

HEALTHY growing

Spring/Summer 2005

For Families of
Children
in Grades 4-5



GET AN END-OF-YEAR ACADEMIC CHECKUP to Boost Future Achievement

After nine months of surmounting academic hurdles, your son or daughter may be hoping to spring past the end-of-the-school-year finish line without even looking back. If so, you're both missing an opportunity to meet with teachers to gauge real progress during the past semester and ramp up for the challenges ahead.

To make the most of these meetings, it's usually helpful to be prepared to ask four key questions:

One: Looking at the subjects that gave my child the most trouble, what particular learning skills need work? For most students, the signs of trouble with particular subjects come in the form of less-than-satisfactory grades. Sometimes a lack of effort is to blame. But problems with basic skills may also play a role. If your child never quite mastered the multiplication tables, for example, higher-level mathematics has probably been especially difficult. Problems in reading may have led to significant challenges with spelling, comprehension and retention in several courses. Teachers can provide useful guidance on the most productive type of remedial work over the summer.

Two: Are there hidden talents that can be tapped and nurtured? Most young people have special aptitudes and interests that can lead to higher achievement. Good teachers who have spent a lot of time with your child can have significant insight into his or her academic "gifts" and potential to excel with additional support.

Three: What "learning habits" should we work on over the summer? Most teachers can name several habits that have an impact on a student's ability to complete classwork and homework and master subject matter. While all students may experience difficulties in one or more of these areas from time to

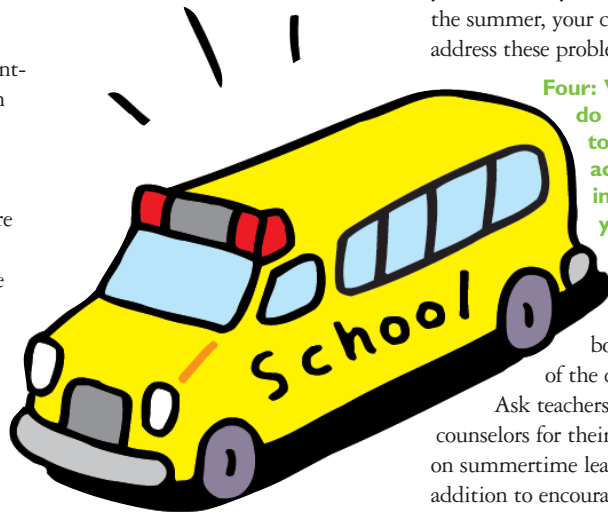
time, teachers are usually well aware of any chronic problems your child may be facing. During the summer, your child can address these problems.

Four: What can we do as a family to foster achievement in the coming year? Learning is a year-long process that takes place both in and out of the classroom.

Ask teachers and guidance counselors for their "best bets" on summertime learning. In addition to encouraging visits to the library, museums and historical destinations, many teachers can also recommend good summertime reading lists, summer learning camps and clubs geared to students. And remember, summers are a good time to learn new skills like sailing or ballet.

What's most important is that you take the time to make contact, and that you use the time wisely to get the most information and insight from the meeting.

These meetings also offer a good opportunity to say "thanks" to teachers who have dedicated so much time and energy to your child's success. This effort on your part sets a fine example for your child.



Web Site Provides Reliable Information on Healthy Eating

In December 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced the launch of a new nutrition web site (www.nutrition.gov) designed to help people find answers to nutrition and food related questions.

"Nutrition.gov is a web-based resource that includes databases, recipes, interactive tools and specialized information for infants and children, adult women and men, and seniors."

The www.nutrition.gov site is maintained by a team of registered dietitians and specialists at the Food and Nutrition Information Center of USDA's National Agriculture Library (NAL). The web site also links to information on the Food Guide Pyramid, Dietary Guidelines, dietary supplements, fitness, and how to keep food safe.

This article was modified from a release from Dr. Raymond J. Huntington, with thanks. Dr. Huntington and Eileen Huntington are co-founders of Huntington Learning Center, which has helped children achieve success in school for 26 years. For more information, call (800) CAN LEARN.

STONE Soup

Parents are more-or-less given the same information, and more-or-less asked to do the same thing: get involved with your child's education, and get involved with your child's school!

Here's the short version. The more you care about your child and your child's education, the more your child cares about you, about your family values, about the community, and about his or her education. The more you care about what goes on at your child's school, the more you show that school—and your child, your child's education, and your community—is as important as work, paying the bills, and having fun. Except, all the talk about school involvement leaves out a few practical matters. So keep reading.

You probably remember the story of the man who wanted to make soup with only a pot, some



water, and a stone.

So, he goes around the community explaining his plan. Of course, his neighbors know that his plan has a big problem! So, little by little, he has a carrot here, a potato there, a bit of meat, a couple of tomatoes . . . Throw out the stone, and he has a good pot of soup!

The man with the stone soup may have been a bit of a con man, but that's not the point. He knew what he wanted—a pot of soup—and he just started off. So should you.

Most of what you've read

about school involvement seems to suggest that school involvement requires a parent with the "soup" already made. Not true. One parent involvement coordinator said: "If every parent in a 500-student school agreed to

commit two hours of time during the school year, think of all the wonderful things we could accomplish!"

Two hours a year! That's the time it takes to read two articles and watch one TV show on school involvement.

How do you do it? Ask your child's teacher. Call the school. Ask a friend or neighbor. Look, you are good at this. How did you find a good doctor, a new job, the right baby-sitter? Think stone soup.

WAYS TO SHOW LOVE for Your Early Teen

The following are some ideas.

- Banish put-downs from your vocabulary.
- Make an extra effort to set a good example at home and in public. Use words like "I'm sorry," "please," and "thank you."
- Use non-violent forms of discipline. Parents should begin instituting both rewards and restrictions many years before adolescence to prevent trouble during the teenage years.
- Mark family game nights on your calendar so the entire family can be together. Put a different family member's name under each date, and have that person choose which game will be played that evening.
- One of the best ways to familiarize your child with good food choices is to encourage cooking with you. Let him or her get involved in the entire process, from planning the menus to shopping for ingredients to the actual food preparation and its serving.
- Your early adolescent's health depends significantly on the care and guidance you offer during this time. By taking your middle schooler to the doctor regularly, keeping him or her safe from accidents, providing a nutritious diet, and encouraging exercise throughout early adolescence, you help protect and strengthen his or her body.
- Regardless of whether you actively try to pass on your values and beliefs to your early teen, he or she is bound to absorb some of them just by living with you. Your pre-teen will notice how disciplined you are in your work, how deeply you hold your beliefs and whether you practice what you preach.
- Your pre-teen needs your steady support and encouragement to discover his strengths. He or she needs you to believe in them as they learn to believe in themselves. Loving your early adolescent, spending time with him or her, listening to and praising accomplishments are all part of this process. Check out our article on getting involved in your pre-teen's school and please be sure you do.

Tips to Help Kids Learn to Manage Money

The USA Federal Credit Union offers the following tips for parents to help kids in the 8-12 age group learn about managing money effectively.

- Sit down with your fourth or fifth grader each month to total all income that he or she expects to have for the month. The total may include allowance, savings account interest, payments for performing chores at home or added jobs for neighbors, or cash gifts from relatives. Ten-to-12-year-olds are capable of earning and this can be encouraged as long as it doesn't interfere with home work or practice (music, sports, theater, etc.)
- For planned spending for the month, the cost of each item to be purchased should be noted.
- Ask your child to set a target percentage of income to be saved. Some months the savings goal may be higher than others.
- For savings, your fourth or fifth grader should note how much

saved money will be kept at home as cash, and how much deposited into a savings account. The bank is probably safer than the piggy bank!

- Your student should calculate whether his or her savings goals have been reached for the month, after the planned spending total is subtracted.
- If your youngster spends money for items not listed in the initial budget, the savings percentage for the month should be reduced to reflect the change.

Parents can point out to their students the relationship between taking care of their bodies and taking care of their money. Savings bring peace of mind and security, a mental health plus.

For additional information, visit www.usafcu.org or call Darren Cameron, vice president of marketing for USA Federal Credit Union, at (800) 521-8440, extension 1080. Ask about their Planet M club for 8-12 year olds.

Modified from a set of tips supplied by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY: *Kids and Volunteering*



Volunteering can take almost any shape and form that works for your family and your child. Perhaps there is a someone right down the block that your family can volunteer to help in some way. Is your child's school working on a special project—improving outdoor equipment, the ball field, or simply cleaning up the school grounds, or planting flowers or shrubs—that you and your child can help with?

Some families may wish to make a more formal commitment.

In that case, there are many community agencies that match families with

organizations with the interests, age of the child, and the amount of time the family can commit.

The benefits of volunteering to your family can be overwhelming. Just being together as a family, working together, feeling pride and satisfaction together, can change the whole way the family thinks about spending time together. But there's a catch.

Regardless of how informal or formal your family decides to volunteer, it's important to remember the old saying "don't throw the baby out with the bath water." All the neat checklists and neat checkmarks next to boxes of lessons learned and skills gained don't matter if your child is unhappy, stressed, or frightened. Family volunteering needs to work for the child.

So, what makes volunteering good for your family and your *child*? Below are a few tips if you want to change the shape of the way your family volunteers.



- Does your child feel safe around the people he or she may meet as your family volunteers? Raking leaves at school may be fine. Going to a soup kitchen—however noble—may be too much for some kids.
- Is everyone—most of the time—having a good time?
- Are there tasks that your child can easily handle on his or her own, and enjoys taking responsibility for?
- Does your child find meaning in your family's volunteering, or is volunteering like doing chores at someone else's house?

Responsibility, sacrifice, tolerance, and service can be learned through volunteering. Family volunteering sets an example that lasts a lifetime. Please see For More Information, to the right.

Clinical Guidelines Advise When to Treat Flat Feet in Children

Are flat feet in children naturally corrected with age or does the condition require medical attention to prevent further foot problems? To help parents learn answers to this question and others, the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS) has released new clinical practice guidelines for diagnosis and treatment of pediatric flatfoot.

According to co-author James Thomas, DPM, FACFAS, University of Alabama Birmingham, the bottom-line advice for parents from the new guidelines is to observe your child's gait regularly, with and without shoes, for signs of flattened arches and seek medical attention if the child complains of foot or leg pain or shows a sudden lack of interest in physical activities.

Thomas added that a flattened arch is common in young children and usually is an isolated condition known as flexible

flatfoot, in which the foot is flat when standing and returns to a normal arch in non-weight-bearing positions.

"When parents notice flattened arches in their children they often don't know if the problem requires medical attention," Thomas noted. "Much of the time, treatment isn't required for pediatric flatfoot unless the child has pain in the foot or leg. So parents and their pediatricians should monitor children with flat feet for signs of progression, such as the onset or worsening of pain and possible adjustments in gait to compensate for it," he explained.

Further, the guidelines advise that if a child's flatfoot condition doesn't improve by the age of 10 (the age the arch should be fully developed), a foot and ankle surgeon should be consulted for exact diagnosis of the problem and treatment.

For More Information

The U.S. Department of Education is looking to show elementary and middle school students that no age is too young, or no task too small, to make a difference in the world. They recently launched a new web site, www.usafreedomcorpskids.gov, to help direct the passions of youths toward volunteer opportunities in their communities. The site is organized for kids (elementary school age), youths (middle schools age), parents, and teachers. The site provides parents and teachers information on how to start a service program and how to support a child's involvement in one.

Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood by Dr. Susan Linn (The New Press, 2004, \$24.95) "Consuming Kids should be read by every parent, policymaker, and professional who works with children."—Alvin Poussaint, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Your publisher could not agree more. The dialogue goes like this: "But Mommy, I want it!" If you have kids—and I have had five—chances are you've heard this kind of wheedling. What you may not know is that advertisers spent \$15 billion dollars last year getting kids to nag their parents this way. Nagging, as classified by marketing research, comes in two flavors: *persistence nagging* (children repeatedly and incessantly badger their parents until they give in), and the much more effective *importance nagging* (children offer a "reason" for why they must have a particular product—a reason included in advertising, or course).

Dr. Linn offers this paragraph on page 114: "An extraordinary video from the Media Education Foundation, called *Wrestling with Manhood*, addresses the disturbing behaviors and values the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) advances, focusing on what its shows teach boys about manhood. One thing the WWE teaches them is that men are bullies. Day after day, large wrestlers pick on smaller ones, beat them up, jump on them when they are unconscious, and taunt them for being weak. To cheers from fans in the audience, characters display an exaggerated relish at humiliating their opponents or their underlings both physically and psychologically."

Susan Linn is an instructor at Harvard Medical School and Associate Director of the Media Center at Judge Baker's Childrens Center, Harvard University.

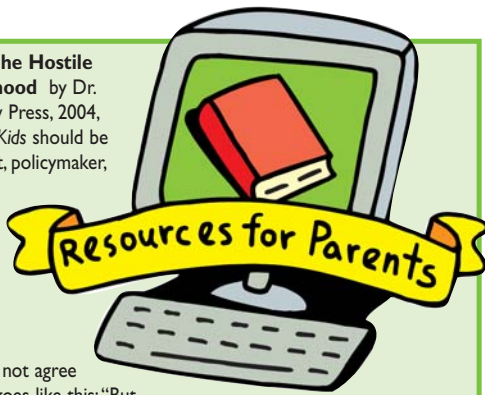
The Good Father by Mark O'Connell (Simon & Schuster, 2005, \$25.00) Dr. O'Connell has a psychotherapy practice and serves on the Boston Psychoanalytical Institute and the Harvard Medical School. This is an important book for both fathers and mothers. The strength in the book is in Dr. O'Connell's method of drawing on his own fathering (lack of it, actually, due to his father's very early death) as well as from his practice and his own parenting. He writes clearly about many of the issues of being a "good" father, in addition to being a male. Thought-provoking and excellent.

Kids Write Through It (Fairview Press, 2002, \$9.95) Children as young as 7 years old write tellingly about such topics as meeting challenges, death and dying, illness and disability, family, and problem resolution. Their advice to others is wise and often more advanced than what is expected of 7-to-12-year-olds. This book is an extraordinary gift; please share it with your fourth or fifth grader. Suggest that your school place it in their library, and that the health teacher assign stories to reinforce health lessons.

Alice R. McCarthy, Ph.D., publisher of the Healthy Newsletters for the past 14 years is now writing a weekly column on adolescence for the *Observer Eccentric Newspapers*, a large chain of newspapers serving 775,000 customers in three states including Michigan. She has 11 years of experience writing parent-oriented columns for two major newspapers and has published 10.3 million copies of the *Healthy Newsletters*. To access her column, go to www.hometownlife.com/Livonia/News.asp, and then type "Alice R. McCarthy" in the "Keyword Search" box.

Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In—When to Worry and When Not to Worry by Perri Klass, M.D., and Eileen Costello, M.D. (Ballentine Books, 2003, \$14.95) In *Quirky Kids*, seasoned pediatricians provide the expert guidance that families with quirky children so desperately need. These are children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders; Asperger's Syndrome; Nonverbal Learning Disability; Pervasive Developmental Disorder; and Sensory Integration Dysfunction. The authors discuss various therapy options, coping strategies, and available medications.

Troubadour's Tales Story book and CD (Humane Society Press, 2005, \$18.00) can be ordered online at www.nahee.org or by calling (860) 434-8666. CD 63 minutes. This storybook and CD for children ages 7 and up helps teachers and parents teach children key lessons in good character, kindness to animals, and respect for national habitats.



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- Legal U.S. resident

For more information regarding eligibility, you may contact *Together Rx Access* at (800) 444-4106. Check www.togetherrxaccess.com for more information.

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For Families of Children in Grades 4-5

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The goal of this newsletter is to help parents and caregivers teach children to make health decisions and to support the teaching of health in our nation's schools. A coordinated school health program includes health education. Please contact your child's teacher or principal with your questions.

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