



## Spring Cleaning the Mental Clutter

Mara Mulcahy, LICSW Parent Educator

As a parent educator, I answer many questions from parents; various questions about their children’s development, behavior, their own parenting styles, etc. Many of the questions are about feelings and emotions. As parents, we strive to do our best and are often critical when we feel that we might and perhaps “should” be doing better; more calm, more involved, more attentive, more creative, more organized, more fun, the list goes on. As I talk to parents, I realize that a common question is about “normal” versus “abnormal” amounts of parenting angst. Are their *feelings* normal?

First, I will present my biases. My education and background is in mental health (I am a licensed clinical social worker). I believe that everyone deserves a good therapist. Undertaking therapy means hard, but beneficial work that can help overall mood and

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Thanks for the Donations we received this year!

We are now seeking donations for scholarships for next year, as we expect the high need to continue and are planning to keep the co-op fundraising amount the same. Please mail donations, made out to PAC with scholarship fund in the memo line, to **NSSC Parent Ed Program; Attention PAC Treasurer; 9600 College Way North; Seattle WA 98103.**

functioning quickly by providing an outlet to house all your “mental clutter.”

Back to the “normal vs. abnormal” question. There are typical amounts of adjustments and fluctuations of feelings as we enter into parenthood.

Learning on the job (i.e., parenting) can be challenging. Sleepless nights, fatigue, and loss of any time to take care of our self is part of the package; for a while, that is. In general, it should get better/easier for some period of time. I will call this return to ease as our “parenting norm.” Then we rapidly move toward the next challenges; teething, colds, sibling rivalry, you name it.

Our “parenting norm” is when we get a leg-up on the home-front and can actually get some of our self needs met. Perhaps we put on clean clothes, have a cup of tea, bathe, read a chapter of a good book (do parenting books count?). Our thoughts

slow. We feel calm and we may think about the day or week ahead. This is a shift from the immediate to the larger whole. This whole process may only last a few minutes, or if you are super lucky, even longer.

Ask yourself; does my mood and functioning get better when I get back to my parenting norm? Can I slow down my thoughts? Can I stop worrying or fretting? There are some outside influences that help or hinder your potential to get your needs met.

- Your child’s unique needs and development - Some ages and stages are difficult and some temperament traits can be challenging for us.
- Support - What do you have for support? Partner, family, friends?
- Stress - Financial to interpersonal.

Other interior influences can also shape how we function.

- Mood - History of depression or anxiety? Stable and robust?
- Hormones - Pregnancy and childbirth can bring on a whole change of hormones that in turn impact our wellbeing.
- Health - Overall wellness and functioning.

What is mental clutter? I would call it the internal noise that remains when you could be doing something positive or even neutral with your mind/ thoughts. Sometimes silence or doing nothing is what we choose to do when we get a moment of calm, and that is different. Mental clutter is when some distant part of us or sometimes an actual outside person tells you that your thoughts have run amuck.

Here are some thoughts from a fellow parent and licensed therapist, Tanya Ruckstuhl-Valenti LICSW, MSW; “Clinical worry heightens anxiety, rather than helping us

## Information for NSCC Student Regarding Impacts of State Budget Cuts

- Budget cuts being considered for community colleges for the next biennium (2011-2013) range from 10%-18% of state funding.
- These cuts would be in addition to the 17% already cut in the last 2 years. Thus total impact will be 27-35% in 2 bienniums.
- Community colleges have been key to the economic recovery. For example, Worker Retraining Programs have a 75% job placement rate within 9 months of student completion, with 94% still employed after 1 year, and 88% full salary recovery.
- Scholarship needs have greatly increased. In the NSCC Parent Education Program, students have stepped up fundraising efforts to help parents/ students participate in the program. Scholarship amounts raised and given out for tuition assistance have gone from approximately \$7500 in 1997, to \$35,000 in 2010.

Follow this link - <http://www.seattlecolleges.com/DISTRICT/policymakers/agenda.aspx> for more information provided by the Seattle Community College District, including a link (by clicking on "State Board Legislative Watch") to find your state legislators contact information.

make better changes. Clinical worry is self talk that judges us harshly as in, 'I'm doing it all wrong! I'm going to screw him up! He'll hate me! I'm a bad mommy!' Clinical worry decreases our emotional wellbeing which makes us less skillful as parents."

This begs the question; what do you do when you perhaps have reached the tipping point and could use some help? When can you benefit from some extra support? Always! (Again, remember that I have declared myself as therapy biased)

Here are some ways to clean up the clutter: Get more help; get a break; try something new; change something that isn't working; connect with others; or as my pal Tanya so aptly put it, "cultivate lower standards." We are very hard on ourselves as parents. Remember that perfection is not a reasonable goal.

The positive changes that parents share with me are not huge ones. They are small and thoughtful ones that seem to gently steer them toward a happier parenting norm.

And maybe, just maybe, the sun will peek out and clear some of that clutter away...

Resources: Therapist referral: <http://counselingseattle.com/>



# Calender

See you next year to all our new and returning coopers! Enjoy Kindergarden to everyone moving on!

## September

**9th-** 1st PAC (Leadership training) meeting of 2011-2012 year



## Pictures NSCC coops:

- Victory Heights toddlers
- Victory Heights
- Woodland Park Pre-3's
- Meadow brook Pre'3s
- University Ravenna 3-5's
- Ingraham 3-5's
- Sandhurst
- Ingraham's Pre-3's
- Crownhill 3-5's
- Wallingford 4-5's





## Ingraham Pre-3s Welcomes New Teacher

Ingraham Pre-3s is pleased to announce that Jeanne McGrady will be the new Pre-3s teacher beginning Fall 2011.

Jeanne's experience with NSCC Co-op Preschool began five years ago with her oldest son in a NSCC Pre-3s program. As she prepares for her youngest daughter to begin kindergarten next year, Jeanne realizes that she is not ready to leave co-op so last fall she began Early Childhood Development Studies at NSCC.

For the past three years, Jeanne has served on the Phinney Neighborhood Preschool Co Op (PNPC) board. This last year, she served as the All School Chair of the PNPC leading the board, working with over 75 co op families and serving as a liaison to the Phinney Neighborhood Association (PNA). Jeanne has also worked as a substitute teacher, curriculum calendar aide, provided care on a weekly basis for siblings aged 1- 4, and was a Dragon Room Summer Programs teacher last year. This summer she will again be teaching camps at the Phinney Center in the Dragon Room Summer Programs: Kids in the Kitchen and Save the Earth.

Jeanne also brings rich experience from work in intergovernmental relations, sustainability and the environment, as a volunteer coach/mentor, and governing committee work with a YWCA program for at risk teenage girls. Her education includes BA degrees in political science, communication, and early childhood development classes.

She loves working with young children, believes in child-led play, and is passionate about community building - making Co-op a perfect fit.

Jeanne and her husband live in the Phinney Ridge neighborhood and next year her daughter will join her older brother at Seattle Public Schools. She looks forward to continuing her work as an



## CO-OP Openings for Fall 2011!

Openings for all ages of children for the fall 2011 school year. Please see openings listing on the website:

[coops.northseattle.edu](http://coops.northseattle.edu)

You can be enrolled in both a day and evening co-op with your children.

- Northgate Toddlers Evening Class at NCSS
- Northgate Evening Multiage (2-5yrs) at NCSS

## Meadowbrook 5's - A Preschool Option

Testimonials from Parents, 2011:

- "Being with the older kids in the 5's program has been great. My child has had a chance to engage in more verbal and sophisticated play and learning because of this class."

- “The dynamic of socializing and working together with their classmates and teacher is the most beneficial part of the program. My child has developed real friendships this year.”

Each year in the 5’s program, there seems to be such special social connections and the openness of the friendship system always seems to flourish.

We want to develop creative and independent thinkers and a place where kids are respected for their uniqueness. We encourage the children to explore new and different ways of doing things and to learn through play. This promotes self-esteem and confidence.

We also encourage the children to work together, teaching the children the value of cooperation and teamwork.

Our classroom community helps children develop the social skills they need to succeed in school.

The 5’s program will give the kids a chance to explore pre-math concepts and pre-reading skills in small groups with the guidance and support of the parents and the teacher. The creative arts are also a big part of our program; the children are exposed to many kinds of art projects, storytelling, and music.

There is an emphasis on science and the natural world throughout the program which both the children and parents have really enjoyed.

- “I like the emphasis on nature / environment.”
- “The teacher’s knowledge of animals and love of science has been a great spark for my child and her fresh outlook on things has been great.”

- “I appreciate the time and effort the teacher has put into developing topics for the kids. I think the material she’s covered has been very interesting and evoked a sense of wonder and curiosity in the children that is a good starting point for a genuine thirst for knowledge.”

The Meadowbrook 5’s program is an opportunity for children who are 5 or are turning 5 by the end of December 2011 and is designed to meet the needs of the older preschool children who will benefit from one more year of preschool.

We have openings for the next school year and encourage you to come look at our program by May 27th to see how it can fit for you and your child.

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