

Parents TOGETHER PRIMER

Fall 2008

A Newsletter for Greenwich Parents of Children from Birth Through Fifth Grade ©
www.parentstogetherct.org

TO OUR READERS

This is the first newsletter of the 2008 - 2009 calendar; look for others throughout the school year. Please contact your school's delegate (see page 7) if you have any questions about the **newsletter** or our upcoming **programs** - see below. We look forward to seeing you at one of our programs!

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

November 10

Mary Ellen Doyle Markowitz, LCSW, will present "**Discipline During the Elementary Years.**" She will discuss how to get your child to stop unwanted behaviors, and how to shape the behavior you want while encouraging responsibility and resiliency.

March 2, 2009

Kathy Steiner will present "**Girls and the Impact of the Media.**" Greenwich High School Wellness Education teacher and coach Ms Steiner will delve into how to help preserve our girls' self-esteem and sense of self in the face of unrealistic images presented on television, magazines, catalogs and video.

All programs are held in the Cone Room at Greenwich Town Hall and start at 9:15 AM unless otherwise specified. They are free and open to the public.

Parenting Styles

How They Affect Your Child's Development

by Mary Ellen Markowitz, L.C.S.W.

For over forty years Dr. Diana Baumrind, a research psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, has investigated the impact of different parenting styles on child development. Her work has remained the "gold standard" and her findings have been discussed in almost every parenting book written. Her main concern has always been to identify those parenting strategies that are most likely to turn out autonomous children who are capable of leading loving and independent lives.

Dr. Baumrind defines three styles with which most people can identify – authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative – and outlines their outcomes for child development. It is important to note that embedded within each of these styles are very different approaches to connection, warmth and discipline, and how parents control their children. While having a warm connection with our children is important, pairing it with appropriate discipline is a much better indicator of healthy development. Research shows that parents who believe they

have a warm relationship with their child, but worry that they let their kids get away with too much, have a legitimate concern. Madeline Levine, author of [The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids](#), would argue that "holding kids to their responsibilities is just as important as cozy late night talks." She states that we need to establish a loving connection so that our kids have a solid base from which to launch their adulthood. We want to discipline our children to the extent that we keep them safe enough to develop the skills they need to lead autonomous and successful lives in society. In other words, it is our job to civilize them.

These well-intended goals have nuances. Outlined below is a description of the three major parenting styles and the effect they have on the developing child.

Authoritarian: Authoritarian parents rely on inflexible rules for running their households. They can be engaged with their children but not particularly

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interested in their point of view. For the most part, discipline is enforced swiftly and without discussion. These parents tend to be detached from their children's needs and not very warm.

Instead they tend to be critical and demanding, and they are disinclined to support the child's growing need for autonomy. "Because I said so" is the often-used mantra in these households.

The result of this type of parenting style is that the children tend to exhibit low self-esteem and poor social skills. They can be withdrawn, discontent and distrustful. Research shows these kids have a high rate of depression. In addition, they lack curiosity because "thinking outside the box" is not encouraged. They are overly dependent on adults for guidance and control. Studies show that children from authoritarian households may be more aggressive. According to the research, due to this one-way emphasis on power, these homes can be breeding grounds for bullies.

Permissive: This type of parent tends to be "friends" with their children. This parenting style is non-controlling, non-demanding, but warm. The parents are involved with their children but not insistent on appropriate behavior. Their response to criticism of a child's behavior is likely to be "it's just a stage," and they may blame teachers, coaches or other adults for their children's poor grades or bad behavior. These parents try to protect their children from the necessary consequences of their behavior or from experiencing disappointment or frustration. Because these parents are hesitant

to discipline, or to curb their child's aggressive and socially unacceptable impulses, the child's emotional and social growth is stunted. Since rules are erratically enforced, there is no sense in these homes that the adults are in control.

As a result of this type of parenting style, the children tend to be likeable, social and enjoy high self-esteem. On the other hand, research shows they tend to be impulsive, immature, manipulative and have difficulty understanding the consequences of their actions. They exhibit lower rates of academic achievement and higher rates of substance abuse than children from authoritarian or authoritative parents.

Authoritative: This type of parent is warm and accepting but sets clearly defined limits and expectations. They are in control of the household. They are demanding but responsive to their child's needs and ideas. They use support rather than criticism or punishment to encourage children to respect the household rules. This style places a high value on cooperation, social responsibility, and self-regulation. These parents value high achievement and self-motivation but do not overly emphasize competition. They promote autonomy by encouraging children to figure out how to approach challenges and solve problems on their own. They support the child's growing autonomy while focusing on both independence and connection. This loving but firm parenting style promotes maturity with the use of appropriate discipline.

The outcome of this parenting style is that the best-adjusted child comes from homes with

authoritative parents. The research shows that children from these families have a balanced attitude towards achievement, better social skills, higher grades, lower rates of substance abuse and less depression. They are better equipped to lead independent lives, maintain loving interpersonal relationships and to enjoy a sense of competence.

Being a parent is one the most difficult and challenging tasks in life. We must all find the patience to accept our weaknesses and forgive our past mistakes. However, going forward, I believe it is worth the effort to examine our own areas of weakness. It is important to think about how you were parented and take a close look at the script handed down to you. It may need some editing or major revising. For instance, if your parents were too permissive you may have trouble knowing where and when to draw the line regarding inappropriate behavior. If your parents were too critical or too punitive and never valued your input, just the opposite can be the case. You may find yourself becoming the harsh and punitive dictator you swore you would never become. Striving for a relationship that is warm, supportive and yet authoritative is difficult at times, but it is worth the effort. Most importantly it is a gift for your child. Through such structured guidance, he will be able to reach his potential, and become the independent and resilient person who is able to confidently take on the challenges of the adult world.



Greenwich resident and mother Mary Ellen Markowitz has a private practice and facilitates parenting groups.

Manners Matter

At Every Age, In Every Situation

A Conversation with Michele O'Reilly

As Founder and Director of the Connecticut School of Etiquette, Michele O'Reilly knows the importance of manners. Recently *Parents Together* caught up with Michele to ask her for advice.

Parents Together: Many parents today comment that their children are not "polite." Do you think that this is a generational condition or are we, as parents, not focusing on the importance of manners as much as our parents did?

Michele O'Reilly: I believe it to be the result of both factors, a generational condition as well as not having the time to focus on the importance of manners.

Teaching manners requires time and patience. It is often a "thankless" job until your child grows into an adult and realizes the greatest gift you gave them...a sense of respect, character, integrity, accountability and civility. Having good manners means more than placing your napkin on your lap or eating your soup correctly. Manners are taught as much by parents' actions as by their words.

In today's society, parents and children are extremely busy. There is less time for sit down family meals every night with polite conversation, fewer two parent households. We have road rage, and images in the media

promoting rudeness as acceptable and entertaining. Until recently there was a rebellion of sorts against formality and tradition. What parents are realizing today is that good manners are neither pretentious nor outdated, but practical and necessary for increased self-esteem and overall personal and interpersonal success.

Good manners have been made more complicated by advances in technology. Handwritten thank you's are being replaced by emails and text messages. Face-to-face meetings are less common than a phone call. In some ways, we have depersonalized relationships while increasing our technical knowledge.

... a common complaint

*I hear from parents involves
a sense of entitlement...*

PT: As a professional what do you see most commonly in terms of "bad manners"?

MO'R: I have had the pleasure of working with many kind, bright, civic-minded children. They are goal oriented, multifaceted and hard working. But a common complaint I hear from parents involves a sense of entitlement

along with the ever-present lack of table manners.

PT: Is it ever too early to start teaching manners? Where/how do you suggest parents start?

MO'R: It is never too early to start teaching manners and planting the seeds of good manners. You teach your children manners by your actions and words, e.g. how you treat your spouse, friends, family and complete strangers. Well mannered, polite children grow into well mannered, polite adults. I believe if you are kind, considerate and respectful of others, your children will mirror that behavior. If you make it a point to hold the door for others to walk through; send a thank you note for a gift received; and conduct yourself in a manner that makes you "stand out" not "stick out," your children will learn to be grateful, respectful and kind. These are the lessons that will speak volumes to children.

How to hold a knife and fork is important but will mean little if the fundamental principles are lacking.

PT: Is it ever too late to start teaching manners? What advice to you have for parents who are concerned that their children are ill-mannered?

Manners continued from page 3

MO'R: It is never too late to start teaching manners. Communication with your children is key. Parents need to talk with their children and let them know what behaviors and attitudes are acceptable and unacceptable. Your children need to understand that how they treat others is a reflection on their character. Manners provide empowerment and confidence.

Etiquette is a way of life - it's about respect, kindness and consideration. Model the basic courtesies such as saying "please," "thank you," and "excuse me" and be aware of how you respond to others. It is up to you, the parent, to "plant the seeds" of good manners.

PT: An extremely shy child might appear to have bad manners when he or she is uncomfortable with greeting people. How do you suggest parents manage this?

MO'R: You know your own child best and you know their comfort level. Before meeting a new person or going into an unfamiliar environment, role play with your child and work on an appropriate greeting and potential follow-up conversation. Some children find it hard to make eye contact. In that situation I suggest telling her to look at a spot between the person's eyes - this can help if your child is self-conscious when meeting others. I recommend not putting your child down but give lots of positive reinforcement as she makes steps to overcome her shyness.

PT: Similarly, what advice to do you have for parents of children who are overly active?

MO'R: Our programs are instructional as opposed to therapeutic. However, if I am alerted to the fact that a child has attention deficit, I will manage the class to make it interesting and fun for all participants. Again, it's about expectations and plenty of praise as the child makes progress.

PT: With all the mobile technology at our children's disposal it's not uncommon to see young people talking on their cell phones or texting at restaurants; actually this goes for parents too! What are your thoughts on appropriate use of cell phones/ipods etc. in company?

MO'R: If you are with company and you receive a cell phone call or text message that you feel you have to take, at the very least, ask permission to take the call or respond to the text. Suggest that your child does the same. Otherwise you are sending the message that the call is more important than staying engaged with your present company. If your child has a cell phone, encourage him to put it on "vibrate" or "silent" mode when in a restaurant, theater, place of worship, etc. Instruct him to take the call away from the table to a place that is less likely to invade the space of others; just as you would also do. Tell him to be brief and be considerate. Also, tapping on a Blackberry is as

distracting to some as speaking on a cell phone!

PT: Please describe the kinds of programs or courses you offer.

MO'R: We offer courses for children, teens, young adults and professionals. We cover topics such as introductions, meeting and greeting, telephone/cell phone etiquette, thank you notes, table manners, acing the college or professional interview and more. You can visit our website at www.morethanmanners.com for upcoming events and programs.

PT: Do you have any specific stories or anecdotes you could share to illustrate the importance of manners?

MO'R: I received a thank you note from a student who said despite being shy, good manners made her feel more comfortable especially around new people.

While conducting a dining program, I had a young gentleman in his twenties quietly rise from his seat when the woman next to him excused herself from the table. He rose again when she arrived back to the table. The older gentlemen chuckled and thought he was putting on an act. He turned to them quite proudly and said "My grandmother always taught me that a gentleman rises for a lady." By the end of the class the other men were following suit.



The mother of five children, Michele O'Reilly lives in Southport.

Reading Aloud:

Motivating Children to Become Lifelong Readers

By Laurel Scarlata

By reading aloud, you advertise the pleasures of reading instead of the work that children too often associate with reading.

—Jim Trelease

As a former teacher, I am frequently asked by mothers of school-aged children, what should I be doing for my child? I have given the same answer for the last fifteen years: Read aloud to your child every day. That's it. It is quite simple. And I believe from my experience as an educator and as a mother, that it is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child. Early in my teaching career I came across a book that affirmed this belief, *The Read Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease. It has proven to be an invaluable guide. Its pages are dog-eared and paragraphs are underlined, and I often refer to its treasury for lists of "good" books to read to my children.

Trelease states that the most important subject in school is reading, as all subjects rest upon it. But more importantly, he believes that our objective as parents and educators is to create lifetime readers, not school time readers. Research shows that by senior year in high school only 25 percent of students will be lifetime readers. Trelease believes that our national scores are telling us that our children know how to read. But their behavior as children and adults tells us that they don't like it enough to do it very often. We've taught our children *how* to read but forgotten to teach them to *want* to read.

What turns kids on to reading? Trelease believes there's an inexpensive solution requiring just 15

minutes a day. There are no gimmicks or costly phonics programs to buy. According to Trelease, "What you need is parents and teachers reading terrific books to kids every day. Kids don't have favorite vowels, they have favorite stories. Who ever found a child in bed with a flashlight and a workbook?" The National Commission on Reading declared reading to children is the *single most important* factor in reading success.

I remember when my first son was born and how eager I was to read to him. I could not wait to share my

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that you can give to your child.*

favorite stories and the many others that had lit up my classroom days as well as my own childhood. Mem Fox, author of *Reading Magic*, states "The fire of literacy is created by the emotional sparks between a child, a book, and the person reading." I have had so much fun using different voices while I read *Charlotte's Web* or *The Little Engine that Could*. I roar while reading *Where the Wild Things Are* and whisper while reciting *Good Night Moon*.

I truly enjoy myself while reading aloud to my children. I delight in this daily activity. The tradition of reading aloud has remained a wonderful family time for us. It is always a happy time in our house. The books we have read have served as wonderful conversation pieces for us while we share our thoughts and questions with one another. Fox states "reading aloud and

talking about what we're reading sharpens children's brains. It helps develop their ability to concentrate at length, to solve problems logically, and to express themselves more easily and clearly. Reading is a process by which children learn the complexities of language, vocabulary, phonics and grammar."

As I mentioned earlier, reading aloud is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your child. One caution I would mention is to not stop reading aloud to your child just because he or she is reading independently. I was falling into the pattern of letting my oldest read to himself at night. Trelease fears it is a mistake that many of us make. He writes, "Children can hear and understand stories that are more complicated and more interesting than anything they could read on their own. The last thing you want first graders thinking is that what they're reading in first grade is as good as books are going to get! First graders can enjoy books written on a fourth grade level, and fifth-graders can enjoy books on a seventh-grade level reading level." But I found that after reading to him on a consistent basis for eight years, that I missed this time together. So we hit the library and got back into our routine.

I would strongly encourage you to pick up a copy of *The Read Aloud Handbook*... and read to your child every day!



Laurel Scarlata is a former kindergarten and 1st grade teacher at North Street School. She lives in Cos Cob with her husband and three children.

Keep Healthy and Avoid the 'Flu

You can still protect yourself from the flu even if you are not included in a priority group for the flu shot this year, or if no vaccines are available. These simple actions can stop the spread of germs and help protect you from getting sick:

♦ **Avoid close contact.**

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

♦ **Stay home when you are sick.**

If possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

♦ **Cover your mouth and nose.**

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

♦ **Clean your hands.**

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.

♦ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.**

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

♦ **Developing other good habits,** such as getting plenty of sleep, engaging in physical activity, managing stress, drinking plenty of water and eating good food will help you, and your children, stay healthy in the winter and all year.

Source: Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For more information visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

2008-2009 Parents Together

Delegates

Parents Together's strength as an organization stems from its effort to address broad parenting issues on a townwide basis, and narrower topics specific to individual schools.

Making sure this happens are delegates from every public and independent elementary, middle and upper school in Greenwich. Please share with your delegates the parenting issues that are on your mind so that they can tailor programs to best fit the needs of your school community. *Parents Together* thanks the following parents who have generously volunteered to serve as delegates in their schools this year

Brunswick School
Maryellen Feeley & Jane Shang

Central Middle School
Amy Bibb, Laura Knoeller & Mamie Lee

Convent of the Sacred Heart
Rhonda Morley

Cos Cob School
Lisa Edmundson

Eagle Hill
Cindy Leaman

Eastern Middle School
Emma King

Glenville School
Carol Fox

Greenwich Academy
Allyson Cowin & Nicole Heath

Greenwich Catholic School
Sheelah Morrisey Quinn

Greenwich Country Day School
Cary Keigher & Karen Marache

Greenwich High School
Amy Denton

Hamilton Avenue School
Patty Reilly

International School at Dundee
Suzanne Deschamps

Julian Curtiss School
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Mead School
TBA

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FAMILY FUN CALENDAR

November

6 **Thursday**
Greenwich Board of Education
Work Session
7 - 9 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich Avenue
625-7400

7 **Friday**
"Talk to the Animals"
1:30 PM
Convent of the Sacred Heart, Greenwich
Discover the wonder of animals. Free.
532-3534



8 **Saturday**
Inaugural College Symposium:
Learn About Colleges and
Universities
9:30 AM
UConn, Stamford
Sponsored by REACH Prep. Free.
487-0750

9 **Sunday**
Beachfront Bushwhack Race
10 AM
Greenwich Point, Old Greenwich
5-mile run, 1-mile for kids. Sponsored by
Threads & Treads. \$15 pre-race, \$20 race
day, \$10 kids.
661-0142

14 **Friday**
Parent Workshop: "Parenting Styles
and Decision Making"
6 PM
Boys & Girls Club, Greenwich
Childcare and dinner will be provided.
Reservations required. Free.
637-4824

20 **Thursday**
Greenwich Board of Education
Meeting
7 - 10 PM
Central Middle School, Greenwich
625-7400



22 **Saturday**
Enchanted Forest 2008
9 AM - 5 PM
Hyatt Regency, Old Greenwich
Junior League of Greenwich's annual
family event featuring seasonal trees, a
gingerbread village, holiday boutique,
children's events and more. Thru 11/23.
Call for cost.
869-1979

Safe Roads
9:30 AM - 12:30 PM
Greenwich Point, Old Greenwich Limited
traffic to allow for safe walking, jogging,
biking. Thru 4/5/09. Free.

25 **Tuesday**
Public Night at Bowman
Observatory
7 - 9 PM
Julian Curtiss School, Greenwich
Weather permitting. Free.
869-6786

29 **Saturday**
Model Rail Road Exhibition
1 - 5 PM; 7 - 9 PM
St. John's Episcopal Church, Stamford
Annual event. Also 12/6. \$5 adults, \$4
children. 655-1928

December

4 **Thursday**
Greenwich Board of Education
Work Session
7 - 9 PM
Havemeyer Building, Greenwich Avenue
625-7400



5 **Friday**
Christmas on Round Hill Holiday
Fair
6 PM
Round Hill Community Church,
Greenwich
Santa Claus and train rides. Also 12/6
at 9 AM. Free.
869-1071

9 **Tuesday**
Public Night at Bowman
Observatory
7 - 9 PM
Julian Curtiss School, Greenwich
Weather permitting. Also 12/23. Free.
869-6786

13 **Saturday**
Digging for Dinosaurs
Museum Hours
The Bruce Museum, Greenwich
Discover buried dinosaurs bones in an
interactive exhibit that recreates an
excavation site. Thru 7/26/09. \$7 adults,
\$6 seniors and students, free for children
under 5 and members.



18 **Thursday**
Greenwich Board of Education
Meeting
7 - 10 PM
Greenwich High School, Greenwich
625-7400

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 \$12 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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Our Heartfelt Thanks

Your donations are continuously needed to fund our newsletters and programs. Our sincere thanks to the contributors listed below whose gifts were received recently.

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