

# CO-OP COMMUNITY NEWS

From the Parent Advisory Council  
of the North Seattle Community College  
Cooperative Preschool Program



April 2007

## VITAMIN E

LUCIANNE HACKBERT

Empathy in action: a gift to your child and yourself

Recently, I heard Claude Madsen (Heather's Dad) talking about a tense interaction with his eldest daughter, Laura. He described a situation when Laura was refusing to take some medicine and he found himself becoming extremely frustrated. He felt tense in his body and considered dismissing her perspective entirely in order to stay the course with "the plan". As he wrestled internally with his frustration and desire to use his authority to take charge, he remembered the advice of a wise friend. The friend counseled him to let his kids win whenever possible. These words helped him to set aside his own agenda and start to really listen to his daughter. He took her protests seriously. As he listened, he softened, and as he softened he became more open to possible solutions. Without consciously knowing it, Claude was modeling "empathy" for his daughter. Our children do need to see compassion and empathy in action.

Empathy is the ability to identify with and understand another person's feelings or difficulties. It is easy to focus on your child's behavior as an indication of how you are parenting. Some days we may be bombarded internally with questions: Does my child have empathy? At what age does empathy develop? Why does my child show empathy in some situations but not

others? It is natural to want our kids to be tuned into the emotional world of others and to be aware that they impact those around them. We want them to be sensitive to needs beyond their own, but how can we teach them empathy?

The problem is that child development (and human behavior more generally) is not explained by simple equation capturing a few variables that sum together to produce a desired response. In other words, one specific action will not determine the desired outcome.

The development of empathy and compassion appear to arise from a constellation of factors and contexts that impact and encourage one another. Once we give up a simple model we can start to pay attention and cultivate the factors and contexts that seem important. Two main factors come to mind. First, we must encourage their awareness of their own needs, just as we encourage our child's sensitivity to others. We must also be aware of our own needs just as we are aware of theirs! Creating contexts or situations for cultivating a compassionate approach to experience is contagious.

We all have multiple situations everyday when we are overwhelmed by our kids needs. How often can we pause and really listen to what it is they are trying to express, as Claude did so well? How many times a day can we help them tune in to their inner worlds? Attention

to their needs lays a foundation for them to be accepting of their emotions and also those of others. In Parenting from the Inside Out, Daniel Siegel, MD writes:

*"Being intentional as a parent is a good place to begin. No book or professional can offer the right answers for each possible situation that can arise in the day-to-day life with our children. Instead of depending on techniques alone, parents can find ways of being with their children that promote the development of empathy and compassionate understanding."*

*This way of being is rooted in a parent's compassionate self understanding."*

Siegel does a good job of explaining what he means by self understanding and offers some very specific ways to "be with your child" to cultivate empathy and compassion. Siegel really emphasizes the connection between the parent and the child as a critical place for emotional awareness and ultimately emotional understanding or empathy to germinate.

What's difficult about offering yourself as a model is that it can be scary. How much do I share with my child about my inner experience? Will this overwhelm them? I think these are serious concerns that should be considered. But it starts with a willingness to be more transparent. Give them a glimpse of your inner world, even if this means showing something that is imper-

fect, incomplete, a work in progress.

I remember a particularly difficult day at preschool when my small group activity didn't go as planned. To this day, the expressions of five little faces looking at me with a range of disinterest and confusion are etched in my memory. When I shared my sense of failure and discontent with Kellie LaRue (Sam's mom), she helped me to see that making mistakes may be the best "teaching tool" we have to offer our preschoolers. In her view, our kids exposure to an array of parents as teachers (sometimes floundering in this role) gives them many chances to really learn to listen and stay in their seats. I believe that a community of parents working together ensures that we all have the support we need to be open and courageous.

Others are present to help us stay afloat when it's our week to lead by the example of humility.

Show them that you are trying to get it right and that sometimes you make mistakes. Stress that you value the process that unfolds when

things don't go as planned. Intimacy comes out of attention to these conflicts.

This idea is one of the most important conceptual contributions of psychologists like John Gottman (explored in Heart of Parenting) and Neil Jacobson and Andrew Christensen (discussed in Reconcilable Differences- a book about couples in conflict). These researchers came to recognize when we welcome the presence of emotion (especially negative ones ) as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching our relationships are transformed. Sharing your inner world means initiating a conversation that exposes the richness and the complexity inside each of us. Some moments and days may feel intense, others calm, but the beauty in all is to be cultivated.

This capacity follows your child into the world as they begin to connect with others. It is an incredible gift to give them a framework or model for dealing with fact that interpersonal interactions are rife with possibilities and stress, with love and loss. Caring about others means experiencing their joys and

their pain.

Often we close ourselves off because we fear the intensity of others' suffering. Having an honest curiosity and interest in the realm of emotions is a wonderful perspective to develop. For some parents this may come more easily than others. Children may sense both your comfort and your unease. This is natural. What is most important is that children see that we have the courage to stay present for these difficult conversations, and that it is healthy to have such conversations with yourself!

The only pitfall in focusing on your children's development of empathy and a rich emotional world is that it is possible to forget about the necessity to focus and know oneself. Give up the idea that you can "do it right" and show them that you are able to find compassion both for them, and ultimately, for yourself. In the words of Myla and Jon Kabatt-Zinn (from Everyday Blessings: the art of mindful parenting):

*The greatest gift you give your child is yourself.*



## ASKing Saves Kids

Did you know that 40 percent of U.S. homes with children contain a gun? And of those homes, 43 percent of owners leave the guns unlocked and loaded? Yet almost no one asks if there's a gun in the homes of friends or neighbors where their kids play.

Every year thousands of children are killed or injured in accidents involving adults' guns. Just talking to your kids about the dangers of firearms is not enough. Kids are naturally curious. They are also naturally fascinated with guns. That means, if there is a gun accessible, there is a good chance kids will

find it and play with it. So before you send your child to someone's house (playmate, relative, neighbor), ASK if they have a gun in the home. If there is not a gun in the home...great! That's one less thing you have to worry about. If there is a gun, make sure that the gun is stored unloaded and locked, ideally in a gun safe, with ammunition locked separately. Hiding guns is not enough. There are countless tragic stories of kids finding guns that parents thought were well hidden. If you have any doubts about the safety of someone's home, you can invite the children to play at

your house.

ASK stands for "Asking Saves Kids." ASK is a national non-profit campaign designed to educate parents on the importance of asking if there are guns in the homes where their children play. The goal of the ASK Campaign is simple – to save children's lives by preventing accidents with guns left accessible in the home. This is a very real threat to children and parents need to make informed decisions about where their kids play. For more information: [www.paxusa.org](http://www.paxusa.org).

*The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) of the  
North Seattle Cooperative Preschools  
Invite you to a Discussion with*

# *Julie Yee and Bob Dennis*

## **“Getting Your Financial House in Order”**

*Financial and Estate Planning for people with Minor Children*

**Wednesday, April 25, 2007 7-8:30pm**

Faith Lutheran Church - Social Hall

8208 18th Avenue NE - Seattle, WA 98115

This lecture is free and open to the public

*Please do not park in the Church Parking Lot*

**GETTING YOUR FINANCIAL HOUSE IN ORDER:** Our two speakers will work hand in hand to answer the following questions:

- What is estate planning and why have an estate plan in place
  - Top 5 misconceptions about estate planning
  - Fundamentals of an estate plan – The Basics
- How to select an attorney to do your estate planning
  - Taking action
    - Financial Planning – Why do we plan?
    - Building a strong financial house
  - Impact of Taxes on Long-Term Investments
    - Saving for College
    - Retirement Savings
    - Life Insurance

Why work with a Financial Consultant

**JULIE YEE:** Prior to opening her own practice, Julie was an associate with Landsman Fleming & Matson where she practiced in the areas of trusts and estates. She received her JD from Seattle University School of Law and her LLM in taxation from the University of Washington. She is a native of Philadelphia and currently lives in Seattle with her husband and three children. Julie is a coop mom and a serves on PAC.

**BOB DENNIS:** As a financial consultant at AXA Advisors, Bob works with a diverse client base of individuals and families of all ages and income levels. Bob has a particular focus on helping his clients effectively plan and save for their long-term goals, so they can be confident and enjoy the present. Bob Dennis received his Bachelor of Arts from Northwestern University (Chicago, IL) with majors in Mathematics and Economics. Bob is a “native New Yorker”, though you’d never know it from talking to him. He lives in Seattle with his wife Dana and their two very cute “boys”, Oliver and Fred, a Boston Terrier and Brussels Griffon.

*No RSVP required, but for more information, please call 789-6975*

## THE POWER OF OUR WORDS

BY CHRIS DAVID, PARENT EDUCATOR AND PRESCHOOL TEACHER

Judgment, "Be a good girl and give me the paint." or "That is not a nice thing to do." I have used similar judgment words in the past when referring to a child or an action of a child. I avoid using judgment words now; because through my education, I know there is a better way to communicate to children.

Words have power and make an impact on children and how they think about themselves, especially judgmental words when used by parents or teachers. Even positive words can make a questionable impact on a young child's mind.

For example, "Be a good girl and get me the paint." What are the alternatives for this child? If she does not get the paint, is she bad? Is she good only when she is doing what everyone else wants? Will people still like her if she doesn't get the paint? Positive words can teach a negative lesson.

As a new teacher I tried to teach a positive self-image to children. I said: good listening, good eyes, good work, and many other "good" things. Any behavior or activity I wanted to encourage, received the "good" label. I didn't realize how silly I sounded until children started using my words; good eyes, good girl, and good walking. The "good" comment sounded so empty, automatic and not authentic. Then I started to hear the children say: bad girl, bad running and bad boy. Had I taught these little children that it is okay to judge each other?

Every word used with children teaches them something. I have a huge impact on children and I better do it right. I went back to school to complete my degree in Early Childhood Education. I had much to learn. How could I talk to children sound authentic and non judgmental?

One of the first lessons I learned, as a student was to observe children, write down their behaviors objectively, without judgment. A teacher pointed out any judgment is an opinion and not fact. I don't know what made a child behavior in a certain way. But if I describe the behavior and the results of the behavior, I might find out what motivated the action. Instead of "good work," I might say, "you put a lot of yellow in your painting." Now the child might look at the painting and tell me more about it. The child may not always seek my approval of the painting, "do you like it?" After much practice I can describe a child's behavior without judgment even when the behavior is clearly against the class rules.

When I took judgment out of words of my vocabulary, I found that I control my emotions more easily. I remember two children fighting over one truck. I described what I saw; "Erin was playing with the truck. Joel came over and grabbed the truck. Erin yelled and hit Joel. Without emotion I could state; "this is the problem: you both want to play with the same toy." Now the children can work on the problem, they can learn a different way to behave.

These children are not being naughty; in fact, the children are just exhibiting behaviors that are normal for their age and development. Often adults call children "bad" for displaying this typical egocentric behavior. It takes a long time for children to move beyond being egocentric; if adults respond with judgment "bad" each time, what will children learn?

Now years later I am an instructor in preschool classrooms and every year I hear parents say, "good job, good work, good walking." I encourage adults to think about the power of their words. I challenge parents to describe the behavior that they want to encourage, "Jane you picked up all the toys off the floor, Wow!" I bet this helpful behavior will be repeated. And when there is a problem; describe what the children are doing, point out the problem. Then wonder out loud, "How could you solve this problem?" The children become involved in solving their own problems and soon the problem is resolved. Remember this is a process and adults are right there to help during the process.

It is hard to change old habits. At times I slip back and I catch myself saying "good job." And that is okay because most of the time I am choosing my words with care to encourage the learning of social skills, problem solving and self confidence.





## Wallingford Cooperative Preschool 3-5s Teaching Position for Fall 2007 Available

**Wallingford Cooperative Preschool is now accepting teacher applications for its 3-5s class, which meets M/T/Wed/Th, 12:30 pm-3:00 pm**

### **We are looking for someone who:**

- has an early childhood education background and/or experience in a preschool setting
- is a compassionate, community-oriented teacher who is comfortable working with children and parents in a cooperative classroom setting

### **We offer:**

- enthusiastic parent support
- a competitive salary range
- opportunities for professional growth
- a great location in the Wallingford neighborhood near Meridian Park
- a large, open, light setting with a wonderful inventory of supplies and equipment

**Wallingford Cooperative Preschool is affiliated with the North Seattle Community College cooperative preschool system and follows EOE guidelines**

**For a job description and application instructions, interested applicants should contact:**

Christine Meier  
3705 Woodlawn Ave N, Seattle 98103  
*Email:* wallingfordcoop2007@hotmail.com  
Or call 206-545-8871

**Applications accepted until position is filled**

### NSCC Co-op Preschool Openings for 2007\*

	Co-op	Contact	Phone
Infants	North Seattle - Wednesday	Irene Wagner	524-9346
	North Seattle - Thursday	Irene Wagner	524-9346
Toddlers	Broadview	Amy Roberts	525-0244
	Cedar Park	Sloan Chong	321-9242
	North Seattle	Lisa Mildenberger	850-5483
	Northeast	Erin Gustafson	985-8580
	Northgate Wed evening	Eileen Landay	525-1235
	Northwest	Jennifer Arthur	789-6314
	NSCC (new 2007) Olympic	Jaimee Papineau Hwashing Heyworth	412-0938 528-6058
Pre-3s	Ingraham	Piper Salogga	528-1580
	Meadowbrook	Judy Dauphinee	meadowbrookpre3@gmail.com
3-5s	Broadview	Ursula Frank	235-9113
	Ingraham	Cynthia Ramsay	417-5223
Multi-Age	Northgate Multi-Age	Jody Wirtz	789-7077

**Web Link** To view current listings and for descriptions of each co-op, please go to our web site at: [northseattlecoops.org](http://northseattlecoops.org)  
\*current as of 4-8-07

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