BUY, BUY CHILDHOOD: HELPING CHILDREN RESIST THE LURE OF TODAY’S MEDIA AND COMMERCIAL CULTURE

by Diane Levin, Ph.D.

Today’s children are growing up in a media-saturated environment. They average 35 hours per week of “screen time,” during which they watch TV or videos, play with computer and video games, and use the Internet. Before entering kindergarten, the average child will have spent over 4,000 hours watching television alone—more time than doing anything but sleeping. All this time spent in front of a screen affects how children interact with and what they expect from their world.

Much of what children see on the screen can undermine healthy development and is permeated with content that teaches lessons that go against what the adults who care about children try to teach. What they see affects their developing ideas and behavior—about violence, gender roles, sex, and more. For instance, by the end of elementary school, the average child will have witnessed over 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence on the screen, much of which is glamorized, just-for-fun violence.

“Screen time” also takes valuable time away from the concrete experiences that young children need to learn best. It can also promote passivity and a need to be entertained by others.

The impact of media goes far beyond what children see on the screen. There is also the commercialism linked to media—thousands of media-linked products that permeate most aspects of children’s lives, from toys and clothes to food and lunch boxes. Selling toys and other products to children through TV programs was not allowed until 1984, when the Federal Communications Commission deregulated children’s television. Deregulation led to enormously successful programs like “Masters of the Universe,” “GI Joe,” “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,” and the “Mighty Morphin Power Rangers,” which were created to sell products. Indeed, these “program-length commercials” transformed the very nature of childhood. Since deregulation, a majority of the best-selling toys have been linked to the media, such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Transformers, and Spiderman.

Deregulation has led to big changes for children, their parents and teachers—many of which we are only now beginning to recognize and understand.

What’s the problem?

Since deregulation, many parents and teachers worry about how they see media and commercial culture affecting their children. They report having increasing difficulty trying to limit the influence of today’s media and marketing forces on their children. They say they see negative effects in:

- how children use their free time—often saying they are bored and asking for more and more screen time;
- how children play—often having trouble becoming engaged in play, even when they have a room full of toys;
- how children use the content they see on the screen, including bringing in the violent and sexual content

continued on page 4

Diane Levin, Ph.D., is an internationally-recognized expert on media and children. She is a professor at Wheelock College in Boston and the author of several books, including So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do To Protect Their Kids, to be released this summer. Dr. Levin spoke at the Winnetka Alliance’s Networking Dinner in January.
Advice from Barbara Monier, LCSW, on common parenting issues

Q I have a 4 1/2 year old boy who LOVES guns and weapons. Our house doesn’t encourage the behavior, but he is 100% in love with guns. We tried a moratorium on guns and he would say, “Mommy, I’m sorry. I just can’t stop thinking about guns.” We’ve introduced guns as a reward for respectful behavior, but I am wondering whether they encourage violent play and aggressive behavior.

- Mom Who Is Not In Love with Guns

A This is a question that many a parent wonders about. It is always important to be true to our most treasured values in our parenting; however, in this case human nature and normal child development run counter to our values of cooperation and non-aggression. Four-year-old children are at an age where everything is BIG – their actions, their words, their play. In addition, their emotions are generally very intense at this age. They are full of energy, ideas and impulses, and are generally getting better and better all the time at learning the boundaries of appropriate behavior. They are less physically aggressive, less prone to tantrums and more likely to use their words much of the time. BUT, inside of them there is a great deal going on, and they do need ways in which they can channel their normal, expected feelings of aggressiveness, anger, frustration, fear, and the many other strong emotions they feel.

Since your child has let you know very clearly that he “can’t stop thinking about guns,” I would start from the assumption that they are providing something useful for him at this stage of his development. If he demonstrates that he is able to use them in his play, without showing signs that he then becomes out of control in any way, I would further assume that they are actually helping him with his aggression rather than encouraging it. In other words, his gun play is providing him with an outlet that helps him manage these strong feelings in other areas of his life.

You can certainly limit when, where, and for how long he is permitted to play with his guns, but I would not use them as a reward in this case. I fear that may backfire by making them even more alluring because of their being made so special. It may work better to have them be more of an everyday part of his play.

You can, and should, continue to let him know your feelings about the importance of cooperation and non-aggression, but you can do this separate from his play. In other words, don’t feel that you need to give a speech every time you see him grabbing one of his toy guns. The vast majority of children who are permitted to play with toy guns grow tired of them in due time (not counting squirt guns and Nerf guns!), and research has consistently demonstrated no long-term ill effects on children.

Q How do you deal with anxiety about thunderstorms?

- Wondering in Wilmette

A There is no one-size-fits all answer to this question, as much depends on both the age of the child and the severity of the anxiety. Young children, during the whole period from about two and a half years up until six or so, often develop fears of a wide range of things, and these fears can become so severe that they qualify as true “phobias,” meaning that the level of anxiety is extreme and the child can be quite frantic in his/her effort to avoid the feared situation. Commonly, children can develop strong fears of dogs, insect bites and stings, natural phenomena such as thunderstorms and tornadoes, being injured, as well as the very common fears of the dark and separation. Very often these fears crop up without the child actually having any negative experience with the dreaded thing, meaning that most children who become deathly afraid of dogs have not had a bad experience with an actual dog. These fears are a “normal” part of early childhood development, and usually phase out on their own, though they may endure for a number of years before disappearing.

Different children will respond to different methods of soothing their anxiety. Start by thinking about what works best to calm your child when they are distressed and upset in other types of situations, and see if there is a way you can use some of those same strategies for thunderstorms.

Perhaps developing a consistent “thunderstorm routine” would be helpful and you can elicit your child’s help in developing one. Then, thunderstorms may become a special, even fun time, where you play loud music to cover the noise, have a special dance, whatever might work best.

Some children respond very well to specific, concrete information, and lots of it. Borrowing from a strategy known as “flooding” that is widely used to treat phobias, you can find books, internet sites, weather-related DVD’s, etc., that provide a ton of scientific information to explain exactly what is happening during a thunderstorm. Again, the focus here is on the amount, as well as on the content, the two-fold idea being that you are striving to reduce anxiety (feeling) by using the brain (thinking), and that you are providing such a large amount of information and attention to this that the whole thing loses its power.

Q Seeing the White Hen on Green Bay Road while out in the car with his mother, Christopher, age 5, noted: “Look, Mom. It’s the White Chicken!”

A She consults widely with parents and educators on issues related to early childhood development.
As we move further into the electronic age, technological advancements have become a hallmark of achievement. In a world where sun lamps are readily available and people can go fishing on a computer screen, society has taken its cue from culture and moved indoors. And while information is at everyone’s fingertips, this current trend has limitations—people can learn all they want about the great outdoors, but they can’t actually experience it.

Kohl Children’s Museum has confronted this problem head-on. Based on the theory that interactive play has a major role in learning, the museum offers 17 hands-on exhibits designed to make learning fun and interesting for young children. With indoor exhibits focused on real-life experiences, such as a Play Library, Dominic’s, and Pet Vet, the museum concentrates on experiential learning through doing. Its newest permanent exhibit, Habitat Park, is focused on bringing that hands-on learning into the outdoors.

Habitat Park is designed to help children begin to develop an early environmental awareness and affinity for nature. This two-acre outdoor exhibit area fosters sensitivity to the beauty of nature, an attitude of caring about what happens in the natural environment, the development of a personal relationship toward other living things, and respect for the interrelationships that exist among all aspects of nature.

“Safe outdoor spaces for children are actually decreasing,” says Sheridan Turner, Museum President & CEO. “Instead of creating new parks for children to play in, they’re building huge developments and houses with smaller and smaller yards.

“Without these wide-open spaces to run and explore, children are becoming more and more disconnected from the natural world around them. They’re spending more time inside, interacting with electronic playthings and not experiencing the wonders of nature as much as they could.”

An outdoor environment not only offers a chance to commune with nature, but it also provides an outlet for energy and the opportunity for exercise. Obesity and related illnesses are on the rise, particularly in children, and the outdoors provides the perfect place to run, jump, and play, which can be the first steps to enjoying a healthy, active lifestyle.

Habitat Park is open year-round

Kohl Children’s Museum hopes to guide children towards these more dynamic outdoor activities and cultivate a connection with the natural world. Open year-round, the Habitat Park exhibit offers an ideal learning environment that is full of opportunities for adventure, self-initiated discovery, play, exploration, and experimentation while allowing children to freely explore the exhibit’s various habitats of woods, prairies and gardens.

An inner courtyard protected between the Museum’s wings features a children’s sensory garden, and is perfect for toddlers and younger children. A larger fenced-in area features winding pathways, a grass maze, an underground tunnel, and a sculpture trail.

Nine children’s sculptures, representing a variety of media, reside in the garden. The selected sculptures, created by a variety of artists including several from the Chicago area, all use nature as a theme to spark children’s imaginations in unusual ways. From one angle, Dino Crisanti’s “Hidden Deer” appears to be a random assortment of tree stumps, but reveals itself to be a deer at rest when viewed from another vantage point. Robert C. Anderson’s “Sharing VI–Garden Kaleidoscope” encourages visitors to turn a rotating bowl containing natural objects like leaves,

Dylan, age 2½, to his mom: “Mommy, I’m going to be a man some day.”

“Oh, really,” replied Mom. “When is that?”

“Thursday,” answered Dylan.

Kate Rodbro is the development coordinator at the Kohl Children’s Museum in Glenview.
they see into their play and interactions with others;
- what they are learning about being boys and girls—with extreme stereotypes about how boys and girls are supposed to look and behave;
- their children’s frequent nagging for things they want or “need” and the fleeting happiness that acquiring new objects seems to bring before the nagging begins again.

Media and commercial culture are having too big an impact on young children’s learning and development for we, as parents and teachers, to try to brush it aside. It is time for everyone who cares about children to work together to reduce the hazards that media and marketing are creating for them. Here are two examples of the kind of rethinking that can help you develop effective responses.

**The impact of media on play**

*From a parent: “I started using television and DVD’s with my daughter when I was making dinner or taking a shower. She started asking for it at other times and gradually, without our even realizing it, it took up a lot of her free time. Now, when she has free time and we don’t turn it on, she says she’s bored, even though she has a room full of toys. Is this a problem or am I just being a nervous parent?”*

*From a teacher: “It’s harder and harder to have ‘free play’ in my classroom. Some children can’t cope with the lack of structure. They roam around the room dabling with this or that, but rarely getting involved in any activity for long. When they do, it often quickly dissolves into a conflict. I’ve stopped putting out some of the more traditional materials, like playdough. Children don’t do much with it; they just poke at it and then go on to something else. It’s often easier to plan structured activities that I lead.”*

Play is vital to all aspects of children’s development and learning. Children actively use play to master experience and skills and to try out new things. In the process, they learn a lot about how to find interesting problems to work on and how to solve them in creative ways. This helps children feel the sense of power that comes from actively figuring things out on their own. It helps them be excited about finding new problems and solving them. It also helps them see themselves as problem solvers—an attitude that serves them well in all aspects of learning, both formal and informal.

How children play affects what they learn as they play. When play is a creation of children’s own imaginations, experiences, abilities, and needs, it is likely to more fully meet their social, emotional, and intellectual needs and contribute to a solid foundation for later learning. Like the accounts above, many parents and teachers say a lot of children have trouble creating their own play. Children have less time to play as more of their time is taken up watching a screen. When they do have time to play, the highly realistic, media-linked toys they often use can channel them into imitating what they see on the screen rather than engaging their own creative play and problem solving.

Children who do not engage regularly in creative play are less likely to learn the important skills that the play can teach. When this happens, we would expect to see children who have short attention spans, flit from thing to thing, and are at loose ends when they have free time or during “free play.” In a sense, these children have developed what I call “Problem Solving Deficit Disorder (PSDD),” the inability to find and engage in solving interesting problems. This can jeopardize the very foundation that is needed for optimal learning which requires the ability to problem solve.

**Helping children reclaim play**

Helping children become good players is one of the best ways we can reduce the impact of PSDD. In many cases this will mean placing more emphasis on:
- reducing the time children spend glued to the screen so that they have more time to play;
- helping children find interesting problems to work on and then helping them develop the skills they need to solve those problems;
- providing children with deeply meaningful content to bring to their play that comes from their direct experience rather than the superficial content that often comes from the screen;
- helping children learn to use open-ended materials such as playdough, blocks, etc., in the service of their play, rather than expecting toys to tell them how to play;
- entering children’s play in unobtrusive ways to help them engage in and sustain creative play.

**The impact of media on social development**

*From a teacher: “I find I’m spending more coming on page 6*
THE MANY JOYS (AND MANY CHALLENGES) OF NEW MOTHERHOOD

by Janet Goss

More and more women today are choosing to have children later in life. They are pursuing higher education and fulfilling careers before they marry and start a family. Transitioning from full-time employment to full-time mom can be a difficult challenge for many women. It is often a mix of emotions as a woman navigates the challenges of her new daily life, whether she has stay-at-home status or she is balancing the demands of work and family caregiving. No matter what the challenge, the journey one takes with a new baby does not have to be taken alone. There are many resources out there to make the challenges of new motherhood a little smoother.

Surf the web. Talking to other moms and sharing your feelings can be immensely reassuring. Online chat rooms like www.mamasource.com give you the opportunity to talk with women about your experiences and get different perspectives on a variety of topics.

Read up. There are many helpful books on this subject. The Mother Trip: Hip Mama's Guide to Staying Sane in the Chaos of Motherhood by Ariel Gore and Ellen Forney and The Mommy Chronicles: Conversations Sharing the Comedy and Drama of Pregnancy and New Motherhood by Sara Ellington and Stephanie Triplett are two great books that help dispel the stereotypes of what a mom “should be” and invite the reader to create their own version of motherhood.

Find YOU time. Look for something geared more towards you as an individual and not as you as a mom. Explore your passions and set some time for yourself, even if it is just for an hour. Check out a yoga class or check out the local library where you can find some inner balance. Join a book club or have a “girl’s night out” where you can have space to be a woman and not just a mom.

Join a support group. Mothers & More is a national organization now serving 7,500 moms. Local chapters can be found all over the U.S and are structured to support women dealing with the joys and challenges of motherhood. Find them at www.mothersandmore.org

Our First Class at the Winnetka Community House, starting April 15, is a 10-week class that offers new moms a place to meet other women with newborns, share their feelings and experiences, find support and a safe environment for their 3-10 month olds to play and learn. For more information on this class, please contact Janet Goss at 847-446-8060.

Janet Goss, M.A., L.P.C., is a licensed professional counselor at Family Service of Winnetka-Northfield

“OUR FIRST CLASS” FOR NEW MOMS AND INFANTS STARTS APRIL 15

For new mothers, “Our First Class,” is a parent-education, peer-support and playgroup all in one! Moms can make new friends, get questions answered, find support, and have fun with their infant, too.

Each session explores the common challenges, joys, thoughts, fears, and excitements of motherhood. The group facilitator helps to provide a supportive and non-judgmental environment, as well as facilitating a balanced discussion between parents’ questions and the topic of the week. Articles and information on thematic topics are offered weekly, on topics ranging from sleep training to understanding temperament. Infants are free to play, eat, sleep, roam, or just snuggle with Mom. Each class concludes with a short session of music and movement with your baby.

The class will meet at the Winnetka Community House on Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:15 a.m., from April 15 through June 17. The fee is $120 for 10 sessions.

Janet Goss holds a Master’s degree in clinical psychology, with an emphasis in marriage and family therapy, and is a licensed professional counselor at Family Service of Winnetka-Northfield.

This effort is co-sponsored by the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood and Family Services of Winnetka-Northfield. The Winnetka-Northfield Rotary helped fund this program.

For more information or to enroll, please call Janet Goss at 847-446-8060 or email her at jgoss@familyservicewn.org.
and more time helping my children settle disputes. Many kids seem to have fewer skills than the children I had when I started teaching [15 years ago]. More kids hurt other children as soon as they can’t get their way. I keep telling them to ‘use words, not fists,’ but it’s often like talking to a wall. I think some kids actually feel scared by what’s going on.”

Children learn how to interact positively with others through a slow process of construction. They use content from how they are treated, their interaction with others, and how they see people treating each other to build their own ideas about how to behave. They gradually learn what to say and do to work out problems with others in a peaceful manner and to have respectful give-and-take relationships. It is vital that children learn these skills when they are young, because research suggests that patterns of behavior at age eight are related to behavior in adulthood.

Screen time takes time away from interacting and learning how to interact with other children, so many children have fewer opportunities to learn positive social behavior. It teaches a great deal about aggressive and mean-spirited behavior. In addition, media and commercial messages teach girls to judge themselves and other girls as objects—how they look and what they can buy determines their value, not what they can actually do. Boys learn to judge girls this way, too. And boys learn to judge themselves and other boys by how strong, independent, and ready to fight they are. In a sense, both girls and boys are made into objects, and it’s much easier to be mean and uncaring to an object than a person. This undermining of the development of positive social behavior and relationships can relate in what seems like “compassion deficit disorder (CDD),” whereby children have less ability to take care about the point of view of others.

What often results from CDD are accounts about problems with aggression among children like that of the teacher above. Many teachers say they spend too much time trying to maintain the safety of their classrooms and admit to resorting to more “time outs” and harsher “discipline techniques” than in the past. Schools abolish recess because children hurt each other on the playground. And parents rely more on screens to keep children well behaved when they get together to play.

Helping children learn positive social behavior

There is much parents and teachers can do to counteract “compassion deficit disorder” that may often involve rethinking conventional practices. For example, you can work on:

- recognizing that children’s aggression is often a result of their not having learned how else to interact with each other in give-and-take ways or to work out their problems with others;
- taking a more active role helping children find positive ways to interact and solve their problems peacefully;
- helping both boys and girls expand their concepts of what’s okay for them to do as boys and girls;
- talking with children about the mean-spirited, sexist and violent content they see on the screen to counteract the harmful lesson taught and teach alternative ones;
- helping children find the deep satisfaction that can come from solving problems and mastering new skills—thereby learning “I can do it!” instead of “I want it!”

In conclusion

Children urgently need the help of the important grown-ups in their lives to overcome the many special challenges that the media and commercial culture have created. Once we have a lens for recognizing how media and commercial culture play can influence our children, we are better equipped to develop strategies that can work for us and for them. The above discussions of play and social development illustrate how we can begin to fashion a comprehensive and meaningful response. And as we do, it will also be important to work with others to try to change the societal conditions that are making it so much harder for us to be good parents and teachers.

To learn more about the impact of the media and commercial culture on young children:

Websites
- Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood.
  www.commercialfreechildhood.org
- Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment [TRUCE].
  www.truceteachers.org
  Educators who prepare materials to help parents counteract the negative impact of media and promote healthy play.

Books

“How do you get a million dollars?” asked the three-year-old.
“You just go to the bank,” answered his older sister.
SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2007 ANNUAL FUND DONORS

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Spaces still available at St. Elisabeth's Nursery School. Morning program for 3 and 4 year olds (9:00-11:15 a.m.) with extended day enrichment program available (11:15-12:45) and "Ready to Rock" (1:30-3:45 p.m.) five afternoons a week. "Ready to Rock" is a transition class for older fours and younger fives before they head off to kindergarten. For more info, contact Deb Wechter, Director, 556 Vernon Ave., Glencoe. 847-835-0609.

Register now for PACT’s Seven Week Summer Session. PACT offers classes for children 6 months to 4 years old. Located at 315 Waukegan Rd., Northfield. 847-446-5370.

Register now for “Summer Discovery” classes at Christian Heritage Academy, June 9–July 17. Register your 2nd-8th grade students for outstanding summer classes offered by faculty members at CHA. Classes include soccer, basketball, Kindermusik, sculpture, ceramics, painting and art classes. For registration and information, please call 847-446-5370.

Register now for French School Summer Camp. The French School will offer an 8 week summer camp for children aged 3 – 6 years old. Camp runs from June 2nd to July 25th. French Summer Camp offers fun activities, outdoor play, games at the park, creative crafts, jewelry making, cooking, dramatic play, and more, all in a French immersion environment to promote and maintain language acquisition. For more info. or to register, please call the French School at 847-501-5800.

12 “Journey From the Heart” at the Winnetka Public Library. Dennis Swiftdeer-Paige presents his Native American storytelling program. All ages welcome but of special interest to children 6 and up. 10:30–11:30 a.m. Drop-in program at the Main Library in Winnetka. 847-446-7220.

15 “Our First Class” for New Mothers and Their Infants. Parent education, peer support, and a playgroup all in one. Make new friends, get questions answered, find support, and have fun with your infant, too. Meets on Tuesday mornings from 10:00-11:15 a.m. for 10 weeks at the Winnetka Community House. Fee is $120 for 10 sessions. Co-sponsored by Family Service of Winnetka-Northfield and the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood. For more information and/or to enroll, please call Janet Goss at 847-446-8060 or email at jgoss@familyservicewn.org.

17 Kindergarten-Preschool Articulation Meeting. Directors of area preschools and kindergarten teachers in public and private schools spring meeting. At Hubbard Woods School, 3:45-5:00 p.m. For more information, call Julie Pfeffer, 847-446-9400, or Blakely Bundy, 847-441-9001.

26 National Youth Service Day. Sponsored by the Volunteer Center’s High School Board. Call The Volunteer Center for more info. 847-441-7665.

26 Sacred Heart School’s Annual Fundraiser “Nite Lites.” The theme is “In the North Woods.” Dinner and casino. Held at the school. 6:00 p.m. 847-446-0005.

30 Avoca West School’s Kindergarten Visitation Day. For incoming kindergarteners and their parents. Visit classrooms from 2:30-3:30 p.m. 847-724-6800.

1 & 2 Eighth Grade Play: “Beauty and the Beast.” 7:30 p.m. at Sts. Faith, Hope and Charity School, in the gym. 847-446-0031.
Winnetka Alliance’s 6th Annual Summer Reading Book Fair at The Book Stall at Chestnut Court.
Please come to our Book Fair, devoted to summer reading choices for children and adults. Proceeds support the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood. 9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. 811 Elm St., Winnetka. For more info, contact Dale Wyatt, 847-501-5279.

The Volunteer Center’s Annual Recognition Luncheon and Volunteer Fair. Michigan Shores Club, 10:30 a.m. 2:00 p.m. Betsy Holden will be the speaker. Attend fair and visit with agency reps. immediately before luncheon. Call Volunteer Center for more info. 847-441-7665.

Superintendent of the Winnetka Public Schools Discusses the District’s History and Philosophy.
Join Dr. Mary Herrmann, as she discusses the rich history and philosophy of the Winnetka Public Schools. Appropriate for parents of incoming kindergarten students, those new to the school district, or anyone interested in learning more about the Winnetka Public Schools. 9:00-10:30 a.m. in the Community Room at Skokie School, 520 Glendale, Winnetka. For more info, call Nancy Fehrenbach, 847-441-8618

Willow Wood Preschool’s Registration Sign-up. First opportunity to put your child’s name on the waiting list for the 2009-2010 school year. 7:00 a.m. at the school. 847-441-6393.

Middlefork School’s Kindergarten Visitation Day. For incoming students and their parents. Meet the kindergarten staff and tour the classrooms. Visit anytime between 3:15-4:30 p.m. and 6:00-7:00 p.m. 847-446-6725.

62nd Annual Northfield Family Fun Fair at Middlefork School. Amusements, food and games for all ages. 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. 847-446-6725.

**JUNE**

13 & 14 64th Annual Winnetka Children’s Fair. Winnetka Community Nursery School’s annual fair, held on the Winnetka Village Green on Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Games, rides, face painting, pony rides, booths and refreshments. Fun for the whole family. 847-446-4432.

“A Jester and his Castle.” All ages welcome. This introduces the Summer Reading Program theme for younger children. 10:00-10:45 a.m. Drop-in program at the Main Library in Winnetka. 847-446-7220.

Mother Goose and Friends. This drop-in program is of special interest to younger children. 6:30 – 7:10 p.m. Main Library in Winnetka.

**DATES AHEAD**

July 17 Dave Rudolf’s Music Program. All ages welcome. 2:00-3:00 p.m. Drop-in program at the Main Library in Winnetka.

Oct. 18 Winnetka Public School Nursery’s Pumpkin Fest. 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Held on The Village Green. Great family fun with games, rides, food and pumpkins galore. 847-446-5153.

Oct. 27 French School Open House. 7:00 p.m. Call to make a reservation. 562 Green Bay Rd., Winnetka. 847-501-5800.

March 1-7, 2009 TV Tune Out Week 2009. Join over 5,500 kids in Winnetka, Northfield, Kenilworth, Wilmette, Glenview, and Glenview as they experience a week without television or other screens during the 15th Annual TV Tune Out Week. Choose from dozens of alternative activities available all week long. Find more information on the Alliance’s website at www.winnetkaalliance.org.
2007 ANNUAL FUND DONORS
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Bring Your Cherubs to Church School.
Winnetka Congregational Church
amilies travel from January to December. No longer are two weeks in the summer the yearly family vacation. Is it realistic to expect materials that will pack easily into a carry-on bag to not only be fun for children, but to give “bang for your buck” in terms of weight vs. value? Can we occupy toddlers as well as preschoolers? Can we eliminate the one usage book for one that literally is worn out from repeated usages? Are there materials that parents will like as well? The answer is—yes, to all!

What would I add to your carry-on bag? I am excluding any general fiction titles, as you know what beloved story is best before bedtime. I am referring to high use, thinking, identification, informative titles. I want these titles to be useful for a week or more, to be used over and over yet still have new ideas, hidden facts, or items that continue to interest not only your child but you.

I have always loved picture puzzles. Is there anyone who has not loved Highlights Magazine’s Hidden Pictures? My second most favorite picture puzzles is Scholastic’s I Spy series. There are board book formats for babies, early readers in paperback formats for toddlers, and the original full-size format that includes a dozen or so titles.

The gamut of picture puzzle books available is quite exciting. Larger, simple pictures or compositions equal quick success—necessary for young children. Conversely, multiple small items on less clear, dark backgrounds are more challenging. Start with easy puzzles that are age appropriate and work up to the more difficult. Visual discrimination is the thinking skill used in solving picture puzzles. It is a learned mental and visual activity and a very useful one for reading readiness. For older children, picture puzzles might be a complicated story, like Garland’s Mystery Mansion, when users must rely on memory, visual discrimination, and advanced thinking skills.

Walter Wick is the king of picture puzzle books. He is the creator of the Can You See What I See? books, as well as the Seymour stories, which are excellent for toddlers. Scholastic has published some of the titles in a paperback “I Can Read” format. In any of the picture puzzle titles, do not hesitate to change or add your own challenges, such as “find two….” or “find a green…..” Take turns with your children. I promise they will challenge you as easily as you challenge them! Look-Alikes and Look-Alikes, Jr. by Joan Steiner seem simple enough at first glance. But, look again, because every item is composed of many other small, everyday things. The space ship begins with a badminton cock and ends with batteries. I defy you to identify every item in the general store, although the author has graciously listed every item used on each spread at the back of the book.

Where’s Waldo? is the definitive example of picture puzzle visual discrimination and, right now, seems to be having a resurgence of popularity. Also, for children as young as one year, look at Each Peach, Pear, Plum by Ahlberg. If you point to the hidden fairy tale or Mother Goose character several times, your toddler will soon find them on her own.

There are several picture puzzle books based on collections of famous paintings. Micklethwait’s I Spy An Alphabet in Art is one example and there are also some very challenging titles that are mysteries. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Can You Find It? is notable.

Check out the jokes, riddles, and knock-knock titles at the library or bookstore. Joanna Cole has fabulous and unending directions for a variety of card games. Travel with a Xerox copy of the ones that are appropriate and don’t forget the cards!

Leonard Wise is the author of The Way Cool License Plate Book. Roxie Munro creates the best maze books going. When choosing what to pack, remember to add at least one non-fiction title on a subject that your kids love. The Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness books come in several formats, including smaller paperback editions, and they cover numerous subjects. The illustrations will delight, as the short, informative text enlightens.

A few, well-chosen titles that include picture puzzles and other ideas will keep your young travelers thinking and happy for hours. Please do not be the people I sometimes meet on planes who travel with nothing in their bags for their children to help them pass the time! Check out the library or the bookstore. There is more out there than you think. Do not leave home without them!

B. J. Kass is a children’s literature consultant who has worked at Greeley School and The Book Stall at Chestnut Court.
What is the best advice when your child takes something from a store?

- Embarrassed

Many young children will do this at some point in their early years. The simplest answer to your question is: explain to your child [again!] that it is always wrong to take things that do not belong to us, and that whatever was taken will therefore need to be returned. Then, go with your child to return the item to the store (or wherever it was taken from). Realistically, it will probably be too difficult for your child to explain the situation to the “grown-ups” at the store, and this is fine. Your child will get the message quite well by having to accompany you and then listening to you explain to the store personnel that an item was taken and is now being returned.

How strong a tone you take with your child during all of this depends on several factors. The younger the child, the more I would tend to handle this simply and straightforwardly, with a minimum of worry on your part about the “theft,” and an assumption that putting the situation right by having the child participate in the return is adequate. The rest depends on your child’s developing conscience. During the years between approximately age three and the age of six or so, children are in the process of developing their own internal sense of right and wrong. With some children, their conscience is very strong and harsh – towards themselves! If they understand that they have done something wrong, they feel terrible shame and remorse. Other children have a much less strong conscience, and we may worry that they don’t seem to feel as badly as we may expect when there has been a serious transgression. A child with a strong and harsh conscience is likely to feel VERY ashamed and guilty, and a light touch in our parenting is sufficient. A child who has a less strict conscience may well need a stronger tone from us as we reinforce the importance of making good choices, including never taking anything that does not belong to us.

OCCASIONAL PROGRAMMING AVAILABLE

The exhibit also includes occasional programming with museum educators, such as natural scavenger hunts, wind exploration, and shadow games, in addition to adult-guided programs so that teachers and adult caregivers across all generations can interact with their children in the outdoors and develop experiences that can be replicated at home, school, on family vacations, or outings to other outdoor parks.

With the goal of encouraging children to truly engage with the outdoor world, Kohl Children’s Museum has dedicated itself to continuing to build upon its current exhibit. In Autumn 2008, Habitat Park will close temporarily for expansion of its offerings. By June 2009, the second phase of the exhibit will open to offer a variety of new elements, including a rainbow garden, shelter building, and an exploration of animal movement.

This next phase of Habitat Park reinforces the ideals held by the entire exhibit and by the museum in general—young children learn best through play. Offering a secure space where children can safely explore nature provides access to the outdoors, which is too often lost or neglected, while instilling a love of nature at a young age that children can then carry throughout their lives.

Habitat Park has been underwritten by the Diana M. and Bruce V. Rauner Family. The Outdoor Sculpture Garden has been given by the Shaw Family in memory of Charles H. Shaw.
My three boys have all had their fair share of nights when they wouldn’t go to sleep. There were times when they woke up four times a night at eight months old, just wanting to be held. I thought I was pretty good about keeping them on a good sleep pattern until one night late last summer. My five-year-old went to bed normally, he was sleeping just fine when I checked on him before I went to bed. Then at about 11:30 that night, thankfully I was still up reading, he came walking into our bedroom. He was talking, but I really could not understand him and he kept pointing at a window. I hit my husband until he woke up. He couldn’t understand him either, so he had him come to be with us and he fell right asleep. About an hour later, I found him standing on our bed, about to walk off of it. When I tried to talk to him, he started screaming. After about 30 minutes, he calmed down. We did not. This was the first of many bad nights in our house. He would scream and yell and hit us. He would point at things and talk, but we couldn’t understand him or calm him down. All we could do was to just make sure he was safe. In the mornings, my son had no idea what we were talking about and often asked why he was not in his bed when he woke up.

**Night terrors**

These incidents started a conversation with our pediatrician and our investigation into sleep disturbances. Our pediatrician asked us some questions and diagnosed that our son was having night terrors, which sounded horrible to me. He based this on the fact that he would wake up about three hours after falling asleep, would seem awake but wasn’t, and never remembered the episode in the morning. Other symptoms of night terrors include sitting up in bed, appearing afraid, rapid heart rate and increased breathing, and sweating. After a few minutes, most children will just fall back to sleep.

Our doctor was not too concerned about these symptoms lasting very long, as he helped us realize that our son had had two major life changes happening in the same week—starting kindergarten and moving to a new house. Even though our son was very excited about both things and we gave him plenty of time to talk about them, he was obviously worried. Other than stress, night terrors can be triggered by trauma, illness, or fatigue.

Night terrors are not all that common. About 6 % of the population is prone to them and they mostly affect boys. Night terrors are more problematic for the parents as they often feel so helpless. In our case, as soon as school started and the move was over, our son was fine. We have not had an event since, but I know he is prone to them, so we make sure he gets plenty of sleep and will watch out for things that cause stress in his life.

**Nightmares**

Nightmares, on the other hand, have affected almost all of us at some time or another. The same sorts of things that cause night terrors, such as stress, illness, medication, or reading—can cause nightmares. Watching something scary on television is the most common cause.

Children can keep nightmares at bay by keeping to a sleep routine. Always go to bed at the same time. Have a special blanket or toy. Nightmares are usually remembered so, if your child knows what upset her, it is possible to work out the problem and avoid whatever triggered it. It might be as easy as not watching the monkey scene in *The Wizard of Oz* for a few years. Another technique is to ask the child to draw the dream on a piece of paper and then tear up the picture. Nightmares are normally not a long-term problem, and most children simply outgrow them.

**Sleepwalking**

Sleepwalking is also a concerning event in some families. Children may get up and walk around. They may seem awake but don’t respond. The most important thing to remember with sleepwalking is to maintain the safety of the child. Make sure all doors and windows are secure and that all potentially harmful objects are out of reach. Just return the child to his/her bed. Sleepwalkers do not remember their sleepwalking and most children outgrow this, just like the other sleep problems.

Sleepwalking is also not a cause for concern. Parents and caregivers just need to maintain the safety of the child. And, as with most things in life, all of these problems will be outgrown.
REMEMBERING DEBBY CLINCH

by Betsy Regan

On January 22, 2008, the early childhood community was shocked and saddened to lose a great friend, the former director of Winnetka Community Nursery School, Debby Clinch. Debby was also an incorporator of the Winnetka Alliance and served on both its Advisory and National Advisory Boards.

Debby had a familiar look. I felt sure we’d met before when she hired me in February 1994. She had an open, friendly face and a wide, easy smile. I remember looking at Debby and thinking, “This woman is really cool!” She didn’t look like any preschool director I’d ever seen before. No bulky theme sweaters or frumpy jumpers. (Sorry, ladies!) Debby had a style all her own with her jangling collection of funky silver bracelets, clunky shoes, her fun overalls and unique, whimsical accessories. We were all inspired by her style that was at once eclectic and kid friendly.

Her personality inspired us, too. She was unpretentious, incredibly caring, yet her New England roots were never far away. She could cut to the heart of an issue in a very no nonsense manner, yet deal with problems in a kind, discreet and sensitive way that made people comfortable talking to her. She had a wonderful, funny personality and a great laugh!

“Debby was first and foremost a child and teacher advocate”, remembers Katie Lodge, a teacher at WCNS for nine years. “And she took the time to get to know each and every child and their families.” Debby’s calm and steady demeanor was a comfort to parents new to the community. She helped families navigate through the often challenging waters of this area. She was nurturing to her teachers as well, and she always offered us her strong support when we needed it.

Debby invited staff into her home often and always made us feel a part of her close knit family. Her house was filled with beautiful antiques, amazing collections and the same original creativity that was so reflected in her personality. Debby’s husband, Howie, one of the friendliest people I’ve ever known, was a great host but could also be found at school on any given day fixing, moving, always helping. It must be said that Debby and Howie’s devotion to each other was a big part of who Debby was and how she lived her life. They were married 50 ½ years! We were sorry to see Debby retire in 2000 but were excited for our friend to begin a new adventure with Howie in Massachusetts.

To Louisa, Brad and Houstoun, thank you for sharing your wonderful mother with us for so many years. She made a difference in the lives of so many children, parents, and teachers! There will be a celebration of Debby’s life on Saturday, April 19 at 3:00 p.m. at the Winnetka Congregational Church.

Betsy Regan has been a teacher at Winnetka Community Nursery School since 1994.
ALLIANCE OFFERS TRIBUTE FOR INSPIRING TEACHERS

Once again, as part of this year’s Annual Appeal, the Winnetka Alliance will offer the opportunity to thank an outstanding early childhood educator whom you feel has made a special difference in the lives of young children. For every contribution of at least $75, the Alliance will recognize a designated educator in several ways:

♦ He or she will receive a personal letter, telling of the gift on his/her behalf. The donor will have the option of including a personal statement.
♦ His or her principal or director will be advised of this distinction.
♦ His or her name will be posted on the Alliance website and mentioned in the Winnetka Talk’s School Digest column.
♦ He or she will be acknowledged at the Alliance’s 2009 Networking Dinner.

Details about how to make a Tribute gift are also available at www.winnetkaalliance.org. A Teacher Tribute gift can ensure that a dedicated teacher hears an important thank you “many times, many ways” while affirming the Alliance the critical funds it requires to continue serving the community’s youngest members, their parents, and their teachers. Acknowledge greatness—thank a teacher!

Pay Tribute to an Outstanding Early Childhood Educator.

Each $75 donation honors one outstanding early childhood educator. Educators will be recognized with a letter from the Winnetka Alliance and notice to their school. Their names will be published in the Winnetka Talk, posted on the Alliance website, and announced at the January 2009 Networking Dinner. Thank an educator today…and help support the work of the Winnetka Alliance, too.

Educator’s Name: ___________________________________________

School/Center: ____________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________

Optional comments about this educator: ____________________________________________________________

Thank you for your tax-deductible contribution to the Winnetka Alliance. Your gift makes it possible to support the parents and professionals who nurture and teach our young children in Winnetka, Northfield and the North Shore.

$75 donation

$________ All amounts are gratefully appreciated.

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Make checks payable to: The Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood

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IF I COULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN AS A PARENT, I WOULD...

♦ “...not buy every new baby item that comes on the market, thinking that it makes me a more prepared mom.” - Mother of three, ages 8, 8 & 4
♦ “...worry less about lost sleep. You catch up eventually.” - Mother of three elementary school kids
♦ “...not stress out about picky eating habits. Everything seems to be sorting itself out now.” - Mother of two, ages 4 & 2
♦ “...not stress so much about what they would or would not eat. They are now healthy young adults and all that worry was for nothing.” - Mother of an adult son and daughter
♦ “...have relaxed when I was on the playground with them. I was too concerned about them getting hurt to let them feel free to explore. They picked up on my apprehension and as a result were hesitant to take risks until well into elementary school. I also would have let them get really dirty with reckless abandon when they played outside.” - Mother of two college-age kids
♦ “...let them dress themselves and I wouldn’t have worried about the result.” - Mother of three grown kids and a 7th grader
♦ “...not sweat how clean my house was (or not).” - Mother of three adult children
♦ “...let my kids wear all those ‘fancy’ clothes instead of saving them for that special event, only to find they had outgrown them.” - Mother of 8-year-old twin sons and a preschool daughter
♦ “...do more silly, ‘let’s break the rules’ things like suggesting we have ice cream only for dinner or wearing old Halloween costumes just because or writing all over the windows with wax crayons or blowing bubbles in our kitchen instead of outside. Kids remember this fun, offbeat stuff.” - Mother of a son and daughter in middle school
♦ “...spend more time sitting on the floor playing and less time worrying about how we are going to clean all these toys up.” - Mother of three young children and a teenager
♦ “...not been so busy to come home and have dinner with my kids when they were young, as now that they are teenagers, they are often too busy to be home to have dinner with us!” - Father of two teenagers
♦ “...have started chores much earlier!” - Mother of four, ages 13, 6, 4 & 2
♦ “... make the time to snuggle and read to each of them every day.” - Mother of three, ages 10, 8 & 5
♦ “...take more time each day to ‘smell the flowers’ and do less rushing from one activity to another. I would also try to see the world through my children’s unadulterated eyes more often, as they are keenly intuitive about people and the world around them.” - Mother of a daughter, 15 and a son, 10
♦ “...give myself a break and realize that I was doing a pretty good job!” - Mother of two sons, 6 & 2 and a daughter, 7 months
♦ “...have had more children.” - Mother of three college-age children
♦ “...not have been so hard on myself, expecting myself to be perfect and to produce perfect children. Children are not (and are not supposed to be) perfect.” - Mother of three adult daughters and four young grandchildren
♦ “...believed the old advice of ‘This too shall pass’ when I got upset about some behavior or worried about a situation that seemed insurmountable at the time.” - Mother of five adult children and grandmother of 13