



Volume I, No 2

MAKE A NICE DAY

*Billy was balanced on the edge of a chair
Surprised at the mess that had crashed near the stair.
His terrarium had lasted three days and a half
Its resident lizard now left with a laugh.
It was running to freedom as I put down the phone—
I tried to convince it I'd find it a home—
But it raced on gingerly as I suddenly smelled
The cream soup burning, but—oops—the doorbell.
So I walked with patience to the front door,
In touch with my feelings (my mood was quite sore!)
And I said to myself, "Some days have a way
Of reminding me how I must make a nice day."
So I answered the door and declined my free brush,
Dealt with my feelings; put on some fresh blush
I still had a pot with an awful smelt
A floor full of dirt and an impulse to yell;
So I told my son I was trying to cope
And he knew that together we'd find new hope.
Then he helped me clean up as if it were play
And we proceeded to plan how we'd make a nice day.*

The concept of making a nice day surpasses simply dealing with the unexpected. It embraces a philosophy of deciding what is liked best, choosing what is desired most and creating the opportunities wanted today.

Many parents have already learned how to make their days rewarding. They know when to say "no," how to meet commitments to every "yes," and still have time for their children and themselves. Those who have achieved this gratifying condition are certainly aware of the factors involved in making effective use of time; but those who want time to do more, or even time to do less, periodically need to reevaluate their priorities and methods of planning.

There are hundreds of books written on making more effective use of time. There are books by time—management consultants, reorganized housewives, and successful salesmen. Their one area of unanimous agreement is very simple: Make a plan and follow through with it. Their systems for planning vary, but there are tips from each which many parents in Stelle use in planning for quality time with their children.

For example, a mother of a one—year—old girl reports that she first plans and lists her teaching activities on a monthly calendar, These are then amplified on a weekly “To Do” list. Her daily plans are made around her daughter’s naps, realizing that her growing baby concentrates best soon after she awakens. All teaching plans are flexible and support developing the child’s independence while promoting balanced growth. Once Dad comes home he takes his toddler for walks, creating a special time for discovery with his daughter and allowing Mom some time of her own.

One mother of a three-year-old boy uses a three-ringed notebook to keep all of her teaching information together. She also uses a daily planner with categories for different activities. She’s found that her son is at his best in the morning, and that is when they do their prime projects. Their activities are supplemented in the evenings when Papa reads or tells stories to his son. Any item may become the object of an information-packed anecdote, and even National Geographic may be paraphrased for the little one’s enlightenment.

One five-year-old’s mother finds that their best activity period starts right after breakfast. She organizes her teaching activities in a daily planner and writes her son’s goals on a coloring chart. As he finishes a project, he enjoys coloring a place on the chart which indicates his accomplishment. When Dad is home, he works with his son by reading stories and involving him in home repair projects.

Each of these parents has adapted, planning techniques to fit their own needs. Some parents put an emphasis on noting each of the learning activities they’d like to do within basic subject areas. Others prefer to review the activities they’ve recently done and plan more intensively for the areas where they discern weaknesses.

All parents in Stelle strive to expose their children to a balance of experiences, yet this doesn’t mean that they interrupt children who are absorbed in a science project because, “It’s

time to do math.” Children are encouraged to develop concentration and independence through investigating their interests to the fullest. Parents create more interests by continually introducing new ideas. If, over a period of weeks, they observe an imbalance in their children’s pursuits, they initiate activities to help regain equilibrium. This creates the foundation for their educational planning,

MAKING LIFE EASIER

Planning can make life easier. The following questions are devised to help clarify your understanding of your current organization.

1. What tools do you use in organizing your day? A plan book? “To Do” list? Card file? (Putting your plans into writing gives you a clearer idea of what you’d like to get done, allowing you to select the most important tasks and forget the rest. This diminishes the need to keep mentally reviewing the thousand-and-one things you want to do. It also allows you to more easily spot projects which really don’t merit the amount of time they require.)
2. Have you designated a place for keeping your paperwork organized? (A desk with a file drawer is ideal. File folders in a box under the bed work well too.)
3. When do you take time for planning? (Even if your plans continually have to be revised, regular planning will increase the quality of the time you spend with your children. Some good times for planning are: before the children awaken in the morning, while your spouse has the children occupied, while the baby is taking a nap, or when your children are visiting a neighbor. Many mothers “swap” children, allowing each mother to have time alone while the other watches the children.)
4. At what time of the day are your energy and concentration at their peak? When are your children at their best? (If you find that you and your children are at your best in the morning, plan to do priority teaching projects at this time. You’ll still integrate learning

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Basic

Principles

• PART ONE •

THE RELATION BETWEEN *AGE* AND DEVELOPMENT

The younger children are, the more easily they learn.

The younger children are, the more what they learn enlarges their ability to learn.

The younger children are the higher their rate of mental and physical growth.

THE YOUNGER THE CHILD, THE FASTER THE GROWTH

To get an indication of the rate of your children's potential mental growth, look at the rate of their physical growth. At birth, children are about a quarter of average adult height. By age three, they are usually somewhat taller than half the average adult height. If children maintained the same rate of growth during subsequent three-year periods, they would reach adult height by around age six! The rate of physical growth during normal children's first three years is by far the highest rate of physical growth they will experience throughout their entire lives.

Most of us who are parents have come to take for granted this early rush of physical growth. Most of us, though, have not found it as easy to perceive that early mental growth is fully as rapid. The rate of mental growth during normal children's first three years is by far the highest rate of mental growth they will experience throughout their entire lives.

This fact is well documented. During this century, there have been well over a thousand research studies on early mental development. In his now-classic, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics, Benjamin Bloom has summarized the findings of many of those studies. He reports on the amazingly fast rate of brain growth occurring during the first few years of life, a rate which he finds decreases as a child's age increases. In fact, brain growth in early life is so much faster than at any other time that normal children have usually developed about half of their total adult intellectual capacity by the time they are four years old! And eight-year-olds have developed about 80 percent.

THE YOUNGER THE CHILD THE GREATER THE IMPACT OF EXPERIENCE

When parents grasp the significance of this fact, often the first questions they ask are something like, "What can I do, then, to make these early years really count for my child? If so much mental development is going on, how can I help it along?"

Those questions are based on the correct assumption that development is affected by experience. Perhaps the questions are also based on parents' familiarity with physical development.

We can picture a child living with relaxed, loving parents, has ample nutritious food, abundant exercise, and plenty of fresh air and sunshine, Then we can picture a child exactly the same age, with exactly the same physical build, who lives with tense, distancing parents, is fed processed, devitalized food, is made to keep still as much as possible, and is kept inside almost all the time. It's easy to predict which child's body will be more fully developed, stronger, better coordinated, more capable. It's also predictable that if both children were sent to the same summer camp for a month, the healthier child would consistently and voluntarily eat better foods and get fuller exercise. That is, since he had experienced more healthful input, his capacity for experiencing healthful input would be greater.

Similarly, the more mental stimulation young children receive, the more they are able to take in. The more freedom young children have had to explore their environment, the more they will be interested in exploring it and able to learn from that exploration.

Observant parents have guessed as much for generations. Now research has confirmed their observations.

As an example, thousands of experiments with animals have demonstrated that early stimulation equals increased intelligence. They have also shown that young animals given increased input have brains which are heavier and more neurologically and chemically complex than the brains of animals receiving less early stimulation. In other words, the more they learn at an early age, the better developed their brains are, therefore the more they are capable of learning.

From much research on the brain, we learn that an average human brain has around 10 billion neurons. Intelligence, apparently, is related to the existence and function of the connections between these neurons, or cells. A cell can have thousands of these connections, or very few. The connections are created and strengthened by new input reaching the brain as a result of new experience, and most readily by the experiences one has as a very young child.

By the time children are eight years old, they can have logged eight years richly filled by appropriate, engaging interaction with life, and have vast numbers of well-used connections between their brain cells, Or they can have had a dull eight years of scant experience, with sparse and lightly etched links between cells.

They have, in either case, formed their basic perception of and relation to the world. Children with such different levels of experience, and therefore such different brains, vary greatly in how much of life they perceive now and will perceive in the future.

Both of them, as are all of us, are designed to approach the new through its connections to the known. Children presented with a picture of a view they've never seen will quickly take in all that is familiar, be most attracted to anything new but somewhat similar to something they know, and may not even see—unless it is pointed out—elements in the picture which don't relate at all to their experience.

This means that children with a wealth of meaningful early experience, children who have profusely interconnected brain cells, are able to perceive and be attracted to more of the world because they already know so much of it; the more they know, the more ways they have to relate to the new they encounter. The more young children learn, the more they are able to learn.

So we're back to the parents' question, "What can I do, then, to make these early years really count for my child?"

When we know the fast rate of early growth, and understand that early experience generates capacity for growth, we find the answer not only obvious but urgent as well. To give our children, each day of their early years, as full and meaningful an experience base as we're able begins to seem very important—possibly even crucial.

End Part One of a Two Part Series

J.C.

TO MOTHER IS TO TEACH

by Joanna Carnahan

PICTURE OF A TEACHING MOTHER'S MORNING

Let's say that you've chosen mothering as your profession for the next several years; that you have some awareness of the profound impact mothering has on a child's development; that you've decided to take a segment of each day for exclusive attention to your child—a special teaching, exploring, learning time; and that you want to know how other teaching mothers use this one—to— one time.

In Stelle, all mothers of children under six have, at some level of themselves, chosen mothering as a profession, their work of highest priority. They create opportunities throughout each day for enriching their children's development; and, generally, they set aside mornings for exclusive, one-to-one teaching.

If you talked to several of them, you'd get a composite picture of a morning which might look something like the one given below. We'll call the parents Ann and Matt, and name their two— year— old Jon.)

Sometime between 6:00 and 8:00, the family gets up, gets dressed, has breakfast, and Matt leaves for his work. Jon, of course, is included in all of these activities, is talked and listened to, is allowed and taught how to help.

Around 8:00, as Jon is finishing his breakfast, Ann shows him bits' of birds and composers of classical music. Then Ann plays a record of music written by one of the composers just shown, and they talk about the music as Ann helps Jon wipe his face and together they clear the breakfast dishes. After that, Ann introduces a simple word game, Jon shrieking with delight as he finds and identifies familiar words. Then Ann reads several books to Jon, pointing out words on each page for him to read.

By 9:00, Jon is ready for something active. Ann leads him through some tumbling, jogging on a small trampoline, brachiating, and some basic dance warmups. They wind down by doing movements in time to some happy, tuneful songs, and conclude with Ann singing through the alphabet, giving the name and major phonetic sound of each letter as they page at top speed through a big alphabet book. After the book is put away and a record of violin music is put on, Ann shows Jon word cards and math facts, birds and composers, then sets up finger paints on the kitchen table. Soon Jon becomes absorbed in making lines, curves, swirls, streaks, and some of the letters he sees his mother writing for him to imitate. When he copies two letters and Ann shows him that they make a word, both Ann and Jon get excited, clapping their hands and congratulating each other on the fine production! Before Jon tires of "writing," Ann initiates clean-up and brings out cheese and fruit. As they snack, she shows him more bits.

It's past 10:00 by now. Ann had planned on doing a science experiment at about this time, but Jon asks her to read a special book, so they cuddle up on the couch for more reading. When Jon begins to wiggle a lot, Ann realizes she's read too long and suggests that they see how many steps it takes to march around the living room. Jon thinks it's a grand idea. They count out loud in a singsong way as they hold hands and march together. The science experiment comes next, including some elaborations suggested by Jon. As they put away equipment used in the experiment, Ann begins saying words in the foreign language they're learning, turns on a foreign-language tape, and brings out word cards for Jon to act out. Next come another record of classical music and a puzzle for Jon to work on. Ann helps by describing shapes of the pieces Jon uses and giving tips on good puzzle-fitting techniques.

At around 11:00, the puzzle is put away and Jon begins hammering nails into some soft wood. Since Ann has already throughout the day, but

* A valuable, specialized teaching tool which we learned about from the Better Baby Institute; 8801 Sten ton Avenue; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118

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a special teaching time will help you to integrate more meaningful experiences.)

5. Do you feel good about what you're doing now? Do you feel overextended or bored? What kinds of changes could bring you more of the opportunities you want? (Knowing your present—day limits is just as important as knowing all the things you want.)

6. How can you adapt and build upon the work of other people? (A librarian at your local public library can be of great assistance in helping you use library resources.)

7. How do you make time for yourself? What do you want to do just for you? Having some time alone is essential to the regeneration of your enthusiasm about life and what you are doing.

After you've reviewed your responses to these questions, jot down some of the things you'd like to do with your children in the next couple of weeks. Add a column of things you'd like to do for yourself, too. You needn't invest time in listing activities which are already habits, any more than you need to make a checklist to remind yourself to brush your teeth. Remember

that the purpose of planning is to make your life easier as well as more enjoyable. With this kind of planning in mind, you're likely to find much more frequently that you can MAKE a nice day.

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demonstrated this activity to Jon several times, she moves to the back-ground, reappears twice to help with a recalcitrant nail, and then, when Jon shows signs of ending his hammering, shows him more bits before inviting him to help her wash dishes and get lunch. Their concentrated one—to—one time together flows into an afternoon of excursions, classes, special projects, housework, or any of a number of other activities from which Jon learns in different ways.

A typical morning? There's no such thing. Each day, and each child, are unique. Yet this composite picture of a morning includes elements familiar to many teaching mothers. We hope you'll find some of the elements useful in your special teaching times with your own children.

PARENTING FOR EXCELLENCE — Volume I, No. 2 — May 1981

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Parenting for Excellence is published ten times per year by The Stelle Group. Subscriptions are sold by the volume, with volumes beginning in January. Subscription rates are \$15 for one year, and queries about subscriptions and delivery should be sent to The Stelle Group, Administration Building, Stelle, Illinois 60919, or you may telephone: (815) 949-1111. Up to 250 words may be quoted if *Parenting for Excellence* is given credit and The Stelle Group's address is included.

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