

Welcome to Brighton Area Schools
KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM
"A Time and Place for Wonder"



Best Practices for Families with Young Children
Compiled by Brighton Early Childhood Staff

Today's parents are bombarded with advice. The Early Childhood staff at Brighton Area Schools has compiled some useful and valuable information from their experiences, both professional and personal. The result is this guide, highlighting the needs of the young child in today's often busy, hectic world.

Our children are only young for a very short time. Please stop and take time to enjoy the beauty and excitement that fills the lives of our young. They are our future; let's invest in them!

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Love

Loving our children is the most important work we do. We are lucky that love can work such magic; we just have to let ourselves do it.

But, do *what* exactly? I am talking about an activity that is extremely simple, primal, natural and unsophisticated. If you have ever held a baby, or even talked about holding a baby, you know what I mean. Your eyes take on a gentle look, a broad and crinkled smile expands over your whole face, your voice takes on a cuddly tone, and you fall completely into the role of a baby-lover. Each of us can do this if we let ourselves.

Although you know how to do it, you probably do not know how crucial it is. There is *nothing* you can do – no diet, no trust fund, no exercise program, no vitamin or medicine of any kind, no brain enrichment program of any sort, no lesson or activity or gift – that can help your child more than the act of loving.

So, put it at the top of your list. It is more important than having a clean house. It is more important than laundry. It is more important than being on time for the dentist. It is more important than losing weight. It is more important than making money. It is more important than pleasing other people. It is more important than answering the telephone or checking e-mail.

That does not mean you have to give up everything – like work, laundry, the telephone, and e-mail – in order to do it right. It does not mean you have to spend vast quantities of time ogling your infant or playing catch with your 9-year-old son. You just have to make sure that the other adults who do spend time with your kids do so lovingly.

Taken from:

"The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness"

By Edward M. Hallowell, MD. Copyright 2002

Family Time

Today we struggle to give our own children the ease and space and quality of interaction that we took for granted growing up. No, we cannot turn back the hands of time. But as the overworked exhausted parents of a generation of busy, over stimulated children, we can slow down the pace of daily life in our own homes.

If we as a staff could choose one thing to ask of you as a kindergarten parent to support your child as a learner, this is what we can suggest to you: Take the time to just **talk with** and **listen to** your child.

What does a quality interaction with your child look like?

- Turn off your cell phone
- Turn off the TV
- Be in the same room
- Get down on their level
- Make eye contact
- Physical contact
- Be engaged in the conversation

This takes time...**MAKE** the time...Enjoy the time!

Ideas for spending quality time with your child:

- Go on a walk
- Sit down to dinner together
- Play a game
- Play with your child and following their lead
- Cook with your child
- Enjoy music together

Please listen to and talk with your child as much as you can. We realize that life is busy, but we encourage you to spend some quality time with your child. This will allow you the opportunity to encourage and support your child as a learner. Your child is worth it! Give them your time. Before long, they will be grown.

Recommended Readings:

Mitten Strings for God: Reflections for Mothers in a Hurry by Katrina Kenison.
Raising Children Who Think for Themselves by Elisa Medhus, M.D.
Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv
I Love You Rituals: Activities to Build Bonds and Strengthen Relationships by Becky Bailey

Play

PLAY IS SO IMPORTANT TO OPTIMAL CHILD DEVELOPMENT THAT IT HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD!

Other research-supported facts about play:

- Children are freer to master new knowledge at their own rate and in their own way.
- Play is important to healthy brain development.
- Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills.
- Play is linked to growth in memory, self-regulation, oral language and recognizing symbols.
- Play builds active, healthy bodies.
- Play is nature's way of helping children in the maturation process.
- Play helps children learn to delay gratification and to prioritize their goals and actions.
- Play may act as an outlet for reducing anxiety and relieving stress.
- Play helps children remember more, focus better, and regulate their own behavior.
- Play helps children construct an appreciation for other people's cultures and beliefs.

Often the most difficult work teachers have to do is teaching the parents and decision makers is that 'play is a whole lot more than play!'

This information was taken from:

Helping Young Children Develop Through Play – National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds – American Academy of Pediatrics.

Power of Play – Rosh Vettiveloo – Learning Support Services.

Recess and the Importance of Play – National Association of Early Childhood Specialists.

Why Children Need to Play – Dr. Elena Bodrova and Dr. Deborah J. Leong.

Play – Stuart Brown.

Alliance for Childhood.org

Whole Child.org

Conscious Discipline

Developed by Dr. Becky Bailey

A wonderful woman who lived in a shoe
Had so many children,
And she knew exactly what to do.
She held them.
She rocked them.
She tucked them in bed,
I love you, I love you
Is what she said.

Research says: Parent-child relationships that include healthy communication and the ability to set limits in the #1 factor in self-esteem, social competence, academic success, and psychosocial development of children. (Strage and Brandt, 1999).

What Conscious Discipline Does: Conscious Discipline significantly enhances parent-child relationships in the areas of setting limits, communication, satisfaction, involvement and support.

Becky Bailey believes that self-control must be the first priority for all parents. Self-control is the ability to reach out and empathize with others, to accept and celebrate differences, to communicate feelings directly, to resolve conflicts in constructive ways, and to enjoy feeling close and connected to others. *The Seven Powers for Self-Control* are ways of perceiving and thinking. Each of the Seven Powers has a slogan to help you remember to use that particular power in times of conflict.

The Seven Powers for Self Control

POWER OF PERCEPTION

No one can make you angry without your permission

POWER OF ATTENTION

What you focus on, you get more of

POWER OF FREE WILL

The only person that you can make change is yourself

POWER OF UNITY

We're all in this together

POWER OF LOVE

See the best in each other

POWER OF ACCEPTANCE

This moment is as it is

POWER OF INTENTION

Conflict is an opportunity to teach

From these **Seven Powers for Self-Control** emerge the **Seven Basic Discipline Skills**. Dr. Bailey believes these are the only skills you need to constructively respond to any difficult moment. As parents change their attitudes and behaviors, so will their children. Conscious Discipline is about parents teaching their children how to behave, not about parents controlling their children's behavior.

Seven Basic Discipline Skills

- Composure:** Living the values you want your child to develop.
This teaches *integrity*.
- Encouragement:** Honoring children so they will honor you.
This teaches *interdependence*.
- Assertiveness:** Saying no and being heard.
This teaches *respect*.
- Choices:** Building self-esteem and willpower.
This teaches *commitment*.
- Positive Intent:** Turning resistance into cooperation.
This teaches *cooperation*.
- Empathy:** Handling the fussing and the fits.
This teaches *compassion*.
- Consequences:** Helping children learn from their mistakes.
This teaches *responsibility*.

Resources for Conscious Discipline:

www.beckybailey.com

Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline by Dr. Becky Bailey, Harper Collins.

I Love You Rituals by Dr. Becky Bailey, Loving Guidance.

Parenting classes are held throughout the year on various parenting topics.

Nutrition

Balanced Breakfast Suggestions for Healthy Kids

Young children need a healthy breakfast every day to maintain optimal brain function. Too much sugar and carbohydrates raise blood sugar levels and can cause inattention, crankiness, hyperactivity and anxiety. Too little food can also cause behavior and attention problems.

Here are some suggestions for busy parents:

1. Old fashioned oatmeal with cow, rice or soymilk. (Avoid sweetened instant mixes). Add a handful of almonds. Fresh fruit.
2. Whole grain toast with peanut butter, almond or cashew butter. Fresh fruit.
3. Protein shakes (mixes are available at local health food stores) these can be made with water, juice, soy, rice or almond milk. Many kids love these. Add fresh fruit and whole grain bread to the meal.
4. Eggs with whole grain toast and butter. Fresh fruit.
5. Pancakes or waffles (homemade) with added protein powder and ground flaxseed. The protein and flax doesn't change the flavor (honest)! You can make these ahead of time and freeze. Fresh fruit.
6. Yogurt (soy and rice varieties are available at local grocery stores). Fresh fruit, rice cakes, crackers, bread.
7. Cottage cheese or other cheese on whole grain bread or bagel. Fresh fruit.
8. Unsweetened granola, milk or yogurt and fresh fruit.

When planning breakfast:

- Avoid sugary foods and drinks
- Try to get at least 10 grams of protein
- Use complex carbohydrates found in whole grains
- Add a little fat such as butter or olive oil
- Use fresh whole fruit, juice is OK occasionally
- Eat a wide variety of food; don't eat the same thing daily
- **Remember, water is essential for optimal brain function**

Healthy Snacks

1. Keep a bowl of whole fruit in a visible spot, such as on the kitchen table, counter, or an eye-level refrigerator shelf.
2. Skewer bananas, berries, and pineapple chunks to make fun fruit kabobs.
3. Shred carrots or zucchini into bread and muffin mixes.
4. Keep cut veggies in a clear container in the refrigerator for easy snacking.
5. Instead of tortilla chips, dip fresh vegetable slices into salsa.
6. Serve hummus with pita bread slices.
7. Keep a container of granola with a scoop inside in an easily accessible location.
8. Almond or peanut butter with fruit preserves on whole-grain bread or wraps.
9. Hard-boiled eggs with whole-grain crackers.
10. Make air-popped popcorn the night before and serve the leftovers for a snack.

Academic Readiness Skills

Parents often ask "What skills does my child need to enter kindergarten?"

We all want our children to be ready and successful as they begin their school experience. In the Brighton Area Schools kindergarten program, we understand that children come with a broad range of skills, and work with students at their level of skill to ensure a good beginning.

Parents can help by building those foundation skills and habits which make learning fun and predictably successful in school.

Ready for School means I am...

Socially and emotionally prepared

- I can talk with adults and answer their questions.
- I pay attention during circle time.
- I take turns, share, and play well with others.
- I know my birthday, full name, and age.

Healthy and active

- I eat healthy food, especially for breakfast.
- I dress myself and manage buttons and zippers.
- I throw, catch, bounce, and kick a ball.
- I jump, hop, skip and turn a somersault.
- I play outdoors every day.

Enthusiastic and curious

- I like to tell stories and talk with you.
- I like to ask questions and learn from your answers.
- I go for walks and observe nature.
- I like to sing, draw, color, build, and create.

Has language skills

- I know most of the letters and letter sounds of the alphabet.
- I can spell and write my first name.
- I like to find rhyming words.
- I like books and can tell you what the story was about.

Counts and recognizes shapes

- I can count out loud to 20.
- I can count 10 objects.
- I know shapes like circles, squares, and triangles.
- I like to find numbers around our house.

Motor Needs

Helping your child develop gross and fine motor skills.

During the early years of childhood, children engage in playful activities, which encourage the development of sensory and motor skills. These activities are crucial to early brain development. They lay the neural foundation for enriched brain structures that serve us throughout life. Please consider trying the following activities this spring and summer to prepare your child for kindergarten.

Balance activities: Good balance skills help children to move with grace and accuracy. Try having your child:

- Walk a balance beam heel to toe, forward and backward, or use a two-by-four.
- Hop on two feet, one foot, play hopscotch, jump rope.
- Gallop and skip.
- Riding a bike.
- Jump on a mini tramp.
- Freeze tag.

Bilateral motor skills: These skills help children use both sides of their bodies in a coordinated fashion. Try having your child:

- Run, gallop, and skip.
- Do jumping jacks.
- Do a cross crawl movement, touching your hand to the opposite raised knee.

Visual motor skills: Good visual skills help children to track, converge, and accommodate with their eyes, which are foundational skills for reading. Try having your child:

- Throw and catch a ball.
- Hit a balloon.
- Dribble a ball.
- Throw to a target placed on the wall or to a basket on the floor.

Gross motor activities: These skills strengthen the body and heart and help with agility and confidence. Try having your child:

- Run, climb, swing and pump.
- Carry groceries, laundry, wood, dirt, and leaves.
- Push carts, wheelbarrows, and strollers.
- Jump on a mini-tramp.
- Swim.
- Bike.
- Jump rope.

Fine motor activities: These skills help strengthen the hand and get children ready to manipulate classroom tools and write. Try having your child:

- Play with clay and play dough.
- Do puzzles, mazes, dot-to-dots.
- Cut coupons, paper dolls, shapes.
- Zip, button, snap, and tie laces.
- Make place mats and cards.

References:

- Why Motor Skills Matter* by T. Liddle, 2004
Fine Motor Activities for Young Children by Landy and Burrige, 1999
Handwriting Without Tears by J. Olsen, 2003
Brain Gym by Paul Dennison, 2010
Motor Skills for Academic Success by Nancy Sornson, 2010

Screen Time

Screen Time: Some thoughts for parents.

What is screen time?

- Television, video, and DVD
- Computer
- Play stations, X Boxes, and Nintendo
- Game Boys

How much is too much? The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1999 recommended:

- No television for children under two.
- Older children no more than seven hours a week.

Why restrict TV? What problems can occur with excessive screen time?

- Language development delays – children learn to talk and use language correctly by practice and interaction with real people.
- Motor development delays – children’s gross and fine motor development needs movement and exploration of the environment. Children’s brains grow with movement.
- Visual development delays – too much staring at a screen with the eyes in a fixed position can delay visual development. Moving hands and body lays the foundation of visual-motor and near point skills.
- Social skill delays – children do not learn to play with others while looking at a screen. Screen time is so entertaining; children sometimes fail to develop good social skills if they always have the option of interacting with the screen.
- Cardiovascular health – children need outdoor play in the fresh air to strengthen their bodies and especially cardiovascular systems. Michigan leads the nation in childhood obesity and diabetes.

What parents can do to help;

- Reduce screen time with enforceable house rules.
- No “screens” in the bedroom.
- No TV during meals.
- Watch good shows with your children, and then turn off the screen and talk.
- Monitor violence.

References:

- The Plug-In Drug: Television, Computers and Family Life* by Marie Winn, 2002.
- Endangered Minds. Why Children Don't Think & What We Can Do About It* by Jane M. Healy, PhD., 1990. Simon and Schuster.
- Failure to Connect. How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds For Better or Worse* by Jane Healy, 1998. Simon and Schuster.
- Smart Moves. Why Learning is Not all in Your Head* by Carla Hannaford, PhD., 2005. Great Ocean Publishers, Arlington, Virginia.
- Preventing Early Learning Failure* by Bob Sornson, 2001 ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia
- “Kids and TV” Parenting Magazine, April 2002.*

Sensory Needs

Every day, we receive a great deal of information from our senses. We use this information to organize our behavior and successfully interact in the world. Our senses give us information about the physical status of our body and the environment around us. Think of the senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Yet, there are many other sensations, which are just as essential to survival. Our nervous system also detects changes in movement and gravity.

These sensory systems include:

- **Balance and movement** (our vestibular sense); the knowledge of the position of one's head in relation to gravity and movement, which is used to come down a slide, or ride a playground swing without falling off.
- **Muscle and joint sense** (proprioception); the internal awareness of the position of one's joints and muscles in space, which allows you to lift a spoon to your mouth without spilling your soup.

Our brains much organize this information so that we may function in everyday situations, such as the classroom, at home, on the playground, and during social interactions. When one recalls all of the sensory modalities, it is truly amazing that one brain can organize input from all senses simultaneously, and still come up with a response to the demands of the environment. The complex nature of this interaction is reflected in the following example:

“Johnny, please put your coat on.”

- **Focusing** your attention on the person speaking and hearing what they say.
- **Screening out** other incoming information going on around you.
- **Seeing** the coat and adequately making a plan for how to begin.
- Seeing the armhole openings and **sensing muscle and joint position** (which allows you to know where your arms are and where to put your arms in relation to the coat sleeves).
- With your sensitive **touch awareness**, you **feel** that the coat is on your body correctly.
- Adequate **motor planning, touch awareness, and fine motor skills** to enable you to zip or button your coat.

We could continue with this breakdown, but the point is that the central nervous system is constantly focusing, screening, sorting and responding to sensory information, both from the external environment and from internal receptors in order to perform purposeful activity. Imagine the amount of **SENSORY INTEGRATION** needed to sit in a chair, pay attention in an active classroom, copy an assignment or read a book!

As you can see the central nervous system is constantly focusing, screening, sorting and responding to sensory information, both from the external environment and from the internal receptors in order to perform purposeful activity. A great amount of sensory skill is needed to sit in a chair, and pay attention in an active classroom. (Adapted from Janet McLaughlin, Occupational Therapy Association).

Some children struggle when one or more of their senses are not working optimally. These children can feel unsafe, over stimulated, uncomfortable in their own bodies, afraid of loud noises, have difficulties with different textures in clothing, food, and messy supplies like paint and other problems that stem from sensory system disorders. The staff of Brighton Area Schools are aware of these sensory difficulties and help children cope and overcome them. (Adapted from Janet McLaughlin, Occupational Therapy Association).

References:

- Sensory Secrets* by Katherine Chemin Schieder, 2001.
Sensory Integration and Child by Jean Avres, 1979.

Creative Needs

The two best musical activities for young children in or out of school are singing and moving to music. Also fun and helpful activities are listening actively to music and playing instruments. But singing and moving activities offer the most towards musical, language, and physical development. Parents will do a world of good simply by giving their children opportunities to be musical, language, and physical development. Parents will do a world of good simply by giving their children opportunities to be musical, and encouraging their efforts.

SINGING with your children is so important it bears repeating: Sing with your children! While making breakfast, riding in the car, washing dishes, taking a bath – all these are perfect times for singing songs. When listening to the radio or a CD, show that you enjoy singing along with your favorite songs. This will encourage your children to do what they are already inclined to do – sing!

- Sing everything: current radio hits, patriotic songs, sacred songs, holiday songs, novelty songs – anything that moves you to make a joyful noise and get everyone singing with you.
- Singing gives you a chance to talk about *meaning*: What does the song say? What are the definitions of the more important words? Talk also about the difference between a *singing voice* and a *talking voice*.
- One more thing: children love to make up songs. Encourage this all you can. This is a great way to play with some of the vital elements of music and language such as melody, rhythm, form, vocabulary, rhyme, humor, and sense.

MOVING is essential to children's play. Children move naturally as they sing songs associated with games, actions, and dances. Movement can be synchronized with a steady beat or with conspicuous rhythm and melodic patterns. Also, movement can be tied to the verbal patterns in a song, providing a deep developmental play with language, and even serving as a memory cue for learning the words of songs.

- Alternatively, moving expressively and freely to the feeling or mood of the music can be just as enthralling.
- How do children move to music? They can move to any musical or verbal element using big muscles or small muscles. They can stretch, bend, swing, twist, bounce, shake, push, pull, sway, rise, or collapse. They can walk, run, jump, hop, gallop, skip, slide, leap, lunge, or strut. They can tap, snap, pat, point, or clap.
- Movement offers wonderful opportunities to practice *musical opposites*. Movement can be quiet or loud, slow or fast, high or low, starting or stopping, smooth or choppy, same or different, etc.

LISTENING actively, perceptively, noticing the subtleties, and nuances of music is a skill that can grow. Listen to musical opposites. Listen to rhythm, melody, harmony, tone colors of instruments, and musical structure. Listen to words, ideas, and feelings. Listen to everything you can, and *talk about it*.

It is as important as anything else to expose your child to a wide variety of music. Kids from preschool through roughly age eight are remarkably open to all kinds of music, unless they are otherwise influenced. Let them hear all different styles, genres, and cultures, from Bach to rock to Indonesian gamelan music to Native American flute music.

PLAYING INSTRUMENTS is fun. While playing along with songs play freely, play with words, play with melodic and rhythmic patterns (as you do with all other movement). Play sticks, shakers, drums, or whatever instruments are available (but don't worry about technique - that comes later). And don't forget, the body is a musical instrument. It's good for tapping, clapping, slapping, snapping, stamping, and patting the head, shoulders, chest, stomach, elbows, legs, knees, ankles, etc.

Musical play in children, as with all their play, should happen freely. Let them escape into music, forgetting the rest of the world, laughing, moving, and sounding. Children, when fully engaged, are most free to learn and develop.

Why Art?

According to Dr. Violet Robinson's book, *Art Really Teaches*, art exploration promotes a variety of skills, concepts, and tools necessary for young minds and bodies to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

- **Personal Development**
Develops self-concept, self-expression, self-discovery, and imagination.
- **Social Development**
Encourages cooperative learning and tolerance of new ideas.
- **Physical Development**
Strengthens fine and gross motor skills, dexterity, and eye-hand coordination.
- **Language Development**
Promotes students to talk about their art experiences, processes, and projects with others, lays the foundation for the development of written expressions.
- **Cognitive Development**
It builds understanding of classification, sorting, spatial and dimensional relationships, and patterning.

Art Discovery Tips for Home

- Devote a box or drawer to a variety of art materials. Allow your young artist plenty of time to explore, play, experiment, and discover. Do not forget nature's bounty of art supplies and household odds and ends.
- Take a closer look at the world with your child. Have them use their "artist eyes" and study the intricacies of a snowflake under a magnifying glass or watch the busy lives of ants. The more children notice and observe, the richer their art becomes.
- Go on a shape, line, or color scavenger hunt. Who can find the most triangles, curvy lines, or blue items?
- Think beyond the art supply aisle:
 - ❖ **DRAW & PAINT** with the hose on the sidewalk on a summer day, to music, with feet, hands, and even brooms.
 - ❖ **STAMP & PRINT** with old puzzle pieces, shoe soles, bubble wrap, and the wheels of toy cars.
 - ❖ **STACK, SCULPT & BUILD** outside and inside with snow, mud, toothpicks, and paper towel rolls.
 - ❖ **FOLD, CUT & TEAR** old cereal boxes, cardboard, junk mail, wrapping paper, and ribbon. Consider your child a custom paper shredder!
 - ❖ **WEAVE** with dryer lint, grass, and branches on your backyard fence. Even toes and fingers can be woven!

- Start a sketchbook with your child; just a few pieces of paper stapled together will suffice. Encourage them to observe and draw their everyday adventures and outings.
- Talk to your child about their creation. Asking simple, nonjudgmental questions like, "Tell me about this part of your drawing," can lead to eye-opening conversations.
- New ideas and art games are as close as your local library. Mona Brookes, MaryAnn Kohl, and Ann Wiseman are three marvelous authors of books pertaining to kids and art.
- For a great resource of unusual odds and ends and art inspiration, check out **The Scrap Box** in Ann Arbor (www.scrapbox.org).

Play with Me

I tried to teach my child from books;
He gave me only puzzled looks.
I tried to teach my child with words;
They passed him by, oft unheard.
Despairingly I turned aside;
“How shall I teach this child”! I cried.
Into my hand he put the key;
“Come” he said. “Play with me”.

Author Unknown

“How Do You Grow a Healthy Child?”

1. **Plant** – plenty of calm and peace in their lives.
2. **Plan** – for their rhythm – give them time to do things for themselves.
3. **Grow** – deep roots with many loving relationships.
4. **Work** – to provide them time to move and grow.
5. **Use good tools** – music, art, books, and the natural environment.
 6. **Feed** – sit down for dinner, together.
 7. **Weed** – out hectic schedules.
 8. **Observe** – their uniqueness.
 9. **Fertilize** – with a generous amount of play.
 10. **Nurture** – their natural connection with nature.
11. **Don't over water** – stand back (sometimes) and let them soak up the environment for themselves.
 12. **Cultivate** – friendships and fun.
 13. **Prune** – TV and screen time from their day.
 14. **Stimulate** – good food and good conversation.
 15. **Learn** – from their enthusiasm and compassion.
16. **Tend** – to your needs so that you can support theirs.
 17. **Honor** – your opportunities to listen.
18. **Enjoy** – this kindergarten year; there is nothing else like it.
 19. **Don't rush** – these seasons will fly by.
 20. **Harvest** – their love and respect forever.

Diane Tamblyn, 2010