

Parents©TOGETHER PRIMER

Summer 2008

A Newsletter for Greenwich Parents of Children from Birth Through Fifth Grade ©
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To all our readers:

Wishing you a happy,
healthy, safe
and relaxing summer
with your family
and friends!

Parenting in Non-Traditional Environments:

How to Parent Children Through and After Divorce and In Blended Families

By Elisabeth Tullis Schneider, LMFT

"A group of individuals living under one roof" is how the Miriam-Webster dictionary defines family. But any parent knows that family is so much more. Family is the unit through which we nurture, teach, discipline and care for our children. Family is the thing we create when we choose to marry and combine two adult lives. But when a divorce changes the dynamic of that family, or when a remarriage creates a blended family, the roles and responsibilities of family members become blurred and uncertain.

If you and your family have experienced such a change, take heart; between 43 and 50% of first marriages end in divorce¹ and more than a third of all children will be a part of a stepfamily at some point in their lives². But while the numbers of families experiencing such transitions are high, the challenges that confront these parents and children continue to be significant. You can minimize these challenges and improve the transition if you make a commitment to understanding and working through the process with your children.

PARENTING DURING AND AFTER DIVORCE

When you are going through a divorce, your life turns upside down.

Whether you wanted the divorce or not, you suddenly find that the "constants" in your life are shifting and things as simple as taking the kids to school can become complicated. Your children face this instability and uncertainty as well, only they have even less information and control over the situation. Here are some tips for parenting your children when you are going through a divorce so that they experience the least amount of turmoil:

- ♦ **Create as much stability as possible.** Your family is in flux; daily changes may be occurring. You may not know from one day to the next who gets the children for the evening, whether you will be able to stay in your house, or how you are going to pay for the kids' education, clothing, etc. Your young children need to experience as little of this turmoil as possible. Keep things as stable as you can and make as many decisions with the other parent as possible. When there are unknowns, try to come up with a basic plan and give the kids only the information they need. Also, work at maintaining traditions and normalcy when you can. Keeping bedtimes, meal times and core activities as consistent as possible will increase your young child's sense

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of well-being. The best case scenario is if both parents can keep consistency between the two homes.

- ♦ **Do not disparage the other parent to your kids....as much as you may want to.** This only hurts the children and creates confusion and uncertainty in their young and impressionable minds. The courts may also view this as parent alienation and they take a strong stance against this.

- ♦ **If your anger at your spouse/ex is significant, get help.** You will need to find support and a good therapist who can help you separate your anger at him or her so that you can continue to co-parent effectively.

- ♦ **Listen to your kids.** Talking to them is fine and sharing information is important, but it is even more important to listen. Listen to what they say both verbally and nonverbally. Young children will probably ask the same questions many times; they may ask you ten days in a row if you are moving. Instead of getting exasperated, recognize that this is their way of looking for reassurance, and be responsive. You may not always have answers to their questions; tell them what you do know and assure them that any unknowns will be answered soon. You can say, for instance, "I'm not sure if we will have to move; we're going to stay here in this house for now and if something changes, I'll let you know."

Once you begin settling in to your life as a single parent, you will experience new challenges. This is uncharted territory for you and your kids. How can you alleviate some of the instability inherent in a changing family dynamic? First, make sure to continue to seek out healthy counsel and care from those around you, and try to follow some of these tips:

- ♦ **Include your children in the development of your new lives by allowing them age-appropriate decisions.** Maybe you can have them help decorate their new bedrooms. Give them some say in the matter; they have just been through an

experience where they had little to no say in what happen to them, and will appreciate having a voice.

- ♦ **Continue the conversation.** Make sure you are still listening to them when they tell you what they are feeling, what they need, etc. Much of this "conversation" will be nonverbal! Get outside help if necessary. Recognize that many kids need extra support through this time and a group or individual counseling experience can have a very positive and normalizing impact on your kids. Young children may say hurtful or unexpected things because these feelings come to them suddenly. Don't react. Just listen. Knowing that your kids can talk about how they feel will provide a great deal of safety and security for them.

- ♦ **Try to keep the kids out of financial issues as much as possible.** By nature, they will tend to worry about this sort of thing, so adding to their concern will not help. Young children, in particular, should not be involved in these matters.

- ♦ **Be very careful about dating.** Dating is an important, vital part of a single person's life and just because you have children does not mean you should not date. But, you must be very careful about whom you bring home to your kids and to what extent you involve them in the dating process. Here are some ideas to consider:

- ♦ Do not have new and different men/women coming into the home when you go out on dates – this puts your children at unnecessary risk.

- ♦ Conservative therapists tend to support the idea that you should not introduce a significant other to your children unless you have been dating long enough to determine that this is a serious, long-term relationship.

- ♦ If you are in a serious relationship, be thoughtful about how to introduce the new person into your children's lives. Don't make it a high pressure intense family event. Keep it low-key and short enough that the kids won't feel forced to interact for

many hours. With young kids, make sure to meet them on their level; take them to a kid-friendly movie and pizza or maybe they can suggest something they would find fun. Don't expect them to sit through a formal dinner with this new person and to have fun doing it!

- ♦ Try to go on dates when the other parent has the kids so that their time with you is steady and consistent and they know they are your priority.

- ♦ Be sensitive to including the significant other at events with the children's other parent. This will happen eventually, but it shouldn't happen unless the relationship is very serious. When it does occur, talk to the kids in advance and give them an opportunity to voice concerns. Come up with a plan together about how to make the situation as comfortable as possible.

HOW TO PARENT IN BLENDED FAMILIES

If you've made it through the post-divorce transition and have now decided to re-marry, you have new and different challenges coming to the fore. Creating a blended family can be extremely rewarding, but it takes a great deal of love, patience and intentionality (not to mention a thick skin).

If you are the step-parent, you have the challenge that your role is both undefined and unclear, not to mention that you are the easiest target for the kids' anger. You must deal with this while you build a healthy marriage. And if you are the child's parent, you have the challenge of parenting your child(ren) while also adjusting to a new marriage. You may struggle with balancing the needs of your new spouse and those of your child(ren).

In the early days of a blended family, it is important to remember that in most cases kids don't need or want another parent. They aren't the ones who decided to remarry – you are. They may feel afraid that you are going to start a "new" family and forget them; or they may dislike your

new spouse. Sometimes children hear negative feedback from their other parent as well. And while your kids face these challenges (and likely act out because of them), you must parent and discipline them appropriately while you also adjust to this new situation.

It is essential to remember that blending a family takes time. Research shows that it takes anywhere from 4-10 years to fully adjust to life as a step-family. The more you work together at it, the sooner the adjustment will happen. But becoming a step-family cannot be forced, nor does it happen with the natural flow of becoming a traditional family (pregnancy, birth, growth, etc). It requires patience and commitment and the sooner you accept this, the less pain you will experience. In the meantime, here are some guidelines to make the transition a bit smoother:

- ♦ **As spouses, you MUST be a team.** Do not let the kids divide and conquer. Even if you disagree on an issue, and you will, you must present a united front to the kid(s) and discuss disagreements when you are alone. NEVER undermine your spouse in front of your child.

- ♦ **The stepparent should avoid taking the disciplinarian/parenting role as much as possible, although this is more difficult with young children.** To the extent possible, let the children's mom or dad set the rules and make the major decisions; your job is to act as a supporter to those decisions. When you do have to discipline or parent, come up with a plan with your spouse and make expectations clear to the kids together. Then implement them in a clear, unemotional way. Be prepared to repeat yourself many, many times!

- ♦ **Find trusted friends and supporters outside of your marriage with whom you can share.** Your spouse should not have to hear every complaint and frustration you have and while it's fair to share some of them, especially when you need to come up with solutions or implement changes, complain or vent to your friends instead.

- ♦ **Back off.** If you are trying hard to make everything wonderful and happy and cheery, this is admirable, but it will backfire. The kids need time to get to know you or your new spouse, and you need time to get comfortable with this new situation as well. Don't take it personally if they don't adore you or your new spouse right away. Just back off and let them come to you. They will eventually seek you out if you create a safe, healthy environment for them.

- ♦ **Be consistent.** Figure out with your spouse what the rules of the house are and stick to them. Don't make exceptions just to get on the kids' good side because they will learn to manipulate you, and you will definitely pay the price later on. Stick to your guns but do it in a clear, non-confrontational way.

- ♦ **Don't take things personally.** This one is tough. It feels personal when your child or stepchild ignores a question you ask and walks out of the room. It feels personal when they act disrespectful in your presence. Resist the temptation to react and instead remember that it has nothing to do with you and everything to do with their confusion and frustration with the situation.

- ♦ **Help your kids/stepkids deal with the uncertainty and fear that they are feeling.** As much as you are scared, uncertain, exhausted, and overwhelmed, I guarantee the kids are as well. In fact, they often feel more so because this is happening to them without their input, approval or choice, whereas you have a voice in what is happening. The kids need a safe and non-threatening environment in which to voice their concerns and to ask questions. If you can, create this at home with a weekly family meeting. If this is too hard, involve a third party, such as a therapist or spiritual advisor, to help. You don't necessarily have to respond to or "fix" whatever your kids say is bothering them; just the act of them sharing and you listening will help to decrease their anxiety and fear.

It can be hard, when you are in the midst of all the turmoil and change, to

imagine that step-parenting or blending a family will bring you joy and happiness, but it certainly can. You get to be an integral part of the physical, emotional, intellectual and relational development of the kids' lives, and that is a privilege. Your stepchildren can bring you great joy, satisfaction and fulfillment over the years as you see them grow, succeed and mature, and you know that you have helped them on their path. In addition, you can be a trusted adult to the kids without all the responsibility of daily parenting. You may find that your relationship with your child(ren) grows and expands in ways it didn't or couldn't when you were a single parent, doing things on your own. If you work as a team, creating a blended family can be very connecting and intimate for you and your spouse.

You can learn a great deal about yourself in the process. Many parents will tell you that parenting is the most humbling experience around; stepparenting may be even more so; your stepchildren can teach you and help you grow as an individual if you take advantage of the opportunity. If you have children, or plan to have children, your stepchildren can be a wonderful source of support and care for their half-siblings

These benefits may take years to realize and a great deal of patience and fortitude will be required of you in the meantime. Hopefully, as you wait and put in the long and thankless hours in this most difficult of jobs, you can look forward to the time when these joys will come to fruition.

¹ www.divorcereform.org/rates

² http://info.ag.vt.edu/vce/offices/newsletters/blended_families.pdf



Elisabeth Tullis Schneider, LMFT, is a marriage and family therapist at Family Centers in Darien and Center for Hope and Renewal in Greenwich. She has a teenage stepdaughter and is expecting her first baby this spring. For more information about Family Centers, visit <http://www.familycenters.org/> or call 869-4848 or 655-0547; for more information on Center for Hope and Renewal, visit <http://www.hopeandrenewal.org/> or call (203) 340-9816.

An "Eye" on Safety: Protecting Your Child's Eyes This Summer

By Andrew Wolf, MD

Children spend countless hours outdoors during the summer. Baseball games, swim parties, barbecues, and endless days on the beach are all part of a healthy childhood experience. Unfortunately, most eye injuries related to sun exposure and sports also occur during the summer months. Proper eye protection for your child can significantly reduce the risk of injury.

SUN SAFETY

Excessive exposure to sunlight during childhood can be extremely harmful to the eyes. Sunlight contains dangerous ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which over time can lead to a number of eye problems, including injury to the surface of the eye, cataracts, and macular degeneration.

All children should wear sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats, especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when ultraviolet exposure is the most dangerous. UV exposure can be especially intense at high altitudes or near reflective bodies of water and bright sandy beaches. It is also important to recognize that clouds offer very little protection from the sun's rays, as UV light passes easily through them.

There are two types of UV rays: UV-A and UV-B.

Although most sunglasses block UV-B radiation, many do not afford UV-A protection. Effective sunglasses for children should block 99-100% of both UV-A and UV-B radiation. Be sure to read the label on the sunglasses closely and only buy those that meet these criteria. Wearing sunglasses without UV protection can actually make the situation worse since the dark lenses

cause the pupils to dilate, allowing more of the dangerous UV radiation to enter and potentially damage the eye.

Many parents fail to provide proper eye protection for their child for fear that the child will frequently lose or break their sunglasses. Fortunately, suitable sunglasses can be quite inexpensive. When selecting a pair of sunglasses, it is important to remember that higher cost does not always correlate with better protection. Wrap around styles with large lenses that fit close to the eyes are best as they prevent the sun's rays from entering through the sides of the frames. Parents can set a good example for their children by wearing sunglasses at the appropriate times.

SPORTS SAFETY

Eye injuries are very common on the playing fields. Almost 50% of eye injuries in children occur while playing sports or participating in other recreational activities.

Adequate prevention can significantly reduce the risk of your child suffering a sports-related eye injury this summer. Studies have shown that more than 90% of eye injuries can be prevented by

wearing appropriate protective eyewear.

The majority of sports-related eye injuries are due to blunt trauma. The severity and type of injury depends on the size, speed and hardness of the object hitting the eye. Sports with high-velocity ball action such as tennis, soccer, golf, baseball, basketball, lacrosse, and hockey are

potentially the most dangerous.

Common eye injuries associated with sports are abrasions and contusions, corneal lacerations, retinal detachments, and fractures of the bones around the eye. Children suspected of having an eye injury should be examined promptly at an emergency room or by an ophthalmologist, as the serious nature of the injury may not be readily apparent.

The best protective eyewear is a sports frame with polycarbonate lenses. Protective glasses or face shields are available for most sports. Polycarbonate is a high-impact shatter-resistant plastic that offers ultraviolet protection and can be made in prescription or non-prescription lenses. Although many athletes wear contact lenses, they do not provide any protection against injury. Many believe that regular eyeglasses will protect their eyes; however, the lenses of regular eyeglasses can break upon impact and potentially lead to an even more serious eye injury.

It can be difficult to convince athletes, especially teenagers, to wear the recommended protective eyewear. It is important for parents, teachers and coaches to convey the importance of protective eyewear. Your eye doctor can recommend the eyewear that is most appropriate for your child. Following the above guidelines can help make this a safe summer for your child!

RESOURCES

www.preventblindness.org
www.aapos.org
[www.aao.org/aaosite/eyemd/
children.cfm](http://www.aao.org/aaosite/eyemd/children.cfm)



Andrew Wolf is a Pediatric Ophthalmologist with Stamford Ophthalmology. He specializes in all aspects of pediatric eye care.

"Eye injuries are very common on the playing fields. Almost 50% of eye injuries in children occur while playing sports or participating in other recreational activities."

Advice From the Greenwich Police Department

Safety Considerations

By Detective Christy F. Girard

Leaving Children Unattended in a Car

It surprises me how often I see children left in a car. It may be while the parent or caregiver runs into a store to pay for gas, or gets the dry cleaning. Many times the engine is still running and the doors are unlocked. I had a case where several children were left in a car in the driveway with the engine running. One child got into the driver's seat and put the shifter in gear. The car rolled down the driveway, across the street, and into the neighbor's garage. Thankfully, nobody got hurt.

Connecticut General Statute 53-21a, "Leaving a Child Under the Age of 12 Unsupervised," is a recently enacted law. Under this statute, any person having control or providing supervision of any child under the age of 12, and knowingly leaves the child unsupervised in a place of public accommodation or a motor vehicle for a period of time that presents a substantial risk to the child's health or safety, is guilty of a Class A Misdemeanor, punishable up to a year in prison with a maximum fine of \$2,000. Under that same statute, if the situation is between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., it is considered a Class C Felony, punishable up to 10 years incarceration and a \$10,000 fine.

Another statute on the subject of leaving a child unsupervised in a car is Connecticut General Statute 53-21, Risk of Injury to a Minor. It is a Class C Felony, punishable up to ten years incarceration. Each child left unsupervised is another count, and another ten years.

You may ask how long is "a period of time that presents a substantial risk." According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, it takes the average car thief 30 to 90 seconds to steal a car depending on the type of

car and the security system. In addition, in the summer and winter a child may quickly be put at risk due to extreme temperatures.

I know that it is not easy having an arm full of groceries or take out while managing kids, but that is our job; as parents we juggle things. Leaving our children in the car while we run errands is not an option. I fondly remember when the Honorable Chase Rogers, who is now the Chief Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court, addressed a defendant in Court who was answering criminal charges for leaving his child in his car unattended. She rhetorically asked, "Would you ever leave a million dollars on the seat of your car unattended?"

Airsoft and Paintball Guns: Safety Considerations

As the warm weather approaches, kids take to playing outdoors. Over the past few years the Greenwich Police Department has had many calls regarding Airsoft and paintball guns. These calls have included 911 emergency calls regarding someone in possession of a gun, complaints of injuries from an Airsoft pellet, and vandalism from paintballs to houses, cars and other property.

Both Airsoft guns and paintball guns are popular with today's youth. Connecticut State Law requires a person to be 18 years of age to *purchase* an Airsoft or paintball gun, but there are no laws preventing anyone at any age to *possess* one. They both shoot a projectile, however an Airsoft gun may look identical to an actual firearm, down to the exact size, color and markings. Some even have a detachable magazine that functions in the same way as a real pistol. *Although*

federal and state laws exist requiring the end of the barrel of an Airsoft-type gun to be colored bright orange, many do not have these markings. This makes it almost impossible for even a trained law enforcement professional to differentiate between a toy and the real thing, especially in the dark.

The differences between Airsoft guns and paintball guns are:

- ♦ Airsoft guns shoot out small plastic pellets; paintball guns shoot out marble-sized encapsulated "balls" of paint.
- ♦ Airsoft guns are replicas of handguns or rifles; paintball guns generally do not resemble actual firearms. They have a large attached container that holds the balls of paint, and a compressed air tank. However, when that container is detached, a paintball gun can look similar to a real firearm.
- ♦ The plastic pellets that are shot out of an Airsoft gun can travel 50 to 70 feet at speeds up to 500 feet per second (fps); paintballs can travel up to 300 fps. The Airsoft pellets can penetrate a soda can, break a glass bottle, kill a small animal and/or cause severe injuries.

Here are some safety issues to consider:

- ♦ Always have your child wear safety gear, including eye and neck protection when handling either an Airsoft or paintball gun.
- ♦ Supervise your child and instruct them on how to safely use an Airsoft or paintball gun.
- ♦ Instruct your child to look beyond the target to make sure there is nothing or no one behind it.
- ♦ Check with friends' parents to make sure they allow their children to use this type of "toy."
- ♦ Instruct your child to ALWAYS put down an Airsoft or paintball gun if a police officer approaches them.

Kid-Friendly Recipe

Summer Chicken

This is a quick and delicious supper for the family. Add your favorite salad and a steamed vegetable for a healthy meal. Enjoy!

Ingredients:

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 2 large summer tomatoes, chopped
- 3 scallions, sliced
- 12 ounce box fresh sliced mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons canola or vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 teaspoons butter
- 4 ounce, fat-free or low-fat chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon thyme (optional)
- 1 8-ounce carton light or fat-free sour cream
- Small bowtie pasta

Preparation:

Pound chicken breasts to even thickness. Salt and pepper chicken. Saute in oil on medium heat for 5 minutes on each side. Transfer chicken to oven-proof dish; cover and place in oven at 250 degrees. Stir mushrooms and a tablespoon of water into pan drippings. Reduce heat to saute mushrooms slowly until soft. Add chopped tomatoes and scallions and cook until soft. Stir to release sauteed bits and add 2 teaspoons butter and 1 tablespoon flour. Cook on low for 1 minute and add 4 oz. chicken broth. Season with thyme and stir until silky. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream. Serve immediately over chicken and pasta.

SUMMER FAMILY CALENDAR

June



1

"Phenomenal Weather" Family Day

1 - 4 PM
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Make your own windsock and rain gauge. Also features "How They Make a Forecast" presentation at 3 PM. Activities suitable for people of all abilities. Free with museum admission. 869-6786

Touch-a-Truck

11 AM - 4 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
Climb aboard a fire truck and operate a construction truck! Sponsored by the Junior League of Greenwich. 869-1979

5

Greenwich Board of Education Work Session

7 - 9 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich
Avenue
625-7400

7

Father's Forum

8 AM
YMCA, Greenwich Discussion sponsored by the Greenwich Coalition to Combat Underage Drinking. Free gccud@yahoo.com

76th Annual "AKC All-Breed Show"

8:30 AM - 6:30 PM
Taylor Farm Park, Norwalk
\$5 adults, children 12 and under free.
Rain or shine.
203-426-1173

8

Autism Annual Walk

9:30 AM Registration and Resource Fair,
10 AM Opening Ceremonies,
11 AM Walk
Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY
914-934-5138

Children's Picnic in the 100-Acre Wood

Noon - 3 PM
Garden Education Center, Greenwich
Children's party hosted by the Junior
Committee. Call for cost.
869-9242

10

"Dance Group" Children's Program

3 PM
Byram Archibald Neighborhood Center,
Greenwich Crafts workshop precedes
performance. Sponsored by the Friends
of Byram Shubert Library. Free.
531-4026

13

"Cook Your Buns" Run and Barbecue

6:30 PM
Tod's Point, Old Greenwich
Kick off your summer with a friendly
jaunt around the trails and roads of Tod's
Point followed by a barbecue of burgers,
hot dogs, fresh salads and watermelon.
Sponsored by Threads and Treads.
Adults \$15 pre-entry or \$20 race day;
kids \$10 pre-entry or \$15 race day.
661-0142



19

Greenwich Board of Education

Meeting
7 - 10 PM
Town Hall Meeting Room, Greenwich
625-7400

28

"Climate Change: From Snowball Earth to Global Warming" Exhibit
Museum Hours

The Bruce Museum, Greenwich Take a journey through Earth's history of climatic changes. Examine fossil and modern evidence for climatic variations. Thru 11/9/08. \$7 adults, \$6 seniors and students, free for members and children under 5.
869-6786

Annual Salute to Veterans

11 AM
Havemayer Field, Greenwich
Free.
981-4340



July

5

Town Fireworks

Dusk
Binney Park, Old Greenwich;
Tod's Point, Old Greenwich
Celebrate the 4th of July! Raindate 7/6.
Sponsored by the Greenwich
Department of Parks and Recreation.
622-7814

7

"Family Movie Night"

6:30 PM Picnic; 7 PM Children's Show;
8:15 PM Movie
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich
Call for movie selection. Rain date 7/8
Sponsored by the Greenwich
Department of Parks and Recreation.
Free.
622-7830

12

"Sand Blast" Sand Sculpture Festival

11 AM - 4 PM
Tod's Point, Old Greenwich
Great fun for the whole family!
Sponsored by the Greenwich
Department of Parks and Recreation.
Free.
618-7650

17

Sidewalk Sale

Store hours
Greenwich Avenue, Greenwich
Thru 7/19. Either find great sales or avoid
Greenwich Avenue!
869-3500

August

11

"Family Night"

6:30 PM Picnic; 7 PM Children's Show;
8:15 PM Movie
Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich
Call for movie selection. Rain date 8/12
Sponsored by the Greenwich Department
of Parks and Recreation. Free.
622-7830

12

Annual "Carnival of Fun"

Call for hours
St. Catherine of Sienna Church, Riverside
Annual fair featuring rides, games, food,
entertainment and dancing. Thru 8/16.
637-3661

26

Grades 6 & 9 Greenwich Public School Orientation

Half-day orientation for incoming 6th and
9th grade Greenwich public school students
going into middle school and high school.
625-7400

27

First Day of School
Greenwich Public Schools



28

Greenwich Board of Education Meeting

7 - 10 PM
Parkway School, Greenwich
625-7400

Greenwich Beaches

Beach passes are required from May 1st through October 31st. During that time, prior to 7 AM and after 5 PM, only vehicle permits for residents and vehicle fees for visitors will be required; no per person fees will be charged. A park pass or guest card/ticket and a vehicle permit/parking pass is required between 7 AM and 5 PM. From November 1st through April 30th, no fees will be charged to enter Greenwich Point and Byram Park. Lifeguards are on duty from Memorial Day weekend thru Labor Day weekend from 10 AM - 6 PM. Call the Town Hall Beach Card Office, 681-3019 or www.greenwichct.org for more information.

Byram Beach / Pool

This park has the only public pool in town. Bathhouses are available for those using both beach and pool. Hours of Operation: Saturday before Memorial Day-Labor Day: Daily Hours: 9:00 AM - 7:45 PM Pool Hours: 10:00 AM - 7:45 PM (until August 13th); 10 AM - 5:45 PM (August 14th to Labor Day); Family Swim: 5 - 6 PM, M, W, F.

Greenwich Point

Open daily from 6:00 am until sunset. Activities include jogging, walking, cycling, nature study, boating, fishing, sailboarding, sun bathing, swimming, and picnicking.

Island Beach

Island Beach is situated in Long Island Sound about two miles south of Greenwich Harbor. Ferry service from June 9th to September 16th; 10 AM - 7 PM (6/9 thru 8/19) and 10 AM - 6 PM (8/20 thru 9/16). Ferry runs every hour, M-F; every half hour Sat., Sun. and holidays. Adults \$2; children \$1; seniors no fee; 4 and under no fee; guests \$6.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Typical Behavior or Something More?

By Betsy Benenson

All children have worries and doubts and yearn for some stability and routine in their lives. In fact, following certain rituals can be a source of comfort and can help calm a child's world. Childhood rituals and superstitions vary with age. By the age of 2 ½, most children have routines that they like to follow, such as taking a warm bath and listening to a story before bedtime, or arranging dolls or toys in a specific order. Between the ages of five and six, children develop group rituals, and will begin to play games that have rules and rhymes. Did you ever hold your breath as you passed a cemetery or lift your feet as you passed over railroad tracks? Ritualized behaviors help children to become socialized and to overcome anxiety. However, when obsessive thoughts become so frequent or intense, or rituals become so extensive that they interfere with day-to-day functioning, the diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is considered.

WHAT IS OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER?

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the essential features of OCD are recurrent obsessions or compulsions that are time consuming (greater than one hour per day), cause a child distress, and interfere with daily activity. What distinguishes OCD from transient rituals or behavioral preferences is a child's distress if the ritual is prevented or the sequence interrupted. In children, obsessions without compulsions are relatively rare.

Obsessions are persistent ideas and thoughts that are out of the child's control. Common obsessions are fears about contamination, repeated doubts, and a need to have things in a particular order. The child usually

tries to ignore or suppress the thoughts by neutralizing them with some other thought or action -- a compulsion. For example, a child who is plagued with doubts about having locked the front door might compulsively check the door again and again, to ensure that it is locked.

Compulsions are repetitive behaviors or acts a child performs to prevent or reduce the anxiety that is caused by the obsessive thoughts. For example, a child who has an obsession with neatness will redo a homework assignment so many times he may tear a hole in it from constant erasing. Washing rituals have been identified as the most common symptom of OCD in children and may be expressed in repeated handwashing and elaborate bathing or shower rituals.

OCD in children is usually diagnosed between ages 10-12. An estimated 2% of children in the United States experience OCD. Onset appears earlier in males than in females, but gender differences eventually disappear by middle childhood. Children generally do not request help; they often keep the symptoms hidden from their families because they are embarrassed about them. More often than not the problem is identified by parents, who may notice their child repeating nonsensical behavioral patterns, such as checking and re-checking that an appliance has been turned off. It is interesting to note that in 90% of children with OCD, the symptom patterns change over time. For example, checking behaviors may later be replaced by counting or arranging rituals.

Researchers have discovered that many children diagnosed with OCD experience a severe decline in global functioning. Children who have elaborate nighttime rituals will likely not invite friends to sleepovers, and will probably refuse to accept similar

invitations. In addition, homework may become overwhelming as a child spends hours checking, rechecking, and erasing. As the ordering and arranging rituals become more complex and time consuming, they become more difficult to hide from classmates. The potential for being "discovered" by friends and schoolmates may increase the child's anxiety and reinforce feelings of inadequacy for not being able to control his or her own thoughts or actions.

Disorders that frequently occur with OCD include other anxiety disorders, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and learning disorders.

TREATMENT OF OCD

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, OCD usually responds well to treatment with certain medications and/or exposure-based psychotherapy, in which the person faces situations that cause the anxiety and becomes less sensitive to them. For example, the person with OCD might leave the house and check the lock only once (exposure) without going back and checking again (ritual prevention). As the anxiety decreases, the person will hopefully progress to not checking the lock at all.

Children at times will display preferences for order to make sense of their universe. As long as these rituals do not cause overwhelming distress there is no cause for concern. However, if the behavior interferes with daily living and is associated with increased anxiety it is wise to seek professional help.



Parents Together co-editor Betsy Benenson lives in Greenwich with her husband and three children. She is currently studying to become a Guidance Counselor.

Ticks Steal Playtime From Kids: The Importance of Increasing Awareness of Lyme Disease

By Sharon Waxman

Several months ago, my 10-year-old daughter was diagnosed with Lyme disease after months of experiencing a wide array of debilitating symptoms. Not only has she missed many weeks of school this year due to headaches, fever, nausea and joint pain, but her Lyme Disease has been difficult to treat. This has made me realize how important it is for all parents to be reminded of the symptoms and dangers of Lyme disease as well as the precautions we can all take to protect our children from the ticks that carry Lyme Disease.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has reported that children ages 2 to 15 have the highest reported rates of Lyme Disease.¹ Lyme Disease is the most common vector-borne, infectious disease in America, with roughly 20,000 cases diagnosed each year and many more cases going undetected and unreported.² The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that only one case in ten of Lyme Disease gets reported to the CDC as required³. Unfortunately, we live in the state with one of the highest incidences of Lyme Disease.

Lyme Disease is a bacterial infection caused by the bite of a tiny deer tick that carries the infection. The classic symptom of infection, a circular, spreading, bull's-eye rash, occurs in fewer than 50% of Lyme patients. Symptoms of Lyme Disease can reappear in cycles and can manifest themselves as musculoskeletal issues, neurological issues, cognitive symptoms, psychological symptoms, visual problems, digestive symptoms or general feelings of malaise. Don't assume that certain symptoms must be present to have Lyme Disease. If your child has been experiencing problems with joint pain or swelling, bone sensitivity, rib soreness, generalized muscle pain, these are some possible symptoms of Lyme

Disease. Headaches, tremors, numbness, twitching, poor balance and tingling sensations can indicate neurological symptoms of Lyme. Unexplained depression or personality changes, neck stiffness and vision problems can also be symptoms of Lyme Disease. When Lyme Disease invades a child's body, pain can migrate to different body parts and symptoms can change. Some children experience night sweats and/or persistent fatigue. The range and combination of symptoms of Lyme Disease are vast and can vary significantly from person to person so it is important to consult a doctor and get tested if the symptoms are disruptive and persistent.

Fortunately, we can take steps to protect our children while they are playing outside this spring. Taking basic precautions can reduce the risk of being bitten by a tick infected with Lyme. Deer bring ticks to your yard, and birds and other animals help carry the ticks around, but mice are the main culprits in spreading the disease. Deer ticks like cool, moist environments along roads as well as moist, garden areas in wooded settings. Keeping your lawn mowed and cutting down brushy areas around your home creates a less inviting setting for ticks. Leaf litter, wood piles and rock walls are also areas of high tick concentration. Consider treating your property with insecticides in May, July and October to significantly reduce the number of deer ticks.⁴ Ask your veterinarian for products to administer to your pets to kill ticks and be conscious of the fact that ticks can "hitch-hike" from pets to the humans that live with them via beds or sofas. Most importantly, check your children DAILY for ticks and dress them in long-sleeved and long-legged, light-colored clothing when out in areas that might have ticks. Ticks love

to hide in warm, moist places, such as the groin, back of the knees, armpits, the back of the neck, navel and ears⁵.

Early and proper removal of ticks minimizes the risk of disease transmission so this is a critical component of prevention. Ask your pediatrician for a recommended insect repellent and apply Permanone as a spray onto outer clothing and shoes⁶. If you find a tick on your child, remove it with tweezers, being careful not to squeeze the tick's body. Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it out gently without twisting motions. The Greenwich Department of Health in Town Hall (203-622-7843) can test the tick (dead or alive) for Lyme if you bring it in to them in a sealed plastic bag, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m.- 3 p.m. Time for Lyme, at www.timeforlyme.org, is also an excellent resource with much more information.

Being outdoors is a healthy way for our kids to enjoy springtime. By taking as many precautions as possible against Lyme Disease, the memories of the fresh air, exercise and good times will be the only things your children bring home with them.

1. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 105 No. 1, January 2000, p. 142
2. Mary Carmichael, "The Great Lyme Debate," *Newsweek*, August 6, 2007, p 42.
3. www.LymePa.org
4. *Protecting Yourself and Your Family from Lyme Disease*, Kenneth B. Liegner, MD, September 1989.
5. www.TimeForLyme.org
6. Liegner, *op. cit.*



Sharon Waxman lives in Greenwich, CT.

Our Heartfelt Thanks!

Your donations are continuously needed to fund the eight newsletters (four issues of *Parents Together* and four issues of *Primer*) we publish each school year. Our sincere thanks to the contributors listed below whose gifts were received in response to our 2008 appeal letter.

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Dear Readers:

This issue marks the 30th **Anniversary** of the Parents Together organization. In 1979 the Greenwich Advisory Council on Youth and Drugs, in collaboration with the Junior League of Greenwich, the Greenwich Public School administrators and the Greenwich PTA Council, created the organization to discuss cooperative measures for addressing newly perceived needs of parents. Since then Parents Together has been committed to the mission "To give parents the opportunity to **communicate** parenting concerns; **share** parenting skills and insights; **support** each other in making sound decisions about their children's activities; **learn** new skills for being more effective, loving parents."

Many thanks to those of you who responded to our 30th Anniversary Annual Appeal letter which was mailed in March. If you did not receive a letter and wish to contribute, please complete the form below and mail to *Parents Together*, P.O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831.

Thanks for your continued support!

Betsy Benenson
Polly Hyman
Co-Editors

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Who We Are

Parents Together is an independent, nonprofit organization in Greenwich, CT, that offers ongoing opportunities for parents to communicate, share, support and learn together. We work in cooperation with the Parent Teacher Associations of the public, private and parochial schools in town. The *Parents Together* organization and delegates from Greenwich schools plan programs for parents of children in grades K through 12. We also publish two quarterly newsletters: *Parents Together Primer*, for parents of children from birth through fifth grade, and *Parents Together*, for parents of adolescents.

Distribution: *Parents Together Primer* is distributed to parents through their children's preschools and elementary schools. *Parents Together* is mailed to parents of children in grades 6 through 12 in all Greenwich public and independent schools.

Newsletter Subscriptions and

Correspondence: We invite parents and other readers interested in local parenting issues to subscribe to either or both newsletters. For an annual subscription, please indicate which newsletter you wish to receive, and send your name, address and \$10 for each subscription, in a check payable to **Parents Together**, to P. O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831-0417.

Contact Us!

Do you have a story idea, writer suggestion or comment for the *Parents Together Primer* staff? You may fax it to 698-3376 or e-mail it to ptprimer@optonline.net.

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Greenwich Red Cross Safety Town

Greenwich Red Cross is offering Safety Town from June 9th - June 13th and June 16th - June 20th. Each week-long half-day session is a comprehensive safety education program introducing awareness and prevention skills for youngsters entering a traditional kindergarten program in Fall 2008.

Topics covered in Safety Town include automobile, pedestrian, fire, bike, gun, animal, playground and water safety, along with information about medicines and poisons, traveling on trains and buses, stranger awareness and more. During the session children will learn by actively participating in safety lessons. Under the guidance of classroom teachers, Greenwich police officers, fire fighters, EMS and other community helpers, children will learn and practice safe reactions and behaviors. They will also tour an ambulance, fire truck and school bus.

Safety Town will be held at the Greenwich Boys & Girls Club. Sessions meet from 12:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. The fee for this week-long program is \$140. Registration is required; forms are available at www.greenwichredcross.org or can be picked up at the Greenwich Chapter of the Red Cross at 99 Indian Field Road, Greenwich.

*This issue of Parents Together Primer was made possible by
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Parents TOGETHER

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