



NORTHWEST PARENTS' CORNER

Summer 2006

***A quarterly newsletter of parenting tips,
reflections, and ideas***

Summertime, and the living is easy...

Did you know that “doing nothing” may be good for kids? No one wants their kids to be bored, so well meaning parents sign their kids up for all kinds of activities including after-school classes, sports, and summer programs. While these activities are often beneficial we need to be careful not to over-schedule our kids. Like us, they need “down-time”- pure, unstructured free time during which the imagination can soar and create new ideas. What may appear to be “day-dreaming” may actually be a creative process, a chance for one’s brain to “de-fragment”.

A bit of boredom is often the first step to inventing fun! Our parents, children during the Great Depression were never bored. They didn’t have toys and video games. The kids in the neighborhood invented their own games, playing marbles or building go-carts from scavenged scraps, and racing them down hills! Remember lazy days of summer as a youth, lying on your back and watching the clouds go by? Did you try to imagine what shapes you could identify in the clouds? A ship? A dragon? Why not spend some time doing this with your child this summer? It’s a fun game, with no winners or losers, no right and no wrong. And who knows what important subjects might come up in

conversation when there is no pressure?

Unfortunately, when our kids are bored, fun is just the click of one button away. Be careful how much time is spent on television, video games, and computers, which can give kids instant entertainment, and can keep them occupied for hours on end, but also keeps kids from exploring on their own.

Author, illustrator Bruce Van Patter suggests Round Robin stories for making family time fun. In one version the adult starts telling a story, brings it to an exciting part, then passes it on to a child. The story moves back and forth between adult and child or around a group of people, and is created in the moment!

In another version of Round Robin, the story is aided by a bag of props. The first person starts telling the story, bringing it to a cliffhanger. Then the second person takes the bag of props and says, “but fortunately...” and pulls an object from the bag and finds a way for the hero to save him/herself using that object. Then, just as it looks as though everything is fine in the story, the next person says, “but unfortunately...” and takes something from the bag, and describes how it will cause a problem for the hero. The game keeps going like this until there are no more objects in the bag. Van Patter has lots more suggestions for creative games on his website: <brucevanpatter.com> Check it out!

Finding leisure time in a hectic lifestyle

Is your life so over-crowded that you find yourself squeezing in time to “relax” with your family? A couple of hours of leisure time over the weekend or fifteen minutes of play time in the evening may not be very relaxing at all. For many people, finding relaxing family time is one more thing to check off the “to do” list!

On average American workers put in about 140 more hours on the job each year than they did twenty years ago. The growing demands of work and family life have resulted in a major crimp on leisure time.

A hectic lifestyle robs both you and your family of the opportunity to enjoy each other. It often results in general negativity and irritability. These qualities have a destructive effect on families. Stressed out parents tend to overlook the positive behaviors and overreact to the negative behaviors of their children. Even a child’s most basic needs (“I’m hungry” or “Can I go outside?”) can cause resentment in a parent who is preoccupied with a deadline at work or a household chore.

Finding a way to relax and enjoy family and friends is a real challenge for most people. Here are a few suggestions:

Keep family time separate.

Most working parents have learned to juggle lots of balls. Using the waiting time in the grocery store or bank line to write a memo or balance a checkbook is an effective time management strategy. The one big exception to this strategy involves family time. The best way to make your family feel valued is to give them

your full attention when you are together.

Managing interruptions at home, just as you would at work, is one way to keep your focus when you are with your family. By telling a telephone caller, “I’m busy, I’ll get back to you later” you will develop the habit of treating your family time as seriously as you would your work time. Do things which encourage regular family togetherness. Family walks, a certain TV show everyone watches together, family dinners, pizza night, or even Saturday morning cleanup, become family times that everyone can count on.

Don’t forget to laugh.

Laughter is a universal language that brings people together and reduces stress and tension. Humor can be a helpful way of coping with the little surprises as well as some of the big ones of busy family life. Sometimes making a decision to laugh about a mishap is the best way to deal with it. You might even want to write a book someday about some of the crazy misadventures of family life.



Play together.

Busy adults often take themselves too seriously. Playing hide-and-seek or frolicking with your child is a great way to regain your sense of perspective. Next time you are feeling too tired or too serious to respond when your child is asking to play, try it anyway. Chances are you will enjoy

yourself. After all, physical play with your kids is a wonderful tension release.

Be selective with your time.

Unfortunately, many people overschedule themselves and their families by trying to do too many things. Families need unstructured time. Spending time just taking it easy provides the opportunity to be spontaneous and creative. Try to set a realistic limit on the number of outside commitments for each family member. (For example, one extracurricular activity a season for the kids and one evening commitment a week for mom and dad). Also, learn to say “maybe” instead of “yes” when you are considering a request for your help on a project.

Take care of yourself.

Parents who factor their own needs into their schedules are happier and have more energy to give to their families. Find some free time just for yourself. Try a half-hour exercise routine several times a week, a regular get-together with a friend or a new hobby. Whatever it is, make sure it’s something you enjoy.

A few more ideas:

- ❖ Take up a sport with your child.
- ❖ Involve your child in one of your interests.
- ❖ Begin a “family history” activity together.
- ❖ Arrange special “one-on-one” times with your children.
- ❖ Run errands together.
- ❖ Use weekly family meetings to plan out the next week’s activities.

(*Finding Leisure Time...* - Reprinted from the COPElines Library, www.cope-inc.com)

Check out what’s happening in the area this summer

Our local libraries have special summer programs for children and families. Contact them at:

Kent Memorial Library 927-3761
Kent

Hunt Memorial Library 824-7424
Falls Village

Douglas Library 824-7863
N. Canaan

Hotchkiss Library 364-5041
Sharon

Scoville Memorial Library
435-2838
Salisbury

Cornwall Free Library 672-6874
Cornwall

Hughs Memorial Library
672-6374
West Cornwall



Sharon Audubon Center offers educational programs for children and families as well as special events and miles of great hiking trails.

Contact:

Sharon Audubon Center
364-0520

Pack a picnic, stretch your legs, enjoy the outdoors at these fabulous recreation areas:

Appalachian Trail

Harlem Valley Rail Trail

Taconic State Park Hiking Trails

James Baird State Park,
Pleasant Valley, NY

Bash Bish Falls, Copake, NY

Haystack Mountain, Norfolk, CT
Housatonic Meadows,

Cornwall, CT

Taconic State Park, Millerton, NY

Thompson Pond Reserve,
Pine Plains, NY

Macedonia State Park, Kent, CT
Kent Falls, Kent, CT

***Introducing
“Family Solutions”
a family support service***

As an agency, we have always maintained the principle that “if a community values its children, it must cherish their parents” (John Bowlby). With this in mind, Housatonic Youth Service Bureau is pleased to be able to introduce our newest resource for parents, “***Family Solutions***” a family support service, offering parent education, one-on-one family assessment, facilitated discussion groups, community-wide special events, and this newsletter.

Parents are our kids’ first teachers, providing them with the first and primary resource for prevention. Yet families today are under tremendous pressures with parents struggling to keep the family unit intact without the social support that existed a generation ago. Promoting positive parenting skills, and fostering strong connections to school and community “***Family Solutions***” helps parents in their effort to raise healthy, well-adjusted children who will grow into responsible, contributing members of society.

Funded through a grant from the Berkshire Taconic Foundation we have added a new parent education coordinator to our staff. An artist and a social services professional with over twenty years experience, Jill Gibbons is dedicated to helping children and families in the local community. She believes strengthening families is the best way to promote healthy emotional development in children and adults.

“Family Solutions” can help

- Improve your parenting skills
- Enhance your confidence as a parent
- Eliminate power struggles
- Create an atmosphere of mutual respect
- Strengthen relationships with family members
- Build support networks

Help your children learn

- Self-discipline
- Responsibility
- Cooperation
- Problem-solving skills
- Life skills to be successful

Please contact us at:

**Housatonic Youth Service
Bureau
P. O. Box 356
Falls Village, CT 06031**

824-4720

**We are located at
236 Warren Turnpike,
Falls Village,
in the White House next to
Housatonic Valley Regional High
School. Remember we are open
during the summer for parent
support, information and access
to our resource library!**