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# CO-OP COMMUNITY NEWS

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



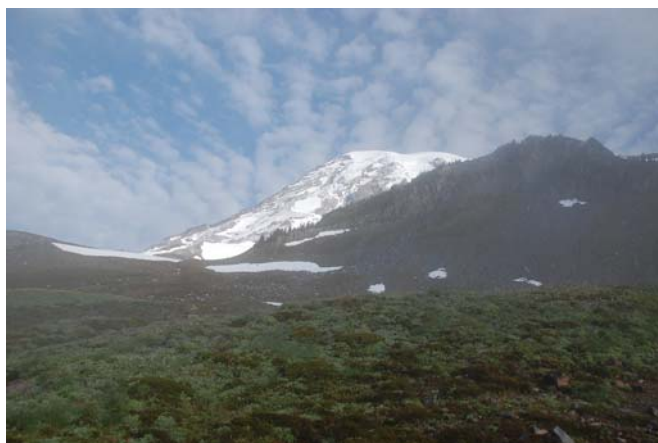
March 2009

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## SHARING NATURE WITH YOUR CHILDREN

From the PAC lecture on October 7, 2008:  
Julie Tubbs Luthy

Unfortunately, many children today do not have the wonderful opportunity to experience nature and the outdoors on a regular basis. Often kids spend the majority of their time inside – either at home, in school or childcare, or in a car. This unsettling trend is the subject of Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. Research shows that children who have frequent opportunities for learning in the outdoors are happier, healthier and learn better. Thankfully there are naturalists and educators that are trying to help parents connect their children to nature and ensure that children grow up getting their share of fresh air.



Julie Luthy is one such naturalist. Julie has been a naturalist for over 20 years and holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Education and Resource Management, and a master's degree in Environmental and Science Education. Her field experience includes work in national parks from Hawaii to Alaska and Washington's own Olympic National Park, numerous nature centers and most recently at Seattle's Discovery Park. As a naturalist she has helped families and school groups nurture a respect and awe for their natural surroundings. This past October Julie was the featured speaker at an NSCC PAC sponsored lecture.

Her presentation was full of practical suggestions for how to share nature with your children and included information and resources about local places to explore. Some of her suggestions included hanging bird feeders outside your windows, teaching your kids bird calls, helping your kids journal to keep track of what they see happening outside, going on a nature treasure hunt, and looking at various insects through a magnifying glass. One of her biggest pieces of advice is for parents themselves to be enthusiastic about nature. This will encourage them to keep exploring and paying attention to what they see and hear outdoors.

Julie noted some local areas to find wildlife such as beavers, salmon, frogs and other wetland creatures. Seattle is also home to many beaches where you can take your children to explore the Washington coast's diverse intertidal life. The list includes Discovery Park, Golden Gardens, Longfellow Creek, Lake Washington, Meadowbrook Wetlands, Myrtle Edwards Park, Ravenna Creek, and Camp Long – in addition to many others.

You can also look online for information and resources. Here are a few sites to check out:

Children and Nature Network – [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)  
Seattle Parks and Recreation – [www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/index.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/index.htm)  
Seattle Audubon – <http://sewardpark.audubon.org/>  
University of Washington Arboretum – <http://depts.washington.edu/wpa/index.htm>

Feel free to contact Julie Tubbs Luthy to arrange a program on a variety of topics. She can be reached via email at [Jluthy@comcast.net](mailto:Jluthy@comcast.net) or by phone at 206-363-0556.

# Help Build Your Child's Brain

By Cesily Crowser, Parent Education Instructor

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about brain development and how it applies to raising our children. You can find articles in every style from intense science periodicals to everyday magazines like *Parenting*. Everyone wants to know how this important piece of muscle develops and what parents can do to foster this development for our children. I have to admit – I am a brain development junkie. If there is a speaker? I'm there. An article about it? I'm reading it. And if they make a movie about it . . . watch out, because I will wait overnight outside the theater for tickets.

Why? Because, despite everything that is written about it, the brain still remains a mystery. Our brains haven't given us enough knowledge to figure out how to figure them out. Kind of tricky if you ask me. However, within this mystery there are some facts that have been uncovered, and it is these facts that keep me hooked. I love knowing that there are little things I can do – some you probably already do – that make a difference in the development of my child.

## Early Brain Development

To begin with, every parent should know that from ages 0 (well actually pre-0, because the brain is retaining information in utero, but that's another article) to 3, the brain is a sponge. It holds onto everything. During these first three years, the brain develops a large number of connections or synapses. Every experience is new to your child and the brain has to process it and see where it fits in. Sometimes a new connection is created and sometimes a previously created one is strengthened.

What does this mean for the parent? Should you begin reading Shakespeare and taking your toddler to the art museum? Sure, if you want to. Or you could just take her outside to see the wind blow through the trees, hear birds and cars, or feel the water as he plays in the wading pool. These activities create pathways too. You can sing songs to him. You should read and talk to him as often as possible. You are laying foundation, and the more the better. It is not necessarily the "educational" quality of the content, but the availability of a variety of experiences that one should consider during this time.

Also, remember that nobody learns well under stress. Children from 0-3 years really need to feel a sense of security and attachment and know that someone is there to meet their needs. If she is worrying about whether or not someone will respond to her when she's hungry or if her environment is stressful for a long period of time, her brain is in survival mode and won't be doing a lot of new connection building until things get taken care of.

## Pruning

At ages 3-10, the brain still makes new connections. But the brain begins to get rid of some connections in a process called pruning. What does this mean for the parent? Well, basically the same stuff as mentioned above. Keep experiences coming. Now that language has begun to develop, conversations are a must. Don't just talk *to* your child, talk *with* your child. Encourage them to share their thoughts. Expose them to new things. Just like any other muscle, the brain needs exercise. Now is the time when we start to focus on "educational" experiences. Take an active part in your child's learning. As much as possible, bring school into the home. From the sensory play at preschool to your child's 5<sup>th</sup> grade math homework, encourage your child to get the most out of these experiences. For example, you could talk to them about how the water in the sensory table is cold, or how it looks like a waterfall when they pour it. Encourage older children to talk to you about their homework. You could even have them teach it to you sometimes. Repetition is the key. How do their school activities apply to everyday life? Ask them.

Once we reach the ripe old age of 10, researchers say major pruning begins. What you don't use you begin to lose. During this time, repetition is even more important. Make sure they are exposed regularly to things that are important to you. You don't have to keep a chart or anything; just keep this in mind.

The research might lead you to believe that the brain is done building at age 10. It's pruning and if you didn't set the foundation for something before that then you worry that you are out of luck. Not true. Pruning is nature's way of getting rid of the brain's excess in order to focus energy. Of course we still learn after age 10. From my readings I get the impression that new connections can still be made – it is just harder. It appears that for some, the brain just uses old established pathways for new things being learned. That foundation that was laid down by experiences in the earlier years now gets used for more complicated subjects.

## A Parent's Role

Fortunately, a parent's role in supporting brain development is not complicated. We don't need to spend a lot of money or even focus all of our time. We just need to make sure that we encourage our children to have new experiences and to continue to learn at every age. We need to spend time communicating, singing, laughing, playing games, and studying with them. We need to make sure they are eating well and getting enough rest. For most of us, we just need to continue to do what we are doing, make a few subtle changes, and take pride in the fact that now we know what we do everyday helps to build our child's brain.

# Gently Used Sale Raises Scholarship Money

*By Toby Beth Jarman, Parent, Cedar Park Toddlers and Wallingford 4-5s PM*

PAC's first gently used sale was a success, raising over \$1600.00 to support the PAC Scholarship Fund. We'd like to give a huge "THANK YOU" to all the co-op parents who helped make this possible: our volunteers, all those who donated or consigned items (and shopped at the sale!), and our own tireless Fund Development Committee that worked so hard to put this event together.

Getting a new event of this scope off the ground is no small challenge, and you did an amazing job.

**Totals from the sales are as follows:**

**Bake Sale = \$318.57**

**Clothing Sale = \$1396.75**

**Grand Total = \$1688.32**



# Managing Grief and Loss in the Family

By Betty Williams, parent educator  
& Toby Beth Jarman, Parent, Cedar Park Toddlers and Wallingford 4-5s PM

Parents gathered at Faith Lutheran Church on Thursday, March 19, to hear a lecture on "Managing Grief and Loss in the Family." This was the fourth in a series of free educational events presented by PAC for the 2008-09 school year. Speakers were Anne Sparling White of The Healing Center of Seattle and Beverly B. Goldsmith of the Safe Crossings Children's Grief Support Program of Providence Hospice of Seattle.

## Communication, Not Protection

Sparling and Goldsmith stressed the importance of normalizing loss and grief by building a framework of understanding with our children. What does grief mean? What does death mean? Children were born with the ability to handle these concepts. With the help of the adults in their lives, they can develop a language around them.

It is often assumed that children are too young to understand and should be protected from the unpleasant reality of grief and loss. But in many cases, children are highly intuitive and can sense stress in the family. They might even imagine a situation that is worse than what's actually happening. Honest conversation in simple, truthful language helps children feel included and gives them a greater sense of control and trust. (See sidebar for examples.)

## Children's Expressions of Grief

The speakers explained that each time a child enters a new developmental stage, they tend to revisit the loss they experienced. Children are not able to realize permanence until they are about 5 or 6 years old. By age 9, a child might feel responsible for the situation. They might be afraid to talk about it. Their behavior may be suddenly quiet, obedient, or helpful. Teenagers have a tendency to withdraw, focusing more on their peers.

If a typical grief response is not apparent, that doesn't mean the child isn't grieving. Children can only take in so much information at one time. They often wait to see what is going to happen and observe how the adults respond.

Typically a child has three main fears around a crisis situation (although these fears may not be clearly expressed):

- Did I cause this?
- Will it happen to me?
- Will it happen to someone I love?

## Parents Are Human Too

Adults don't need to know all the answers to children's questions. If possible, the parent can research an answer and get back to the child later. But for those tough questions that no one knows for certain, it's okay to say "I don't know" or "That's a good question. I wonder that too."

Adults don't have to hide their feelings from their children. Children benefit from adults modeling a healthy emotional expression and release. Sharing feelings can help everyone feel more connected during difficult times.

## Coping Methods

Children will have strong feelings around loss, and those feelings can be expressed in many different ways. Adults can let children

know that they're always available if the children want to talk.

While talking is important, it is not the only way for a child to vent these strong feelings. A parent might say "I can see you are getting upset. Would you like to. . ."

- Draw
- Play sports
- Write
- Run
- Play music
- Cry
- Take a walk

Discipline is still important, even during the most difficult times. Children need that consistency and structure to reassure them that the world goes on. Children may exhibit more annoying or disturbing behavior, which is less likely to be tolerated by adults who are also coping with the loss. Often this behavior has its roots in fear or neediness, as if they're trying to say "Are you still there for me?" Parents can help the children identify and normalize their feelings and reassure them that they are still loved and cared for.

### What Do You Say?

Children need honesty, but not too much detailed information. Simple language is best. Here are some examples:

"I have some really hard news to tell you. I'm very upset and not sure I can talk about it, but it's important to tell you."

"I'm very upset right now, but I will calm down and we can talk more about this if you want to."

"Some people believe X happens when a person dies. This is what I believe . . ."

"His body died. He can't be with us anymore."

"Her heart stopped working."

"It sounds like you miss her. Maybe you can draw a picture."

"Most people live until they are really old. I take good care of myself, I go to the doctor, etc."

"There will always be someone to take care of you."

### Resources

#### **The Healing Center**

A nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive grief support services for adults, children, and families.

(206) 523-1206

[www.healingcenterseattle.org](http://www.healingcenterseattle.org)

#### **Safe Crossings**

A program of Providence Hospital of Seattle which serves grieving kids of all ages, their families, schools, the entire King County community and south Snohomish County.

(206) 320-4000/ (888) 782-4445

[www.safecrossings.org](http://www.safecrossings.org)

# **SAY CHEESE!!!**

## **A Few Snapshots From Around The NSCC Co-ops...**



## **Good Child Friendly Restaurants Around Seattle:**

### Favorite Kid-Friendly Restaurants

Here are some great suggestions from the PAC committee on their favorite kid-friendly restaurants in the Seattle area. Take your kids. Have fun and dig in!

Barking Dog  
Blue C Sushi  
Chipotle  
Dad Watson's  
La Isla  
Louisa's Mexican Restaurant  
My Coffee House  
Montlake Alehouse  
Mosaic Café  
Pagliacci  
Portage Bay Café  
Red Robin

Rosita's  
Ruby's Diner  
Sam's Sushi  
Seattle Center food court for hot dogs  
Spaghetti Factory  
Tutta Bella  
Vios  
Zeeks Pizza

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