutes" and setting a timer that will ring when time is up. This helps the child learn that the sound means bedtime. Refer the child to the ring and start the routine.
- * Have a period of special time that allows your child time to wind down. Incorporate activities that are soothing and calming. (For example: Giving your child a warm bath, reading a favorite story, playing soft music, etc.)
- * Offer a snack. A light snack that includes both protein and carbohydrates (a small piece of cheese and one half slice of bread). The carbohydrates make her sleepy, and the protein will help keep her blood sugar level even until breakfast.
- * Establish bedtime routines or rituals. Face washing and teeth brushing first. Then allow your child to take a favorite teddy bear, toy or special blanket to bed. A favorite doll or teddy bear can be very comforting to a child.
- * End the routine with a hug and kiss
- * Place the child in bed before they are asleep and leave the room while your child is still awake.
- * Keep last "goodnights" brief. Say "goodnight" when it's time for you to leave the room and try not to come back if your child calls for you. Avoid discussion with them as this prolongs bedtime
- * Remain relaxed when your child calls for you and calmly return the child to the bed each time they get up.

DON'T

- * Don't give your child foods and drinks with caffeine in them. Even caffeine earlier in the day could disrupt your child's sleep.
- * Don't pick your child up if he or she continues to call for you or fights going to sleep. Instead, simply reassure them that you're nearby.
- * Don't use sending your child to bed as a threat. Bedtime needs to be a secure, loving time, not a punishment.
- * Don't make lying down together or rocking your child to sleep a regular part of the bedtime routine.
- * Don't make TV part of the bedtime routine.
- * Don't allow frequent interruptions to the bedtime routine.
- * Don't fill up your child's bed with toys. It's probably best to keep your child's bed a place to sleep, rather than a place to play. A favorite doll, a security blanket, or a special book are okay.

Some children do have chronic difficulty sleeping despite their parents' best efforts. Don't hesitate to ask your child's pediatrician any questions about new or longstanding concerns about your child's sleep.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact SAFE START at 412-350-2770 or safestart@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us. Previous issues of PARENT PAGES can be found at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/violence.aspx>



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

**Volume 3 Issue 4
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BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

Sometimes it is very difficult for parents to connect with their child's teacher. When interacting with a teacher some parents may feel uncomfortable or intimidated. Both parents and teachers share a common goal which is improving the quality of life for the children. But, what one person feels is important for the child may not be the same for another. Therefore, team work and talking with teachers on a regular basis is extremely important. This helps both parents and teachers understand each others views and ideas.

Research has shown that when families are involved in their child's program, there are significant benefits for the children, families, and teachers. However, collaboration between parents and teachers is not always a smooth process. Establishing an equal and trusting partnership requires efforts from both teachers and parents. Here are some things you can do to build a relationship with your child's teacher:

- Keep teachers informed about issues that are important to your child
 - Keeping teachers up to date about issues and other information helps them to better meet the needs of your child.
- Attend parent meetings and groups
 - Staff provides various events because they truly feel that the parents will benefit from them. These meetings are a good way to keep parents informed and give parents the opportunity to talk in more detail with staff.
- Stay involved with the class (even if it is for 10 minutes)
 - By being involved with the class you get a sense of what your child does throughout the day. Also, your child might think it is cool you are staying and helping the class.
- Pass along a compliment
 - Everyone enjoys a kind word. If your child is telling you they had a fun day at school let the teacher know. Teachers appreciate hearing these types of things.

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 5

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Consistency

Many parents threaten a child with consequences and never carry them out. When this happens over time, the child's behaviors can become more and more out of control.

The secret to getting on top of a child's behaviors is to **be consistent**. Behaviors improve when a parent reacts to a problem in the same way over time and the child slowly understands that the parent is not giving in.

Consistency is not easy and behavior problems can feel so overwhelming. It's hard to be consistent when nothing seems to work.

- The first piece to making consistency work is to believe that it can.
- The second piece is to decide which problem (keep it to one at a time) you want to tackle.
- The third is to decide how you want to manage the problem.
- Fourth is to do it with extreme consistency.

Remember that it takes a while to help a child learn a better way to behave. As with any skill ongoing practice is needed. When a child is blocked every time he/she behaves a certain way, the behavior will begin to improve. When a parent changes the way he/she reacts to a behavior, the child will also change. This process takes time, patience, and dedicated consistency.

Examples of ways to show consistency are as follows:

Parent says to a child, "When you don't eat your dinner, I can't give you dessert".

"It is really not safe when you run away from me, this really scares me! From now on we will hold hands everywhere we go".

You have __ minutes to get ready for bed or no book and snack.

For when a child is being rude or very demanding, "I hear you but I'm not listening. I don't listen when you talk to me like that"!

Parents can feel guilty about holding a line especially when a child is saying that they are sorry or promising to not to repeat a bad behavior. Try not to give in, understand that this is a process and will take some time. Be patient and persistent. Things may escalate before they get better, but most likely they will improve if the parent is consistent.

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

CREATING ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE

It is a pretty universal thing that we teach our children to say "Please" and "Thank You". However, it is another thing totally to develop within ourselves and our children an attitude of gratitude. Too often in this world we are conditioned to see things from a perspective of wanting to obtain more and more "stuff" and feeling deprived that we don't have what others have.

During the month of November our country does turn to thoughts of Thanksgiving. But, it can be hard to feel grateful when we are struggling with our own bills, pressures, and expectations; when we see others who seem to have life easier than we do. So often, however, it is not how much one does or doesn't have as it is a matter of how one thinks or feels about what they have.

To teach our children gratitude, we must practice it in our own lives. Often we need to learn the lesson first so that we can model it for our children. Some simple suggestions are listed below. Take a few minutes each day to list 3 or 4 things for which you are thankful. These do not need to be grand or magnificent, just honest. For example,

- I am grateful that I paid the rent this month
- I am grateful that I got to work on time this morning.
- When you feel discouraged or resentful, remind yourself of things for which you can be thankful.
- Most important of all, I am grateful for my children, even on their worst days.

Talk to your children about being grateful. Teach them to make a Gratitude List like yours. This can be a dinner time conversation, "What are you thankful for today?"

Say your blessings out loud, "Boy, aren't we thankful we can go to Grandma's today?" Model this for them. Many recovery groups have a phrase: "Fake it till you make it"...this can work with gratitude. As you practice it, you will eventually live it, and so will your children.

We at Safe Start are grateful for parents who care for their children and do the best they can to keep them safe and help them grow.

SAFE START is available to do presentations on ACT RAISING SAFE KIDS for parent and community groups.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact:

SAFE START at 412-350-2770 or safestart@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 2 Issue 3

Dealing with Death for Small Children

When a death has occurred that affects a child, there may be intense worry about losing a parent. Other less specific worries may also emerge. The child could be very emotional, crying easily. She/he could make references to being hurt and need you to help even if by only noticing.

Play themes could relate to car crashes, funerals or vague, less clear or disorganized forms of violence or disaster. You may also see play themes where trouble develops or problems need solved. Pay attention to his/her play and interrupt if it looks too intense or upsetting. If the play is disrupted for any reason, help the child to re-engage in another area.

Pay attention to any aimless wandering, or appearing to get lost in thought. Interrupt this with a hug, some sort of nurturing that will reorient the child. Anger may surface; the child may become easily frustrated, low in patience, or uncooperative. This is a normal part of grieving.

You may hear conversational pieces of her understanding about what happened. The child's reality may be distorted from the facts, but it will be based on the child's limited experience and ability to process. She/he may also spontaneously bring thoughts and feelings relating to the accident up at day care during circle time, at lunch time, nap time, on walks or other points during the day. Be prepared for this. Help the child to keep busy and to feel competent. Use empathy when he/she seems upset, worried or scared.

If she says things like, "My daddy died", it's okay to say something like, "I know, and I am so sorry". If she says, "I miss my daddy", a good response is to say, "I know that you miss daddy, its okay to miss him and even to feel sad". If you are a family member it is important to say, "I miss him too!"

It's okay for her to feel sad and its okay to talk about it. Simple statements like, "I know that you are so sad, you miss your dad". Noticing that the child looks sad or worried can help a lot. When you notice you help the child to know that you understand.

Talk a lot about being safe to assure her that the world can still be safe. Discussions about safety are a good prevention tool for the entire class. Safety issues might emerge at nap time and the child may become fearful. Assure them that they are safe, that you are right here, and will be here when they awake.

Death is not permanent in the mind of a three year old child. She may even ask questions like, "When is daddy coming"? If she asks questions like this respond with, "Daddy can't come to see you; because he died. But he loved you so very much."

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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DOES MY CHILD NEED HELP?

Sometimes in the middle of a very difficult episode with our young children, we begin to wonder if our child might have a serious behavioral problem. It is a normal question most parents ask themselves at some time or another. It is important to keep in touch with the range of normal developmental stages for your child's age.

- Little babies don't cry to annoy their parents or caregivers, they cry to tell you something is wrong
- Toddlers will likely throw a temper tantrum in public on some occasion. They think the world revolves around them and haven't learned to wait, or to control their emotions yet.
- Older toddlers will often get into conflicts with their peers over a toy or an adult's attention. They have a hard time controlling their emotions and using words to describe their feelings.
- Young school-age children may have trouble with transitions to school or to a new classroom. They may experience feelings of inadequacy or bullying. There may be separation anxieties that arise when they start or return to school.

Some clues for parents are to:

- Remain calm and in control of your reactions. Comfort your child.
- As your child gets a little older, 2 or 3, give them simple verbal expectations for their behavior before you go to the store or to a social function, such as, "We are going to the store. I need for you to ride in the cart and talk to me, but not to take things off the shelf. Then we can buy your favorite cereal."
- Teach your child to use words and to show you what their face looks like when they are angry, sad, happy, scared.
- Participate in school activities. This gives your child a sense of your presence in the school.

After checking what normal developmental stages are you still have concerns, you can consult with a professional for additional information. This is a very helpful website where you can find more detailed resources about your child's development and tips for parents:

<http://actagainstviolence.apa.org/materials/handouts/family.html>

SAFE START is available to do presentations on ACT AGAINST VIOLENCE for parent and community groups.

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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HALLOWEEN IS SCARY

For some of us, Halloween is a most exciting and fun-filled holiday. We are thrilled by the ghosts and goblins; we love the decorations and the costumes. However, if you are a young child, especially a pre-schooler or toddler, this may not be as much fun as we grown-ups may think. Young children have not yet developed the ability to distinguish a pretend world from the real world. Monsters and scary things are very real. You need to be extremely careful how you approach all the Halloween festivities if you have very young children. Keep the real intensely scary stuff for your older school age children who know the difference.

Tips to help your child feel safe:

- Do not allow your young children, even elementary school age children, to watch the Halloween horror movies that are popular this time of year. Save those for another time.
- Use face paint instead of masks.
- For the child's safety as well as to help them not be frightened, attend community sponsored parties rather than door to door trick-or-treating in the dark.
- Allow a child to play with the costumes, especially the masks, ahead of time so that they become familiar with them.
- If you as an adult are costuming for some event, let your child help you get dressed, and select non-scary costumes. Go as a butterfly rather than a witch.
- Ask people to take off their mask so that the child can see who is behind it, rather than being confused.
- Do not force an anxious child to participate if they don't want to.

There will be lots of years ahead when your child is old enough to enjoy the fantasies. Do not rush your pre-schooler into this. Children are easily frightened and confused. You can help them decorate pumpkins and do other things without using scary costumes and all the special effects. Reassure your child you will always keep them safe.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact Kathy Mason, Safe Start Early Childhood Specialist, who will meet with you. 412-350-2770



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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"HANDS ARE NOT FOR HITTING"

HANDS ARE NOT FOR HITTING is an award winning board book by Martine Agassi. It is published by Free Spirit Publishing Company. In this book children are encouraged to explore all the positive things they can do with their hands, such as waving, drawing, saying hello, etc. Children are also reminded that hands are not for hitting.

Toddlers and pre-schoolers have very strong emotions about what is happening to them. They react when another child takes a toy away from them, or when they are told "no" by an adult. They do not have the language skills or self-control to verbalize their anger or frustration, so they lash out with their bodies, especially their hands by hitting or pulling at another child. These are normal reactions but they can hurt another person.

Parents can use these moments as teaching times. Below are some tips for when your child strikes out at others.

- Observe your child and anticipate when he/she may become quickly frustrated, cranky, or angry. Step in with a diversion before the behavior occurs.
- Stay calm. **DO NOT HIT THE CHILD FOR HITTING OTHERS!** You must model appropriate behavior yourself. Use your words and **not** your hands to discipline your child.
- Verbalize for your child what you think they are feeling. Do not correct their feelings, only their behavior. For example, you might say something like this: "You are really angry that Joey took your truck. Hands are not for hitting. Tell him you are mad."
- The holiday season is a good time to teach your child that hands are for giving. Talk about positive things the child can do with their hands: hugging, giving gifts, sharing, etc.

Another related book which uses the same concepts is FEET ARE NOT FOR KICKING by Elizabeth Verdick, also published by Free Spirit.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact the Safe Start Office, 412-350-2770.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 2 Issue 4

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Helping a Child with Angry Feelings

Young children are not good at understanding or managing their emotions. They need empathic assistance and gentle limit setting to become aware of their feelings and learn to manage the more troublesome emotions.

Anger is one of the most powerful emotions and can cause lots of problems for parents and children. Angry feelings can show up in very young children as any parent knows. Children tantrum, pout, or may even use angry words like, "I don't love you" or, "You are not my friend anymore!" Angry words can really hurt a parent's feelings. It's important for a parent to understand that when a young child says this they are really angry and trying to tell you how angry they feel but not knowing how. A parent can respond with, "You really are mad at me right now. When a parent responds with this statement he/she is helping on two levels.

- The parent is interpreting the feeling for the child.
- It allows the child to have their own feelings and be responsible for them.

Many parents get caught up in the looks that their child gives them thinking they have an attitude. This is another way a child shows their angry feelings. When a parent responds with something like, "I see that you are really angry, it's hard to feel so mad", he/she again helps the child to interpret feelings. This also eliminates getting hooked in a power struggle.

Tantrums occur when a child becomes so upset that he/she loses all control. Most tantrums will run their course after which the parent can talk with the child and say something like, "You were so angry that you had to kick and scream. I'm sorry that you were so upset but I still won't allow you to wear sandals to school today, it's snowing out!"

Allowing a child to own his/her feelings is not giving into them. Limits can be set using empathy, thus allowing the child to name the feelings while learning appropriate ways to express anger. Parents can always follow through with whatever consequence they feel is appropriate in refusing to give in to the child's rage. It's important for a parent to understand that they hold the power to manage their children always. Anger is nothing to become frustrated or upset over. Rather it is something to manage. Remember; don't buy what the child is selling!

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Holidays Fun and Sometimes Overwhelming!

Holidays are so busy, so much fun and so overwhelming. Lots of parents feel that things need to be perfect! They love their children and want to provide holiday memories to last and last.

Sometimes parents are full of all the things they should do and find that time and money often fall short of their to-do list. Expectations that parents place on themselves or that other family members have of them can pile up and feel impossible to achieve.

How can parents and children experience the holidays in relaxing and enjoyable ways that meet the holiday demands and provide time for rest and relaxation?

- The best way to reduce chaos and disorder is to establish a routine. Try to have an evening routine that extends from dinner through bedtime and is consistent. Children thrive on sameness and feel safe when they know what to expect. In the chaos that the holidays bring, keep this part of the day as constant as you can.
- Help your child to calm down and to manage the excitement of the holidays in quiet, relaxing ways. Take time to read a bedtime story, or put the child to sleep with soft calming music. These can be holiday stories or music. Children will grow up to cherish the holidays when Mom or Dad always read a certain favorite story. ***Remember, the greatest gift that a parent can give a child is time together.***
- Remember also to take care of yourselves. It's so easy to get so busy that you forget to take time for yourself. Give yourself permission to not be perfect, try to be easy with your own expectations. It's okay if this is the year of the less than perfect Christmas. It will still be wonderful and your children will still experience the magic that is all around this time of year.
- Reduce your "To-Do List". Choose from the list what are the most important tasks or items, and allow yourself to eliminate the unimportant ones. You will probably be the only one who notices that something is not done.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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I'm Bigger Now, I am Four

I'm four now and I am bigger. When you say, "You are big," I say "Yes!" It is important to me to be recognized as big.

I am very busy and I probably ask you more questions now than I ever have. My mind is growing too, that's why I talk so much. Sometimes I feel like I want to know everything!

I am a little better at waiting than I was at three but I still need lots of help. I am getting better at sharing too but I sometimes need help with this also.

I enjoy my friends even more, now that I am four. We can play and get along better. My friends are becoming important to me. I look forward to seeing them at my Center each day.

I can still feel afraid of things like the dark. Sometimes I have scary dreams and sometimes I worry. This is partly because I have a vivid imagination at four and I sometimes get scared or worry about people whom I love. I am still too immature to fully process all of the big thoughts that go through my powerful brain!

If I am a boy, super heroes of some sort are probably important to me. If I am a girl, I probably love princess and castles and maybe Dora too! Pretend is becoming more and more important to me. This may sometimes get on your nerves but it is completely normal for a person of my age to enjoy this kind to play.

I can get whiney if I am too tired. My feelings can get me into trouble. They are not easy to understand and there are so many of them. It's hard to be good. If you are patient with me I will do so much better.

When I am around four and one half I will probably begin to ask questions like "That's not real is it?" I am beginning to understand the difference between things that are real and things that are pretend. This is very important for me because it shows that my thinking mind is growing and beginning to understand things that I could not understand when I was younger.

I am becoming interested and curious about going to Kindergarten when I am five. Please talk to me about lots of stuff and read to me. I want to feel excited and ready to go. I know that I can do a good job with all this getting older stuff because I have you to help me!

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact the Safe Start Office, 412-350-2770.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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I'm Three, Oh My!

I am three and I am still really busy. You may notice that I talk a lot and ask "Why" a lot! I love to use words and if I'm at home with you, I probably talk either to myself or to you all day.

You may notice that I have a lot more words now that I am three. I will be learning new words constantly but I am still very young and can become confused when I am upset, scared, angry or worried. I need things to be explained for me in a way that is clear. I do better when the big people around me help me to understand how things work.

I continue to be focused on myself and to struggle with becoming my own person. You may notice that I really want to do things myself. I can get very upset or frustrated when I am unable to do something. You may offer to help me and I probably will say something like: "I do it myself!"

My thinking mind is full of stuff about me. I have lots of trouble seeing things your way. I believe the world is the way I see it. This can be very frustrating for you. You try to explain something to me and I continue to ask the same questions and you know that I'm not getting what you are saying.

I have more fears now that I am three and it's hard for you to help me because my thinking is very magical. I really can not tell the difference between real and pretend. If we watch something scary on television, I may be too scared at bedtime to go to sleep! I might also become frightened by seeming silly things like falling through the bath tub drain along with the water! I may continue to be scared even after you try to help by explaining things. I am not able to listen to reasons why I should not be scared. I continue to believe what I see and fear is real, I am this way at three.

I may be toilet trained, almost toilet trained, or really still trying to learn how to successfully use the potty. All three of these variations are considered normal for people my age. If you are patient and give me time I will be okay. Big boy or big girl underpants really motivate me to try. I really love exciting or pretty underpants!

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 2 Issue 2.1
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I'm Two, Wow!

I'm very busy and I believe that I own the world! I say 'No' a lot because I am trying to figure out and begin to understand that I am my own person. This is very hard for me.

When I say "No" often I don't really mean that I am refusing something. Rather, saying "No" just seems to be what I say, it kind of slips out!

I can display a bad temper and sometimes will tantrum. I might even say something like "I don't like you!" Please understand that I really, really do love you. When I get so angry, the feeling is confusing and I don't know how to tell you how I'm feeling. It would help a lot if you would say something like:

"You are so angry with me right now that you feel like you hate me."

I need help with understanding my feelings. I am too little to figure this out on my own.

When I am about half way through my second year, I will begin to have a lot of interest in using the toilet. If you make this fun and don't push me, I will try. Some days I will be interested and motivated. Other days I will resist and refuse because I'm two!

Please don't think that I am terrible. I am trying to learn hundreds of new things and I am too immature to do this. Also, I get tired easily and can really fuss. Try your best to help me. I will not be two for more than one year!

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 4 Issue 1

2009

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Sending your child to kindergarten can be an exciting yet scary time for both you and your child. Many people believe that children are ready for kindergarten when they have mastered or have knowledge of their letters, numbers, colors, shapes, etc. These concepts are very important for children to learn before they enter kindergarten, but they are not the only things children need to be prepared for kindergarten. The kindergarten readiness tips listed below can help to ease the anxiety and allow the transition to kindergarten go more smoothly.

- ❖ Allow your child to become familiar with the school by driving or taking a walk past it.
- ❖ Make a plan to take a tour of the school even if your child visited on registration day.
- ❖ Bring up school in conversations at home as much as possible. Talk about the fun things your child will get to do.
- ❖ Make shopping for school supplies a fun experience and allow your child to make some of the choices.
- ❖ Start the school bedtime routine before school starts. Allow your child to become familiar with the routine so when school begins they will know what is expected.
- ❖ Check out school related books from the library to help ease jitters about starting school.
- ❖ Make sure your child has the necessary immunizations to start school.
- ❖ Attend open houses and meet the teacher events so that you can meet other parents and become familiar with the teachers that are going to be involved with you child.
- ❖ Prepare yourself. Be strong and don't cry in front of your child as this may cause them to become upset and not want to go to kindergarten.

Three and four year olds can also begin to get prepared for kindergarten by going to a family support center or preschool where they can be with other children and learn some useful skills. You can also set up play dates to allow your child(ren) to learn how to interact with others.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 2

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Morning Arrival and Evening Pickup/ Social Skill Practice

Social skills are learned best through watching and modeling a parent. Social skills take a long time to learn and are also tied to the child's level of development and maturity. A nice way to practice social skills can occur each morning and evening during drop off and pick up at the child's center. The process involves several steps:

Example:

When traveling to the center in the morning, parents can chat with the child by asking things like:

"How do you feel today?"

"What kinds of fun things would you like to do today?"

The purpose of chatting is to set a little structure for the child's day. Chatting can help a child to feel calm and ready to begin his/her day. Children love to talk and will enjoy the process. It will also be the child's introduction into organizing how a thing can happen. When arriving at the child's center, the parent can further help by saying things like the following:

Example:

"I want you to listen to your teachers."

"Have fun playing with your friends."

"I will see you after work."

"Have a nice day!"

As the parent is saying this he/she can also greet the teachers. It is good for the child to see that the parent and teacher get along okay and that things seem regular. Children take their cues from the adults around them. When things look okay and regular children feel safe. Feeling safe helps a child to relax into their day. When evening comes and the parent returns to the center to pick up the child, the same type of process occurs as the parent once again chats with the child:

Example:

"What fun things did you do today?"

"What did you have for lunch?"

"Who did you play with, what did you do?"

The purpose of evening pickup chats remains the same as when the child arrived in the morning. Evening chatting helps the child transition to leaving the center, and again feel organized and safe.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 2 Issue 6

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NIGHTTIME FEARS

An almost universal experience for parents is the child who won't go to bed or sleep because they are afraid of something...the dark, a monster, an alligator, a ghost...We become frustrated because we try everything we can think of to reassure and convince them that the fear is not warranted.

Fears are a part of normal child development. The earliest fears relate to separation anxieties. As the child gets a little older they develop fears from actual experiences, such as the pediatrician giving them a shot or a scary big loud dog. Another stage of fear is of the unknown and real or imagined things. This is actually a good thing, it indicates the child's imagination is active and growing.

Pre-schoolers may have increasing fears of loud noises, animals, dark rooms, separation or large objects or machines, and any significant changes in their environment.

- First of all, ***do not*** try to talk the child out of it. The child is afraid, accept it. Acknowledge it. "Boy that is scary when you think something is in your closet."
- It is also helpful to admit that when you were their age you were afraid of things, too. Share that everyone has some things they are afraid of. Never try to convince them the fear is unfounded. Reassure them that you will protect them.
- Read books about characters who are afraid of things:
 - *I USED TO BE AFRAID*. By S. McMillan
 - *THE MONSTER AT THE END OF THIS BOOK* series by Sesame Street
 - *THERE'S AN ALLIGATOR UNDER MY BED*, by Mercer Mayer
 - *SCARY NIGHT VISITORS*, by Irene & Paul Marcus
- Help your child use their imagination to overpower the fear. Once, in exasperation, I told my 4 year old that the crocodile in her closet was terrified of dishtowels, and gave her the dishtowel I had thrown over my shoulder. Miraculously, it worked. She went to bed with a dishtowel for several nights, and the fears went away. A spray bottle of water can become a "Monster Eradicator". Spray the room before the child goes to bed, and let him keep the water bottle nearby in case of emergencies.
- ***Avoid*** the following things:
 - Worrying too much about childhood fears. Most children outgrow them quite easily with time.
 - Passing on your own fears to your child
 - Emphasizing scary things as you participate in Halloween activities.
 - And most of all, ***avoid exposing them to frightening television or videos!***

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact Glenna Wilson at Safe Start: safestart@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us 412-350-2770



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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NURTURING IDEAS

It is a wonderful feeling for a child to know that the parent loves him/her so much that they would be willing to search the world over to find this special child. The following story provides a format for doing this.

The One for Me

A parent says to a child, "Do you know how much I love you?" Next the parent tells the following story.

Let's pretend that there was this long line of children, boys and girls, all about your age. Let's pretend that I could walk along this long, long line and I would see many wonderful children. I would say, what a nice child but he's not the one for me.

Expand your story by describing how you would search by describing things like:

I would walk and walk and look and look. I would walk all through the summer's green leaves and pretty flowers. I would see many fine boys and girls but not for me.

I would walk through the fall's cool days through lots of colored leaves and I would look and look but not see you. I would walk through the winter's snow all dressed up like an Eskimo. I would see many nice boys and girls but not you.

I would walk through the spring's warm, sunny days past lovely blossoming trees and flowers, I would look and look and finally I would see you. I would say this child of all the boys and girls this age in the whole world is the one for me. I would hug you and kiss you. I love you so much that even if I searched the world over you would always be the one for me!

Children love this story because it feels so good to be loved so much. Children will often ask to hear it again and again by asking, "Will you tell me that story again about that long line of children?" You can make up similar stories to affirm your love for your child. This story is also quite appropriate for adopted children, whether or not they have been told of their adoption.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact the Safe Start Office, 412-350-2770.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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PAYING ATTENTION

Who among us hasn't in frustration said to a child, "Will you please pay attention to me?" We find it very disconcerting when our kids appear to be totally ignoring us. However, we need to stop, take a deep breath, and think about the examples we set...

I have observed over the past few years a new phenomenon in parenting...***the cell phone***...It used to be that when a parent had to travel somewhere with their child, they would put the child in the stroller, or take them by the hand, and walk down the street, or drive in the car. It was a time when you carried on some very interesting and significant conversations. Whether you were increasing a child's vocabulary by naming the things you saw, or singing songs together, or just chatting, you were interacting with each other. Now, much too often, I see a parent pushing a stroller, or leading a child by the hand with a cell phone at their ear, chatting away and pretty much ignoring the child except to keep them from harm. You also see the child in a car seat in the back of the car and the parent on the cell phone while they are driving. Regardless of the safety factor, we are missing an important opportunity to build a strong attachment between parent and child.

Cell phones are wonderful tools to keep us safe, to make life more convenient, to keep in touch with each other. However, we need to discipline our time on the cell phone every bit as much as we would discipline our child's tv watching or candy eating. So when you are on the go with your child, turn the cell phone off, and talk to that child. Tell them how much you enjoy being with them, point out the wonderful sites as you walk...cows in the pasture, or dandelions growing in the cracks of the sidewalk...name the vehicles you see...car, bus, truck, ambulance, barge, train, police car,...sing a song, "The wheels on the bus go round and round", etc. Get to know your child and let them know you better. It's worth it. You can always check your voice mail later and return those calls. But you can't recapture those special moments just between the two of you.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact SAFE START at 412-350-2770.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 4
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Problem Solving Ideas

The Broken Cookie:

Child: "Mom can I have a cookie?"

Mom: "Sure, here you go."

Child: "But it's broken!"

Mom: "It's still a cookie, eat it!"

Parents and children often experience these frustrating problems. The child's inability to accept a broken cookie is based on how he/she thinks at this age. When a parent says, "It's still a cookie, eat it!" he/she is using mature reasoning that is not available to a pre-school child.

A solution to this problem is to restructure the broken cookie dilemma as follows:

Child: "Mom can I have a cookie?" Mom: "Well, we have cookies but there is a problem!"

Child: "What?"

Children will often stop with interest when a parent states "*There is a problem.*"

Parent: "We have cookies but they are all broken. What do you think? Could you eat a broken cookie or do you want to skip having a cookie?" Child: "I can have a broken cookie." Parent: "Good for you even broken cookies taste good!"

Children can be much more cooperative when a parent problem solves potential upsetting dilemmas in this way. It is respectful of the child's developmental ability and makes life a little easier. These are beginning steps in developing problem solving skills in your child.

Try this format with other situations when you need to make something work for your pre-school child. Saying "We have a problem" almost always gets the child interested in trying how to figure out a good solution.

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SAFE START PARENT PAGES

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TRANSITIONS

No matter how old we are or whether it is something we look forward to or dread, change and transitions are stressful and challenging. For you and your child, the first day of school can be momentous and a factor that contributes to whether school is a positive or negative experience. This is complicated because it is also a transition time for the parent. We can feel excited and eager for our child, but grieve the loss of this stage of life. When parent and child are separating from each other it is an exciting but scary time. It's hard to be calm for your child when you aren't feeling that way.

Some tips that may help you and your child adjust over the first few weeks of school:

- Keep your expectations of yourself and your child realistic. There will be good days and bad days. Celebrate and give thanks for the good days, and reassure your child and yourself that the bad days will pass.
- Start right away to build structure, easy to manage schedules. Find a routine that fits your family life style, and try to stick to it. For example, setting aside 5-10 minutes of one on one time with your child when they return home to just talk about their day, or do what they want to do for that time. They may need to revert back to some less mature behaviors just to feel secure, like sitting on your lap, or have you read to them.
- Organize things the night before so that you will have a smoother morning time. Recognize each child's personality factors and build around them for bedtime and morning rising and getting ready. Some children need more "wake-up" time than others. Try to keep from having rushed, frantic leaving. Make it a special blessing time, "I love you and I know you will have a good day."
- Begin a routine homework pattern that fits your family life style. Some children do well with homework when they get home, others need to unwind and do better with homework after dinner.
- Encourage your child that they will have a good time learning lots of new things, but also reassure them that you will help them if they have problems. You will love them no matter what.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact the Safe Start Office, 412-350-2770.



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

**Volume 3 Issue 3
2008**

What Parents Can do to Decrease Exposure to Media Violence

- * Pay attention and be alert to the programs your children are watching
- * Watch the shows with your children and talk about them afterwards
- * Limit the amount of time your children are watching television
- * Don't use the television as a distraction or a baby sitter
- * Disapprove of violent shows and encourage educational shows
- * Don't watch adult shows while children are present
- * If your child witnesses violent acts on a television show, discuss the consequences of the violence and other ways the conflict could have been resolved
- * Disapprove of the violent acts in front of the child stressing that such behavior is not the best way to resolve a problem
- * Discuss the difference between make-believe and reality (for example, point out that the actor has not actually been hurt or killed but in real life such violence results in pain or death)
- * Be careful of viewing shows just before bedtime. The emotion invoking images may linger and interrupt children's sleep

Overall, don't let your children rely on watching television or playing video games as a way to occupy their time. Encourage your children to engage in alternative activities and hobbies. Communicate with your children and engage in play and other activities with them.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact SAFE START at 412-350-2770 or safestart@dhs.county.allegheny.pa.us. Previous issues of PARENT PAGES can be found at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/violence.aspx>



SAFE START PARENT PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 3

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Why Telling A Child To “Be Good” Sometimes Doesn’t Work

All parents have children who sometimes misbehave. This is as common as breathing air. Often when a parent is ready to leave a child in the childcare center they will say to the child, “Be Good”!

We have all heard this statement in our own childhoods and may have sometimes wondered, what does this mean? It does not give a child any real information on how to act. The following example will help explain this. When an adult is invited to go to a place that he/she has never been, it is common to ask questions like:

“What should I wear?”

“Who will be there?”

“Should I bring something?”

If the person who made the invitation just says, “Be good!” this might feel odd or strange because it provides no information! Saying “Be good!” to a child is not wrong or inappropriate but it is not very helpful. Children, like all people, feel more in control when they know what to do or how to act in different places. It is more helpful to a child when a parent says something like:

Example:

“I need you to be good today when we visit Aunt Mary. This is what I mean:

Ask Aunt Mary if you can touch before you touch one of her pretty things.”

“Say hello when we get there.”

“Don’t run in her house, Aunt Mary has a rule about this, you can ask her.”

“Don’t chase Aunt Mary’s cat!”

“If you have problems while we are visiting, I will help.”

When a parent has a conversation like this before going anywhere with a child, it helps to organize and focus the child to better understand the expectations. Over time children become better able to self manage in many places. *It is important to tell the child you will help.* This changes it from a critical interaction to a supportive one.

There are rules everywhere. Children need lots of help to understand how the world works. Children need rule information about lots of different places like, preschool, church, when going to the movies, or to a restaurant, or to the library. All of these places have rules that the child will need to understand and learn. When children learn how to follow the rules of a place they feel more in control of themselves, feel successful and competent. This process takes time and practice. Children never get tired of a parent or teacher reviewing the ways to act in a place; it helps a child to feel safe and organized.

If you would like to talk with someone about your child, please feel free to contact Kathy Mason, Safe Start Early Childhood Specialist, who will meet with you.

412-350-2770