

Co-op Community News

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



December 2007

What's So Bad About Ronald McDonald?

By Tom Hobson, Teacher
Woodland Park Pre-3s and 3-5s



Strangers are targeting your child. Not with weapons, thank god, but with media messages designed to make them beg, whine and cry until you finally break down and buy yet another piece of crap. Excuse my French, but that's the technical word for most of the toys, electronics, candy, and "food" they sell to children.

In college I was part of a student team working on a media buying plan for McDonald's. Our research turned up the fact that in households with children between 2 and 8, it's predominately the children who make the decisions about what restaurant their families frequent. At the time Ronald McDonald was a more recognizable personage for this age group than Santa Claus. We could never determine whether advertising was the cause or effect of this phenomenon, but I just can't imagine that 2-8-year-olds had a lot of say in restaurant decisions during previous generations.

Twenty years later the ability of marketers to get at your children has only increased. And just as we move heaven and earth to protect our children from those who would target them in other ways, it behooves us to take measures to protect our children from these marksmen as well.

It's not just television advertising – but mostly it's television advertising – that we're talking about here. We're all aware of the staggering statistics about how much TV American children watch. I feel confident that most of us adhere (more or less) to the one hour per day model, but even so, if you permit commercial television your child is being bombarded by dozens of commercial messages a day, hundreds a week, tens of thousands a year. (Don't be deluded into thinking that PBS is safe: its programming is rife with subtle commercial come-ons and merchandising tie-ins.) And these aren't just index cards posted on a community bulletin board. These are pitches employing the most powerfully persuasive techniques known to mankind, and they are targeted directly at your child.

Of course, your child has no money of his own; she can't take herself to the store or restaurant. No, these marketing geniuses realize that they

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2007-08 Calendar

December

- 1 Parent Coordinator Training
- 10 PAC Meeting
- 24- Jan 4 Winter Break (no school)

January

- 9 PAC Lecture with Holly Eckert *see page 6*
- 14 PAC Meeting
- 16 Elizabeth Crary's class begins *see page 6*
- 21 Martin Luther King Jr. Day (no school)

February

- 11 PAC Meeting
- 19-22 Mid-Winter Break (no school)
- 25-28 In-House Registration

March

- 10 PAC Meeting
- 10-13 Cross-Over Registration
- 22 Open Registration
- 31-April 4 Spring Break (no school)

April

- 14 PAC Meeting

May

- 19 PAC Meeting

Over the River and Through the Woods

By Toby Beth Jarman, parent
Wallingford 3-5s AM

Almost ten years ago, I fell in love and followed my heart from Philadelphia to Seattle. After six months – rain and all – I knew I wanted to stay. It was a hard decision to move so far away from my family. We were very close, and I didn't want to lose that.

We've had our share of delayed flights, airport tantrums, and vomit at 3,000 feet . . . but I have to say, it's been worth every minute.

I made a promise to myself that we would visit as often as we could afford it. I vowed that our future kids would know their east-coast family as well as they'd know their west-coast friends. We would make it back for at least one of the big holidays a year. Sometimes more. How hard could it be?

Well . . . pretty hard, it turns out! We've had our share of delayed flights, airport tantrums, and vomit at

3,000 feet. But I'm happy to say that I was able to honor that promise to myself.

Holidays not spent on the east coast are spent in Corvallis, Oregon, with my husband's family. That's a 4.5-hour drive on a good day. And it's *never* a good day on I-5. (The drive to Oregon often takes as much time as a flight to Philadelphia.)

Between all this flying and driving, we've spent only one Christmas in our own house – two weeks after the birth of our second child. It's been crazy, but I have to say it's been worth every minute. Our children have real friendships with their cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Our oldest is quickly becoming an expert in United States geography. And all four of us are gradually becoming seasoned travelers.

We couldn't have made it this far without helpful suggestions from other families and the parent educators at NSCC. Here are some great travel tips we've learned along the way:

Involve children in the planning. Talk to your children about where you're going, who you'll see, and how you'll get there. Show them the route on the map and tell them about the landmarks they'll see. Explain that there will be long lines or traffic. Read picture books about travel. Shop for special trip snacks together – but avoid excess sugar and chocolate!



Sleep at last! Sylvia and Zachary Jarman nod off for the last leg of their cross-country flight.

Tire them out first! Sea-Tac Airport has a fabulous indoor play area in Terminal A. For car trips, look for nice wooded rest stops or state parks on your route.

Pack a "bag of tricks." Favorites include: new library books, magna-doodles, sticker books, activity books, crayons and paper, toy vehicles or animals, puppets, and playing cards. Audio books and children's music are great for long car rides, as are car games like I-Spy. And if you're a family that doesn't mind a little screen-time, bring a portable DVD player and some new DVDs from the library.

Avoid unfamiliar medication. Benadryl, for example, is supposed to help keep a child calm and sleepy. But it can sometimes have the adverse effect, making the child feel hyper, uncomfortable, and out-of-control.

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Don't miss Sea-Tac Airport's indoor play area in Terminal A!



when you don't need an Ark to get from one side of the street to the other. I make sure to have plenty of indoor activities to keep my kids busy: We bake cookies, read books, make forts and tents out of sheets and throw blankets. We play Tag, Hide & Seek, Red Light/Green Light, and many other games that I remember from my youth. We dress up, role-play, and sometimes my kids just lie around watching me watch *Oprah*. That's fun, right? But sometimes, even I get a little bored playing the same games, telling the same stories and singing the same songs. Instead, I wish I could go outside and play – if it weren't for that darn cold wind and rain.

What I want to know is, what do you do with your children on those cold, wet, fall afternoons? Do you have a special toy chest just for rainy days? A warm soup, cookie or drink that you make during these dreary grey days that you'd like to share? If so, please let me know about it. It doesn't have to be extravagant, just something that you think might help another parent and their children find comfort in the confines of their own home during these blustery months. Please pass it on; I'm sure I'm not the only parent who would find the ideas useful.

In the meantime, enjoy the fall, and remember: Get Inside And Play! ●

Parents' Picks:

**Seattle Gymnastics Academy
Indoor Playground**
(pictured above)
<http://www.seattlegymnastics.com>

**Seattle Community Centers
Open Gym & Toddler Playrooms**
www.seattle.gov/parks/centers.asp

Mosaic Coffee House
Community Non-profit Coffee
House with Playroom
www.mosaiccoffeehouse.org

Get Inside and Play!

By Maya Dammand, Parent
Woodland Park 3-5s

It seems like it was just a few weeks ago that I was wearing a white linen skirt, brown tank top and leather flip flops. Today, I'm wearing a raincoat, heavy jeans and boots. Fall is certainly upon us and how beautiful it is.

Just the other day while walking to our car from a friend's house, my daughter dawdled along the pavement picking-up various wet, bright-orange, yellow and pomegranate-red leaves that lay nestled beneath a humongous gnarly tree. She hop-scotched over puddles, and sometimes in them, as the rain poured steadily over our rain hoods. It was a picture-perfect late afternoon fall day in Seattle.

Despite the darling way in which my daughter played unabashedly in the elements, the reality was that it was cold that day, and the rain was a nuisance. I just wanted to get into my car and drive home. Playing in the

rain is far more appealing when watching other people do it on TV in laundry detergent commercials.

Don't misunderstand me, I do love the fall and all that it entails. I love the bounty of beautiful rust-colored foliage scattered amidst the ever-greens and the smell of wood burning fireplaces. However, my children do not subscribe to the same hibernation ritual that I've come to embrace.

While I am perfectly happy lounging around indoors reading *InStyle* magazine while sipping coffee and admiring the conifers outside my window, my kids are less than thrilled with this activity. I suppose I can acquiesce and put on my Wellies and other rain appropriate accoutrements and stomp right along with them in the mud, but if given the choice, I'd really much rather stay inside.

And before you think me a terrible mom, don't. I make sure my kids get their share of outside fun on the days

Over the River and Through the Woods

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Bring extra clothes for everyone. I learned this the hard way when my toddler vomited all over my pants as the plane was taking off. I had extra clothes for him, but not for me! It was a long trip...

Buy airline tickets wisely. Check back often to see if airfares have gone down. Try to reserve the bulk head in the front of the plane for optimum leg room.

Be familiar with airport security requirements. Yes, you *will* be asked to remove the baby's booties along with your shoes. And be sure to empty your child's sippy cup.

To pre-board or not to pre-board? While many families appreciate the extra time and space pre-boarding allows, others like to wait until the last possible minute to bring their children on the plane. The children can use more energy and have less time that they're forced to sit still.

Be flexible. Sleep schedules usually go right out the window the first few days (especially when you're traversing time zones). Be patient and try to roll with the flow. They will settle back into their routine eventually, none the worse for wear.

Believe in the kindness of strangers. We've all heard those horror stories in the news – families getting kicked off planes for breastfeeding or tantrums. But a majority of the folks we've encountered have been kind and, if not understanding, at least tolerant. For every crabby flight attendant, there's one who'll offer you extra pretzels and bottled water. For every annoyed passenger, there are many who will offer to help, or at least offer a sympathetic smile. ●

What's So Bad About Ronald McDonald?

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must rely on our little ones to, in turn, "persuade" their parents. Children are no less marketing geniuses, tending to eschew high-tech methods, however, in favor of the old school techniques of persistent pleading, sulking and tantrums. Even if parents manage to resist their children's rhetorical efforts, it generally winds up with children feeling denied, and parents feeling – at least a little – like mean-spirited ogres.

Curse you, Madison Avenue.

Avoiding TV altogether is, of course, the best solution, but abstinence is not realistic for most of us. Many pediatricians recommend no television for children under 2 years old, then no more than 2 hours a day thereafter. I've only personally known one child who was successfully kept from television during her preschool years, but she proudly told me this year (as a kindergartner) that she can watch TV now. People are weak – most of us cannot be lifelong television virgins.

This is why we need commercial "prophylactics." I warn you that the following guidelines (which I've gathered from a number of sources, including parents in our co-op) are far from 100% effective, but they can at least help in your efforts to protect your child from advertising executives and their designs on the peace of your family.

Control the remote control

A responsible adult should control the television (as they would any narcotic – if you think I'm exaggerating, ask me about the narcotizing effects of television sometime). Even as your child grows older and can operate the TV himself, he should be expected to ask permission before watching. As I see it,

it's a fundamental responsibility of American parents to closely monitor what and how much their child watches.

The television plan

Develop a TV viewing "plan" that can function something like the rules we use in our preschool. If you make the plan (rules) clear to your child, it's not you, the parent, limiting your child's viewing, but rather it's the plan. Some families like to predetermine viewing schedules at the beginning of each week; others take it day-by-day.

In our family we began rationing TV by giving our daughter Josephine 4 poker chips every day, each worth 15 minutes of viewing time. We've dropped the actual poker chips now, but the concept still lives, with her having innovated the idea of saving her "chips" for a couple of days in order to "buy" a longer movie later in the week.

Whatever you do, the key is to stick to the plan. The moment your child knows the plan isn't written in stone is the moment she will conceive of the idea to plead for exceptions.

Watch and talk

Watch TV *with* your child as much as possible. Not only do most children enjoy the companionship, but it puts you in the room with those who will target your child – and as powerful as they are, you are more powerful.

I know that you have phone calls to make and floors to mop, but there are many chores (folding laundry, ironing, filing, personal grooming, even exercise) that can happen while you watch. Not only will you be role-modeling active behavior, but you will be there to talk during the show. That's right, there is no better coun-

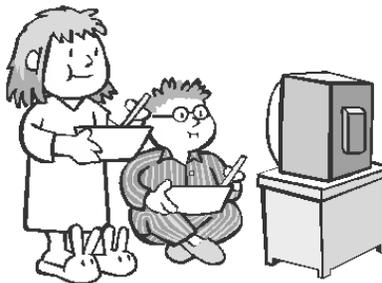
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terbalance to the narcotic haze of passive viewing than talking. Ask your child questions about what they are watching. Offer your opinions about what is going on (this is another of those modern American parenting obligations). Create the sense that TV is a family activity. My memories of watching television as a young child always include my mother, father and brother together in our small den chatting about *The Brady Bunch* (I was Greg and my brother Sam was Bobby) and *The Partridge Family*. We would act out the scenes even as they were being broadcast. I'll never forget Dad's response to my comment that Danny Partridge was funny: "It's just the way his pants fit." I still use the line while I've forgotten everything Danny ever said. On Sunday we would eat popcorn and apples for dinner while we watched *The Wonderful World of Disney*. I have no memories of the actual programming, but very clear ones of the family tradition. TV is not the same as going to a movie or the theater – silence is not golden.

And forget the misguided notion that watching television is restful. Reading is restful, naps are restful. Watching TV alone is *narcotizing*.

Make your child commercial savvy
Josephine has become a master at deconstructing the automobile and beer commercials that target me during sports broadcasts. By 6 years old she had learned to guffaw at the notion that pretty girls will like a man for drinking a certain beer. She recognized when cars are shown performing impossible feats of speed or agility. She struggled more when it was a commercial targeted at her, but she's starting to get the hang of it. It was a proud moment when she said, "That won't *really* make me more popular."

If your child is aware of any brand at all (Disney Princesses, McDonald's, Power Rangers), she's ready for your own home school media curriculum. Children need to understand that advertisements are created by people who are trying to get us to either buy something or do something. It's a fun game to dissect a commercial message: Who is trying to persuade us? Why? What do they want us to do? How are they trying to get us to do it? What do they take us for, fools?



For very young children, the game might just be to play "spot the commercial." It can be difficult for a 3-year-old to distinguish between the sales pitch and the "entertainment," but it's an important media skill to learn.

Try covering your ears and talking about how the commercial makes you feel with and without sound. This can be a great example of how advertisers try to manipulate our emotions. How do certain commercials make us feel and why do they want us to feel that way?

Commercials often boast about taste tests and other comparison surveys that prove their products are the best. Why take their word for it? Do your own taste tests. Make it even more fun by involving friends. Does the heavily advertised brand really taste better than generic? It's not something most of us can afford on a regular basis, but I've occasionally purchased an advertised product that Josephine wants simply for the pur-

pose of demonstrating that it's a piece of crap. A less expensive method is to point out advertised products while shopping. How does the actual product compare to the advertisement? Examine the label (especially if it's food) and the packaging. What did the commercial leave out? Where did the commercial exaggerate? Do you feel the same way about the product in your hand as you did about the one on TV? Why?

Young children can often become confused about what is real and what is make-believe on television. Talk about whether or not what is happening on the screen could happen in the real world.

Lest you've missed it, my personal belief is that targeting children with advertising messages is unethical. I have begun writing emails to companies that I find the most offensive. There are some parents who would have it be illegal altogether. I won't go that far, but that doesn't mean we can't use our consumer power to pressure companies.

The real battleground, however, is in your living room. This is where these strangers find our children with their slick, deceptive messages, stoking the flames of unattainable desires in their little souls.

Those of us who are currently parents of young children are the first generation to live our entire lives as targets. We don't know life any other way. Some of us have made our peace with it, while others (like me) are still trying to figure out what it all means. Whatever the case, it's pretty certain that advertisers will continue to step up efforts to target our children with junky toys and junky food. And we, seasoned veterans that we are, like it or not, have the job of teaching our children how to sort through the crap. Excuse my French. ●

Bulletin Board

Avoid
Emotional
Meltdowns:
Helping
Kids Deal
with Disap-
pointment



Elizabeth Crary

This two credit class is taught by Elizabeth Crary and starts January 16, 7:00-9:30pm, meeting off-campus. This class offers the tools and techniques you need to help children cope, whether you are dealing with toddler tantrums or middle-school meltdowns. For questions, call Elizabeth Crary at (206) 367-6425; to register, call Health and Human Services Division (206) 527-3783.

For location go to:
www.parentingpress.com/location

Preschool Openings Now!

All age groups, ready when you are:

www.northseattlecoops.org

*Planning to stay in co-op
next year? Don't forget to schedule
tours at the preschools you're
considering!*

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The Secret
Key To
Unlocking
Any Family
Conflict



Holly Eckert

- Would you like a way to find more harmony in your relationship with your child?
- A way to show respect for both person's wishes?
- A tool to understand your child's behavior on a deeper level?
- And a reliable process to access your authenticity and self-confidence as a parent?

Gain both inspiration and concrete tools to create the relationship you envision!

Wednesday, January 9, 2008
7:00-9:00 pm

Faith Lutheran Church – Social Hall
8208 18th Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98115

This lecture is free and open to the public. No RSVP is required. Please call (206) 417-3163 for more information.

Trainer and author Holly Eckert takes great pleasure in supporting families toward more understanding, co-operation and fun. Former Director of Northwest Attachment Parenting, Holly is currently a Certified Trainer with the global Center for Nonviolent Communication and the local Northwest Compassionate Communication. She lives in Seattle with husband Richard, son Manny (10) and daughter Keziah (4).

Volunteers Needed!

Registration season for the 2008-2009 school year is coming! We'll be spreading the word about North Seattle Community College's cooperative preschool program at the following preschool fairs:

MOMS Club of Seattle Preschool Fair

Saturday, January 19, 2008
10:00 am-12:00 pm
St. Alphonsus Parish School,
5816 15th Avenue NW
Seattle, WA 98017

ParentMap Preschool Preview Night

Wednesday, January 22, 2008
5:30 pm-8:00 pm
North Seattle
Community College
9600 College Way North
Seattle, WA 98103

Meet with local families, tell them all about our wonderful preschools, get them started on the enrollment process, and help boost enrollment for your school next year!

**For more information, contact
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