



**BARBARA BURROWS**  
**PARENTING**

M A G A Z I N E

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**Fifteen year old asks mother for birth control pills • Temper Tantrums • Sleeping Beauty  
Let mommy feed the baby whenever possible • Dealing with learning disabilities  
Developing strong personalities through competition • “I’m bored - There’s nothing to do!”**

**CANADA’S LEADING PARENT EDUCATION SERVICE • APRIL 2004**

# BARBARA BURROWS PARENTING MAGAZINE

www.barbaraburrows.com  
(formerly Parent to Parent Magazine)  
Canada's leading parent education service

**Publisher**  
Barbara Burrows

Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine is published 6 times per year in conjunction with the Newspaper partners across Ontario in February, April, June, August, October, and December.

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Readers are encouraged to submit parenting questions, their own stories or experiences to "Our Readers Share" and of course comment on anything in Letters to the Editor.

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## Weathering motherhood and why it's not necessary to jump off the Bridge.

### What's Up?



ANGELA GREENWAY  
Managing Editor

**M**y deadline is near... I'm thinking about Mother's Day coming up, and wanting to say something encouraging for mothers. Hmmmm...this isn't a good day to ask me to do that! I can offer some advice though. As a mother, it's always a good idea to stay a little flexible whenever one can. You never know what will happen next. Like this morning, when my third born was late for school. In a mad panic I rearranged my morning to drive her (with just a quick stop at the movie store to return the rentals that were due — RIGHT AWAY!) My second thought for mothers of teenagers, try also to stay a little deaf. You never know what they will say next. Like, in the heated moments we shared this morning in the car on the way to school, when, after I told her I was called about her skipping class again (she knew I was angry), and she stormed off saying, "I f&\*&king hate you."

It's hard to know at these precise times if one is a good mother or not. Since her two older siblings (who have also said the same thing at one point or another) have survived adolescence to become responsible, intelligent and very capable young adults, I have decided that overall, I just might be a reason-

ably good mother (doubts can slip in on such a morning though). Today, all else being equal, I will not drive off the bridge because she "f&\*&king hates me".

Weathering motherhood is what mothering is as far as I can figure. The fact that we don't collapse when they stab our souls is a real testament to our staying power. Will I be upset later on in the day when she returns? I doubt it. Will she storm in the house? Possibly, but I doubt that too. Will I raise it again and explain how her language was inappropriate? She already knows that, and by now is probably sorry for her outburst. Should I apologize for laying into her about school, trust that she can manage well and let her work it out on her own? Probably (difficult though!). Does she "f&\*&king hate me"? Right now she does but tonight when she needs a ride or tomorrow when I offer to make her lunch, she won't. I'm just going to try darn hard to take my own advice and stay very flexible and a little deaf.

*Angela*

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## DEAR BARBARA

## Fifteen year old asks mother for birth control pills

## Dear Barbara:

*We moved to a new community six months ago. My fifteen year old daughter, who has a boyfriend of 3 months, came home yesterday and asked me to take her to our family doctor to get birth control pills! After I had overcome my shock and disbelief, I answered her the only way I felt I could. I explained I didn't feel it was the best thing for her to do and that morally I felt it was wrong. Therefore I could not take her to the doctor for the birth control pill as she wanted.*

*She was furious that I refused. She feels that I have let her down, when she trusted me enough to come to me with this request. I have remained firm in my decision, adding that I have the greatest confidence that she will make a responsible decision, based on what is best for her, as she has done in the past with other milestones in her life.*

*She remains furious! I remain frustrated and frightened she is going to do something she may be sorry for later and I'll be a grandmother at 38. What should I do?*

## Dear Parent:

Your daughter knew before she asked what your position on this issue would be. Attitudes and family values on issues of sexuality are expressed in a multitude of different ways and are quite clear by the time a child reaches 15. If she really wanted birth control pills, she could get them, without consulting you.

I think she asked for contraceptives to alert you to the fact that she is thinking of taking a very big step in her life and she wants to talk with you about it. Not knowing quite how to start, she created a big issue. While she squabbles with you, she does not have as much time to feel lonely in her new community, and frightened about thinking of having sex with this new boyfriend.

Perhaps, through discussion, you can explore what makes her think she is ready for sex. You might ask what it has been like for her moving to a new com-

munity. Is she feeling comfortable at school or does she still feel like the "new kid"? Does this boyfriend help her feel like she belongs? Is she worried he will drop her if she does not have sex? How has she decided that she is ready to become intimate? What does she hope to gain from sex?

Try not to talk in terms of values and how you believe she should conduct herself. Instead, help her think about her own feelings and help her figure out what would make her feel most comfortable. I expect she is lonely and having you understand she still feels on the outside, even after 6 months, will comfort her. This comfort may ease her isolated feel-

ings slightly and hopefully strengthen her confidence enough that she will begin to recognize that she is capable of making new friends, lessening her need to hop into bed with her boyfriend to feel accepted.



**BARBARA BURROWS**  
Director,  
Barbara Burrows  
Parenting

Photo by Murray Pellowe

## Tip for Babies –

## Let mommy feed the baby whenever possible

by Barbara Burrows

**O**ften mothers would like to be the one to feed the baby - whether bottle or breast - most of the time. With bottle-fed babies, others can feed, but there is much to be gained from mothers doing as many of the feeds as possible, especially during the first weeks and months.



Clinical findings and research have determined that babies develop most fully when they are given ample time to form one deep and satisfying relationship at a time - and this is usually with the mother. The time during the day that babies have most chance to get to know somebody is during a feeding. The baby gazes into the face, touches the hand and face, becomes used to the scent, knows the voice and comes to know this one

person in an amazing number of ways. When it is usually the same person each time, the baby "get to know" this person sooner and more fully. This "knowing" is the basis of security, and the security is a basis for positive future development.

When well-meaning friends, relatives, or even fathers offer to help in the early days, they can most help the infant's optimal development by feeding the mother (cooking supper for her) rather than feeding the baby. This allows the mother to devote more time to the baby, and helps the baby form that first, close important relationship.



## Don't miss the next issue

of Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine

**COMING JUNE 2004**

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## GOOD BOOKS - MORE THAN A REVIEW

# Babies and their Mothers; The Child, the Family and the Outside World; Talking to Parents; and Winnicott on the Child

By Donald W. Winnicott (1896 – 1971)

### Babies and their Mothers

Perseus Publishing  
ISBN 0-201-63269  
\$23.00 Canadian

### The Child, the Family and the Outside World;

Perseus Publishing  
ISBN 0-201-63268-3  
\$27.50 Canadian

### Talking to Parents;

Perseus Publishing  
ISBN 0-201-62698-5  
\$19.50 Canadian

### Winnicott on the Child

Perseus Publishing  
ISBN 0-7382-0764-0-3  
\$18.50 Canadian

**T**hese four books contain numerous Winnicott papers. I thought Winnicott's work is appropriate, with Mother's Day coming soon. There are few writers who have as deep an understanding of how deeply women are connected psychologically to their children - in a different way than fathers. Or who recognize how this connection can both elate and exhaust women. As he gained deeper knowledge about the needs of children, Winnicott never failed to recognize that mothers and fathers are only human, and human is what babies and children need.

Winnicott is a man who could be "popular" and completely accessible without ever ceasing to be profound. A paediatrician and psychoanalyst, Dr. Winnicott has been a major influence on the fields of child psychiatry, social work, child development and psychoanalysis.

Perseus Publishing, in these four books, has gathered together some of the best papers written by Winnicott. In these classic papers, Winnicott has written powerfully, with sensitivity and intelligence.

I thought the best way to give a "taste" of Winnicott's wisdom and warmth was to share some of what he says. Here are some excerpts of D.W. Winnicott's writings. Winnicott found that children do the best when parents discover their own, unique way to use their "real" selves to nurture their children. Here is a synopsis of his thinking.

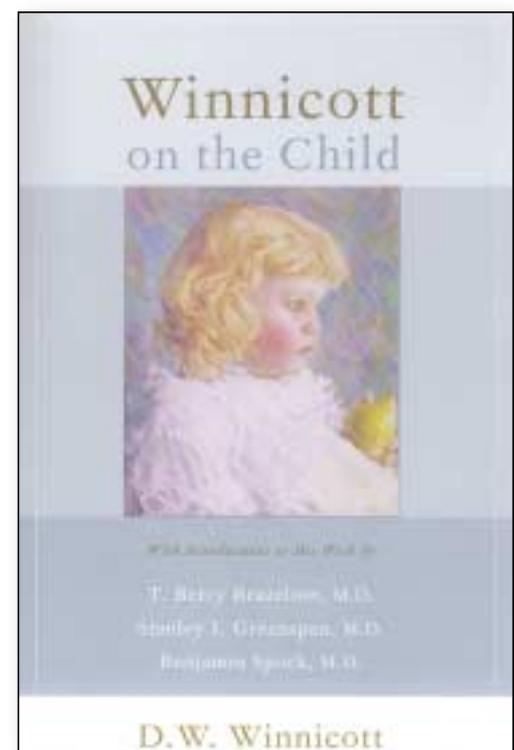
### On Birth

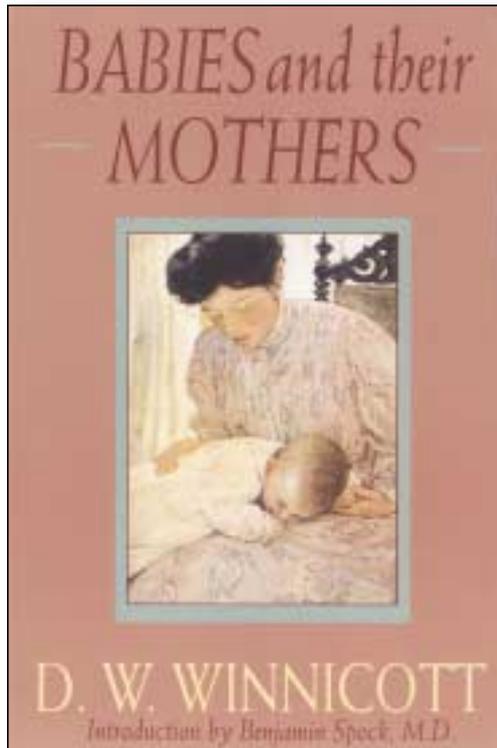
"At the healthy extreme the patient is not a patient, but a perfectly healthy and mature person, quite capable of making her own decisions on major matters. . . She happens to be in a dependent state because of her condition. Temporarily she puts herself in the nurse's hands, and to be able to do that in itself implies health and maturity. In this case the nurse respects the mother's independence for as long as possible, and even throughout the labor if the birth is easy and normal. In the same way she accepts the complete dependency of the many mothers who can go through the experience of childbirth only by handing over all control to the person in attendance."

### On "The Ordinary Devoted Mother"

"By the time the baby is ripe for birth the mother is ready for an experience in which she knows extremely well what are the baby's needs. You will understand that I am not simply referring to her being able to know whether the baby is or is not hungry, and all that sort of thing; I am referring to innumerable subtle things...I believe it is a critical time, but scarcely dare to say this because it would be a pity to make a woman feel self-conscious just here where she is and where she acts naturally *naturally*."

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to recognize that  
mothers and fathers  
are only human,  
and human is what babies  
and children need.



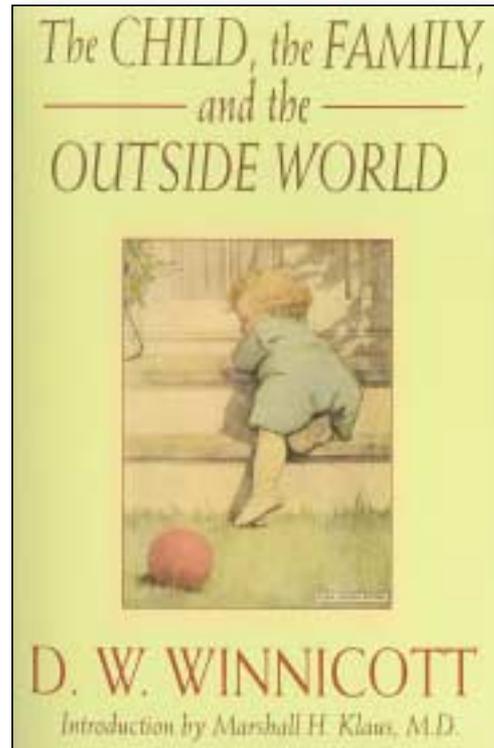


### On Breast-Feeding

"I am not specifically concerned with promoting and encouraging breast-feeding, although I do hope the general trend of what I have had to say in the course of years about this matter has had exactly this effect, simply because there is something natural and it is likely that what is natural has a very good foundation. There is no doubt whatever that a vast number of individuals in this world today have been brought up satisfactorily without having had the experience of breast-feeding. This means that there are other ways by which an infant may experience physical intimacy with the mother. Nevertheless I myself would always be sorry if breast-feeding fails in any one case, simply because I believe that the mother or the baby or both are losing something if they lose this experience."

### On Jealousy

"Jealousy is normal and healthy. Jealousy arises out of the fact that children love. If they have no capacity to love, then they don't show jealousy. Jealousy usually comes to a natural end, although it perhaps starts up again and disappears again. Eventually healthy children become able to say they are jealous, and this gives them a chance to discuss what they are jealous about, and that may help bit. I am putting forward the idea that the first thing to be said about jealousy is that it represents an achievement in the infant's development."

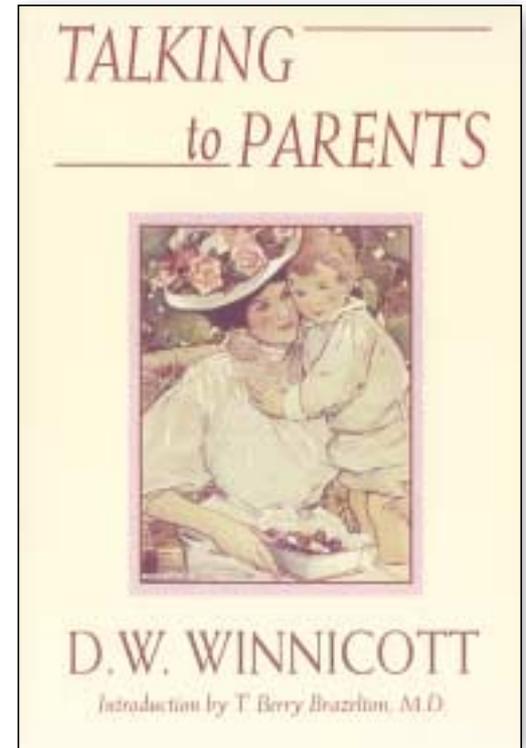


### On the Father

"There is a limit...to the demands that a small child has a right to make on the mother. And who shall set this limit? To some extent, the mother finds she can gradually defend herself. But I expect in the end it's the father who has to come in and defend his wife. He has his rights too. Not only does he want to see his wife restored to an independent existence, but he also wants to be able to have his wife to himself, even if at certain times this means the exclusion of the children. So in the course of time the father puts his foot down...[it is when] the father puts his foot down that he becomes significant for the small child, provided he has first earned the right to take a firm line by being around."

### On Security

"What happens when a sense of security becomes established in the child? I want to say this. There then follows one long struggle against security, that is to say, security that is provided in the environment. The mother, after the initial period of protection, gradually lets the world in, and the individual small child now pounces on every new opportunity for free expression and for impulsive action. This war against security and controls continues throughout childhood; yet the controls go on being necessary...[Parents] continue to function as custodians of the peace but they expect lawlessness and even revolution... Children need to go on finding out whether they still can rely on their parents, and this testing may continue till the children are themselves ready to provide secure conditions for their own children and after... So I see it this way: good conditions in the early stages lead to a sense of security and a sense of security leads on to self-control and when self-control is a fact, then security that is imposed is an insult."



### On the Development of Morality

"Some people think that ideas of right and wrong grow in the child like walking and talking, though some people think you have to implant them. My own view is that there is room for something in between these two extremes, there's room for the idea that the sense of good and bad, like much else, comes naturally to each infant and child, provided certain conditions of environmental care can be taken, for granted. The essential conditions can't be described in a few words, but in the main it is this; that the environment should be predictable and at first highly adapted to the infant's needs."

### On the "Good Enough" Parent

I must be careful. So easily in describing what very young children need I can seem to be wanting parents to be selfless angels, and expecting the world to be ideal, like a suburban garden in summer with father cutting the grass, and mother preparing the Sunday dinner, and the dog barking at an alien dog over the garden fence. Of children, even of babies, it can be said that they do not do well on mechanical perfection. They need human beings around them who both succeed and fail. I like to use the words 'good enough.' Good enough parents can be used by babies and young children, and good enough means you and me. In order to be consistent, and so to be predictable for our children, we must be ourselves. If we are ourselves our children can get to know us."

F E A T U R E

# Dealing with learning disabilities



by Janet Morrison

**L**earning disabilities are simply difficulties which interfere with a child's ability to learn. Some children have difficulty perceiving differences between various letters which look similar. Some children have a problem distinguishing up from down or left from right. One can see that these children will have a hard time learning to read because they confuse words or they don't scan the page consistently from left to right. Some children have difficulty discerning words which are given orally. Some children have poor fine motor skills which make it very difficult for them to write quickly or neatly. Other children have a limited attention span and either lapse into daydreams or become restless and disruptive. Still others have difficulty with number concepts.

There is a lot of controversy about the cause of learning disabilities. Some researchers speculate that learning disabilities are genetic or are caused by damage to the brain suffered either in utero or during the birth process. Others believe that learning disabilities are caused by emotional problems which interfere with a child's ability to focus on academic tasks. The truth is probably that some are caused by damage to the brain and some are caused by emotional problems.

Whether children have learning disabilities as a result of brain lesions or emotional conflicts they all feel badly about the fact that they do poorly at school and that they all suffer frustration, disappointment and feelings of inadequacy. In order to learn children have to be calm and they have to have confidence in their ability to learn. Otherwise, they become immediately frustrated or will not even try. They won't allow themselves to take risks because they fear failure. In order to read, for instance, a child has to take a chance every time he identifies a letter of word - is he right or is he wrong? Some children find it so painful to be wrong that they will cause distur-

**The most important thing parents can do (and the most difficult) is to be relaxed and confident in approaching their children's difficulty.**

bances in the classroom and would rather be perceived as having a behaviour problem rather than let people know they can't master a particular task. For these children, it is far better to be seen as deliberately bad than helplessly mistaken!

Children who have learning disabilities all require extra time, attention and support from their parents and teachers. They need a lot of "one on one" teaching which allows them to focus on the specific task without the distraction of the larger class situation and without the risk of being teased or humiliated when they fail. For parents, it is often very disappointing and anxiety-provoking to have a child who is doing poorly at school. The parents' disappointment (which is always picked up by the child) further erodes the child's self-confidence and makes him even more reluctant to approach new or difficult tasks.

Of course, not all children who are doing poorly at school have a learning disability. There are many children who lack motivation or concentration because they are angry or depressed. Where this is the case, the child's emotional state must be addressed and improved before there can be any improvement academically. If your child is doing poorly at school, the first thing is to investigate with your child and his teacher the nature of the problem. Aside from school work, what is your child's general level of happiness and satisfaction? How is he getting along with friends, classmates and the teacher? How is he enjoying extra-curricular activities? What is the state of your relationship with your child? How high is the tension level at home? How distracted, angry or depressed are you or your spouse? How much pres-

sure are you putting on your child to perform scholastically? All these questions need to be asked and explored in conjunction with the exploration of your child's difficulties. Sit down with your child and ask him how he feels about the questions just posed. You cannot create problems for your child by "putting notions into their heads" and you'll be amazed at the insights some children as young as four or five will possess.

The next step is to determine which school tasks are causing the greatest problem. What exactly is it your child can and cannot do? Ask to have your child assessed by someone who specializes in learning disabilities and ask for exercise tips on how you can assist your child at home. Remediation usually involves simple exercises designed to help your child overcome (or compensate for) his particular area of weakness.

The most important thing parents can do (and the most difficult) is to be relaxed and confident in approaching their children's difficulty. Sitting close to your child with your arm around him or her and calmly encouraging your child to persevere with the task at hand is the best way and most effective way you can help. Often we parents are running up and down stairs, answering the phone, banging pots and pans and all the while shouting at our child to "get down to it", "concentrate", "stop fiddling"! Ad how many of us preach "read! read! read!" to our kids but never pick up a book ourselves or read to our children?

When parents are calm, curious and enjoy learning themselves, they provide an atmosphere for their children which promotes good concentration, curiosity and a love of learning.

*Janet Morrison is a therapist in private practice in Toronto. She has a Master's degree in Psychology in addition to her training at the Toronto Child Psychotherapy Program. She treats children and adolescents with a wide range of problems. She is married and the mother of two sons.*

## Tip for Class – Writing about myself? No way!

**H**elping a child build his “self concept” is widely recognized as a good thing. Children at school are often asked to write stories about themselves to help them figure out more about what they think, how they feel and to strengthen their concept about who they are.

Sometimes children are trying to work through difficult problems, for example, how to get over angry feelings towards

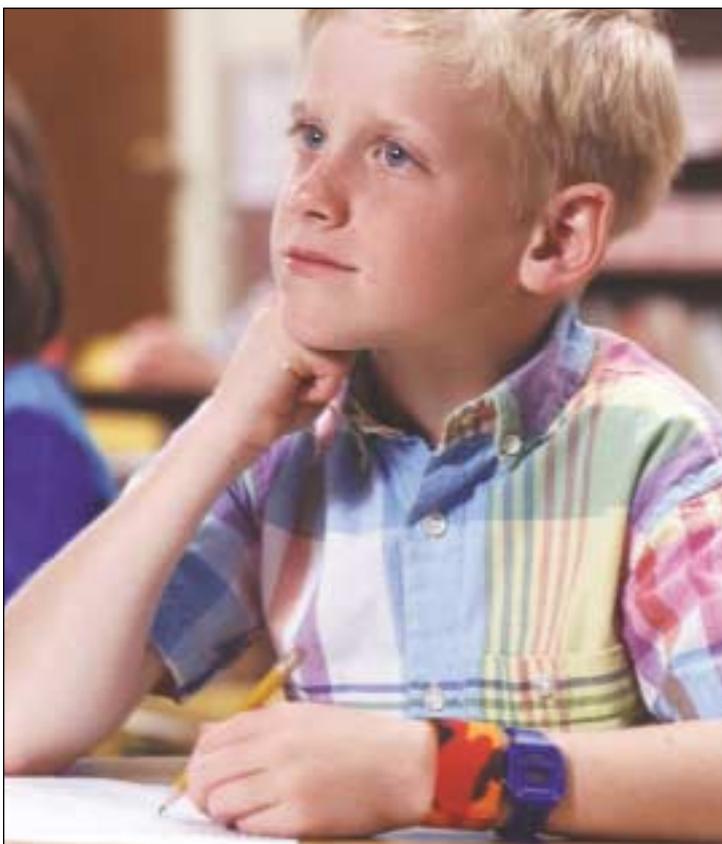
**During these phases, some children find it very difficult to write about themselves, as they don't want anyone else to know about the part of themselves they feel is “bad”.**

a younger brother who seems to get all of your mother's attention. School age children can have quite strict consciences, leaving them feeling quite guilty even for their thoughts. During these phases, some children find it very difficult to write about themselves, as they don't want anyone else to know about the part of themselves they feel is “bad”.

They can't reveal their real feelings without feeling horrible, making up something nice would be like lying to the teacher and procrastinating gets the teacher angry. There is no way out for the child.

Offering a picture of a young boy or girl in some difficult circumstance, about the age of the child, or even of young animals and encouraging the child to write a story, not about themselves, but about what they think has happened in the story might be a much safer assignment for some children.

The thoughts or circumstances the child projects onto the neutral third party will of course be her own, but with this safety buffer, many children can engage much more happily and actively in the writing process, and not feel “exposed”.



## Tip for Tots – Temper tantrums

*By Eleanor Weisberger, Child Analyst and retired assistant professor of child therapy at Case Western University School of Medicine, also author of “Your Child & You” published by Appletree Books, Cleveland OH (Call 216-791-2665).*

**T**emper tantrums are storms that happen when verbalization has not taken place. Your child's feelings build, but he has found no way to discharge them. His pent-up feelings have nowhere to go, and he loses control of himself in fighting, flailing and flinging himself around.

The first thing to do with the under-five child who is besieged in this fashion is to remove him to a quiet place. It will take time for him to decelerate, and you want to make sure he can't hurt himself. Stay with him if he's headed in that direction. Say “I won't let you hurt yourself,” as you toss pillows under him. He feels safer when you take over the controls for a short time and let him know that he can call on some of your strength to whether the storm.

**Temper tantrums are storms that happen when verbalization has not taken place.**

If the tantrum is of a milder sort, such as stamping his foot or shouting furiously, put him in isolation and then encourage him to talk. If he is still screaming, tell him you will talk it over when he calms down. You cannot respond peaceably in the midst of a hurricane.

Getting the child to acknowledge angry feelings, important in all discipline problems, is particularly helpful with the tantrum. The best way to prevent tantrums is to allow the child to express his rage in words at the time it is felt. When anger is emitted piecemeal through words, it need not erupt into something overwhelming which frightens him as much as it does you.

Remember too that during the course of their development children will have angry feelings which are quite unrelated to your handling - as in the case of the two-year-old's negativism or the four-year-old's attempts to play one parent against the other. These are normal phases that really do pass. Often the child himself doesn't know what is eating him. If he is unable to verbalize a feeling and you cannot locate a reasonable source, tell him that he is having a bad day or that he got up on the wrong side of the bed. After all, we have our bad time too. You can sympathize with him, but also make it plain that he cannot take his bad mood out on others, and cannot hurt you, himself or the house.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN CLASS?

*Accounts here are written by parents who have attended Barbara Burrows Parenting programs. The stories are submitted anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the children. Thank you to the parents who have taken the time to share their experiences.*

# Sleeping Beauty

I remember that as a small child I could hardly wait until I was old enough to stay up (really) late - at least until Batman (am I dating myself) was over at 8 p.m.! Now of course, I am all too anxious to 'hit the sack' or sneak an afternoon nap - my current definition of pure indulgence.

I am not sure who is more tired at the end of the day - my husband and I or the kids. We all have early mornings and busy days. It is not surprising then that when bedtime does arrive I look forward to everyone settling down quickly and easily.

Both my husband and I have noticed how extended the nighttime routine has become. As a small child, our oldest daughter (now 8) usually drifted off to sleep quietly, happily and quickly. What used to be a fairly streamlined routine - bath, story and nite-nite - had stretched into hours of frustration for all of us.

We like to think we can respond to our children's needs. So when the oldest decided she wanted to set her own bedtime we agreed, hoping it would alleviate some of the tension. We fully expected she would find a time that was reasonable and right for her. We quickly learned however, that this 'open-ended' approach involved too much freedom, which she did not manage very well. Many nights she would stay up far later than she should (as in beyond the time we had gone to bed!). After awhile she became weary during the day, unusually grumpy and generally run-down.

As her parents we felt strongly that we should step in and set some limits. She seemed happy enough with a specific time we decided on together. We agreed that how she managed herself before that time was up to her, but bedtime was bedtime.

Over the past few months we have experienced a great deal of success with the routine. She seemed delighted with our permission for her to stay up later than her brother and combined with having some free time to play, create and generally 'do her own thing' we found the solution was one we could live with - she was asleep every night in reasonable time.



We were surprised then to find ourselves in the midst of an exasperating evening not too long ago. I had done my best to help all three children to bed. Our son (age 6) is usually so tired he falls asleep after dinner - no trouble at all. The two year old has the confines of a much-loved crib to play in before she curls up on top of all the books, blankets and toys to sleep (not my idea of comfort but she likes it). But the oldest would not settle into bed when it was her turn. What she wanted to do was play just one more, and then one more game, read the never-ending 'last story', tidy up her room for the morning - anything but get into bed. Could she colour at her desk for just a few more minutes she asks? "Sure" (trying to be agreeable) I respond but not for too long.

Another hour passes by and she is still up. I ask her again to get changed and hop into bed. She says she's not a bunny - I laugh but I insist it is still bedtime. I am now well past my 'patient mother' stage.

She was adamant about remaining dressed, sitting at her desk, listening to music and doing any or everything unrelated to bedtime. Phrases like "it's getting

late - better get to bed"; "you'll be tired in the morning" and "its bedtime now and I mean it" all fell on deaf ears. As I ventured back downstairs, seeming like for the tenth time, I could hear music from her tape player grow louder and her words become even more defiant. (Looking back - could it be that we were in one of

those famous *power struggles*?) When I didn't respond she moved to the top of the stairs, obviously upset and yelling, "I'm not going to bed you know!" followed by "I'm coming downstairs now."

I find it difficult to cope with a child that is excessively uncooperative at this point in the day, more so than at any other time.

It is usually because I myself am tired and usually have various things I need to finish up in the evening. At this time of night I am easily frustrated and on this occasion I was (majorly) frustrated!

By now I had been up and down the stairs many times - and by now she had screamed at me and I in turn at her. I knew in the back of my mind that I certainly was not managing very well at all.

I pulled my husband away from his office work to help. "She is unbearable

**Remembering that there is always a good reason for behaviour**

Continued on page 9

## Sleeping Beauty

Continued from page 8

and she is all yours!" I announce. Surely with his gentle, soft touch he could help her into bed and at the same time help me find something for my headache! As it turns out he was just as unsuccessful, at least in getting her to bed. He found the aspirin without any trouble.

We decided it was time to 'lay down the law' and insist she go to bed. We closed the door to where we were sitting downstairs angrily - giving her the very clear message we would not be coming up any more, and she was not to call. She would have to settle herself down on her own.

It was a good try but we knew when we went upstairs to bed that it was a bad idea. We found her asleep in the upper hallway, still dressed, nothing covering her and feeling very cold when we picked her up. As we carried her into bed, trying to get her changed at the same time we knew in our hearts how wrong the entire evening had been.

The next morning she arrived downstairs, not rested and certainly not with her usual morning smile. "I'm sorry" she says to my back. "So am I" I reply. We hug.

I had a chance to bring this situation to my parenting classes with Barbara Burrows. We tried to understand the less obvious forces involved in this situation. I have come to understand that settling down at nighttime relaxes many of a child's defences. With quiet moments and a variety of thoughts to deal with alone at bedtime they often feel more vulnerable. The desire to connect with the parent through this period is often heightened. The entire time she spent stalling could very well have been her way of telling me she needed me even more for some reason. At the time I thought she was trying to be manipulative with her behaviour. All I could think of at the time was couldn't we have talked earlier or couldn't we have done creative work after school instead of at 10 p.m.?

I know now that the desire to have the parents' attention rarely surfaces when children are having fun with their friends or involved with other activities. At those times, they do not need the security of a parent. The parent is needed if and when the child starts to feel anxiety and the deeper feelings when nighttime comes.

It all makes so much sense now. She did seem anxious. I don't know why. I am sure there are a variety of pressures for her at school. Perhaps she had an unusually stressful day. Maybe she has had frightening dreams recently. All in all, she couldn't tell me why she didn't want to sleep, (probably because she didn't really know herself) only that she wasn't going to!

And I know for myself, it is always more difficult to rest when I am worried or upset, even if I am not exactly sure why.

I think if I had addressed her anxiety - asked her to think if there was anything on her mind that might be making it hard to settle down, we might have been able to "zero in" on the important feelings and avoid this difficult evening. If she could have put her feelings into words, and I could have listened sympathetically, perhaps she could have settled down much sooner. Sounds easy after the fact - who knows.

Even with this knowledge, I know there are still going to be some days when it is difficult to find that last drop of energy to spend extra time with her, especially at the end of the day. In a selfish way, I am anxious for those few cherished hours when all is quiet and peaceful.

It has helped all of us to recognize there can be deeper needs on the days when she finds it hard to settle though. This insight will help me try a little harder to get to the bottom of it when she is having trouble, even when I am dead tired. I hope this effort will help me get me my cherished peaceful evening and a good night's sleep for her!

## Tip for Kids – Kids love to fool parents



**“D**o you think this cookie is broken?” a five-year-old asks her mother while carefully holding the cookie so the break is difficult to discern. The mother searches the child's face to try and determine if the child wants her to answer yes or no. She would be pleased to give the answer the child wants but it is not always easy to recognize the correct answer. The mother knows the child hopes to be able to fool her and she is willing to be fooled (or at least pretend she is fooled) to please the child.

Children love to fool their parents. Parents are able to out-think children most of the time, they solve problems more efficiently, they figure out how to get places when children have no idea how to reach a destination — to the child, the parent seems infinitely smarter. Adults would want to find some way of proving their capability if surrounded by others of infinitely superior intellectually. We would take delight in outsmarting or fooling somebody else in this circumstance. Children do the same.

### Do you think this cookie is broken?

Some of a child's attempts to fool their parents can be viewed by the parents as telling lies. A child can tell a made-up story with the intent of fooling parents. If a parent fails to understand what motivates the child's "tall tale" and punishes or criticises the child, the child will be deeply discouraged. A child will wonder how a story that was motivated by a feeling of joking and good will can be worthy of punishment.

Instead, if a parent can respond to the story in the way it is intended the child will be delighted. "How could that possibly have happened?" an astonished parent can exclaim. "What an interesting story!" If the parent feels compelled to address the reality issue, he or she can add, "You have a wonderful imagination. I think you'll be a writer when you grow up and will make up stories people will love!"

Realize telling "tall tales" does not mean your child will turn out to be a pathological liar in adult years. Try to identify these playful episodes and enjoy this typical mode of behaviour. Allow yourself to be fooled by your children when the child is trying to out-smart you in a good-natured way. Your child will be immensely pleased.

T H E G R A N D M O T H E R S

# I'm Bored

*There's nothing to do!*

By Georgina T. Roberts  
of "The Grandmothers"

*"The Grandmothers" are an energetic, experienced group of Early Childhood Consultants linked with The Hanna Perkins Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Collectively, they have decades of experience and have helped several thousand children lead happier lives.*

*As parents are thinking ahead to plan summer activities for children, Gann's article on "boredom" might offer some help.*

"I'm bored: There's nothing to do." Does this wail strike terror in your heart and cause you to rush in with a fun activity or hurry to sign your child up for yet another special program? You begin to review the situation in your mind: "How about a gymnastics class for Matthew—we could fit that in after day camp. And it's right on the way to Sarah's swim lesson. Of course, we'll have to pick up dinner on the way home because both children have soccer games in the evening and I don't want to miss my exercise class."

Why are we scheduling our children's lives so completely these days? Are we worried that Sarah won't be able to compete with her peers if she doesn't learn to play soccer as early as possible? Is it because everyone else is doing it, and we just get caught up in the crowd? Or are we trying to keep our feelings at bay by rushing here and there, keeping everyone busy, busy? Over-scheduling is certainly a way to avoid intimacy. Or do we feel, as some parents do, that all this structured activity makes a child more flexible, able to adapt to new situations or to keep them out of trouble? Surely we are doing the best for our children, giving them every advantage.

But every now and then, parents wonder if there is a reason to step back and analyze what is missing from these over-programmed children's lives. Somewhere in our distant memories, we fondly recall that delicious boredom of long summer days that seemed to represent what childhood was all about. Summer is an especially good time to provide children with lots of unstructured time to give them the luxury of choosing exactly what they want to do, for how long, and with whom. (I hope it doesn't need to be said that TV is not an



option here—in fact, how about turning off the TV for the summer?) The perception of the freedom to choose allows the child to invest all her energy into an activity and receive tremendous satisfaction and fulfillment from it. Who would not wish for their child the wonderful experience of what educators call flow: when she is wholly absorbed in an activity with focused attention and a complete lack of self-consciousness?

Early childhood experts recognize the benefits of letting a child choose his activities. Just the decision making process is highly instructive and beneficial to a child's cognitive development. Experimenting and creating his own world are exercises of the mind which have far-reaching benefits. And think of the opportunities for evaluation: of himself, of others, and of the situation. In this way, children become aware of what they value, what they really like to do. In other words, they are in the process of learning who they are, not just who other people want them to be.

Social learning takes place, too, when children seek interactions with others, when they make up their own rules and learn how to negotiate with others. Think of a group of kindergarten boys in the backyard, bickering, yelling, making up the rules of their baseball game. Think of three 5 year old girls finding a secret hideaway in

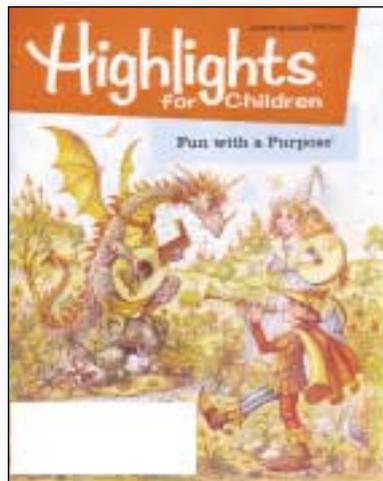
the basement and designing elaborate rules and regulations for their "No Boys Allowed" club. Never mind that the baseball game never gets to the fourth inning or the club never becomes anything more than the posting of rules. These are activities imagined, designed, and carried out by the children; their involvement, their enthusiasm, their intense joy attest to their value in more ways that we can measure. But we certainly know that they are learning, in a very practical way, the people skills that they will need all their lives. When coaches and other adults are in charge, the children just do not have the same experience of seeing how their actions affect others as they do in freely chosen play with peers alone.

"But there's no one around these days," you complain, "all the other kids are so over-programmed, my kids have no one to play with." So now there's the opportunity for solitary activity where the child does whatever she pleases and can lose herself completely in it. Dr. Sylvia Rimm, noted author of books on child rearing, in her research on women who have excelled in non-traditional, demanding careers, found that they often cited time alone as an important feature of their childhood. Actually, we do our children no favor when we rush to entertain them, play with them constantly, even in their earliest years. Instead, get them started in an activity, then phase yourself out. Or put them in a setting where there's plenty to do (your kitchen pots and pans cupboard for your crawling baby, for example), then go on about your own business. Allowing a child to learn how to entertain himself is one of the best things we can do for him. And if he learns this early, his skills and enthusiasm for self-initiated, deeply involved activity will only grow with him.

Just don't forget that to achieve autonomy requires time—lots and lots of unstructured, uninterrupted time. Let's give our children their childhood back. They don't need to train for the Olympics or Carnegie Hall just yet. These skills of self-direction and autonomy will be much more useful for their future endeavors than basic drilling on specific sports skills in the pre-school years. Let's allow them that delicious boredom of long summer days and give our children and ourselves the luxury of time to enjoy each other.

# Highlights

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**H**ighlights for Children was founded in 1946 and has been publishing books for children filled with wholesome fun activities, stories, jokes and cartoons ever since. Designed for use in the classroom or at home, Highlights is dedicated to helping children grow in basic skills and knowledge, in creativeness, in ability to think and reason, in sensitivity to others, in high ideals and worthy ways of living. This publication offers children fun with a purpose. It targets children from 2 - 12 years and contains no advertising. Children from all over the world subscribe and contribute jokes, submit questions and sometimes even write stories.



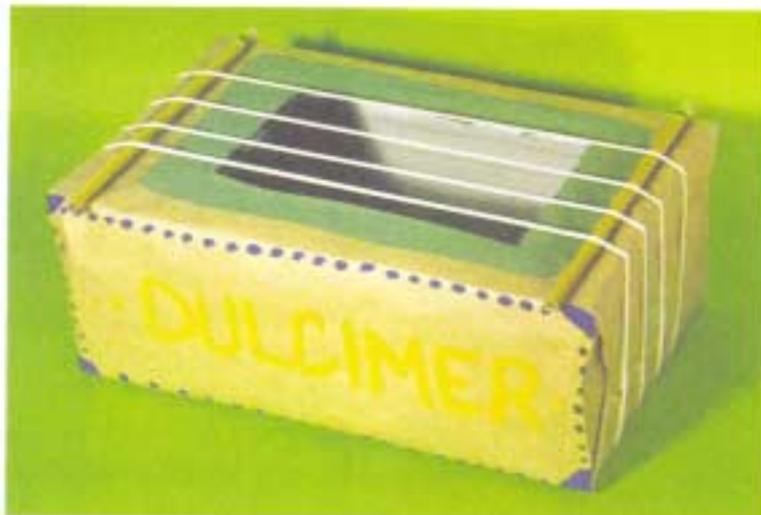
## Make sweet music on this dulcimer

By Jessica Gates

The Appalachian, or Mountain, dulcimer is a musical instrument developed in the United States in the 1800s from dulcimers brought to America by European immigrants. Like a guitar, it is made of wood and has a sound hole. The dulcimer can have three or four strings and is played by placing it on your lap and strumming the strings.

1. Cut a 10-centimetre-wide rectangular shaped hole in the lid of a shoebox.
2. Replace the lid on the shoebox and tape it in place. Cover the box with paper, leaving the hole in the lid open. Decorate the box.
3. To make the strings, stretch four rubber bands around the length of the shoebox. Each rubber band should go over the hole in the lid.
4. Put a pencil under the strings at each end of the box. This will make the strings tighter. The tighter you make the strings, the higher their tones will be.

5. To play, place the dulcimer on your lap and strum the strings with your fingers or a pick. To get different tones on each string, use a pencil to place pressure on different parts of the string while you strum.



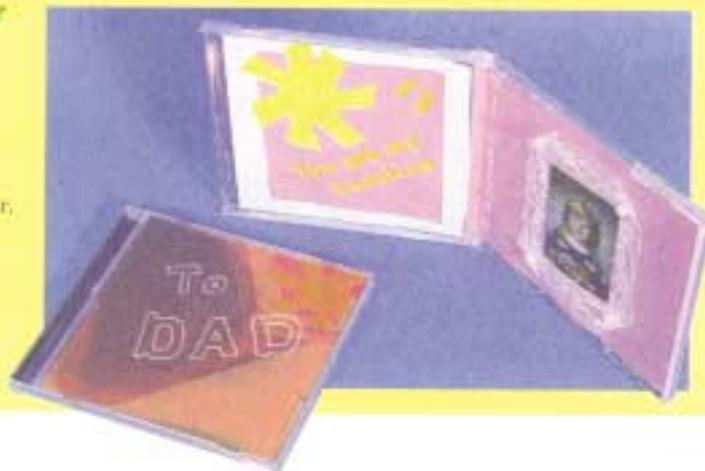
### Craft Challenge!

Design a board game. Take into account all your favourite parts from other board games you've played.

## A card they'll keep forever

By Pat Sandifer Borum

1. Ask an adult to help you pry out the plastic disk holder from an old compact disk case. Remove the title and information pages. Trace around the pages to make patterns on coloured paper.
2. Decorate the coloured paper. Use all four sides for your pictures and message. Suggestions include birthdays, Mother's Day or Father's Day, get-well cards, and festivals.



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## F E A T U R E

# Developing strong personalities through competition

by Judith Deutsch

*Judith Deutsch, M.S.W. and Clinical Social Worker deals with both adult & child issues in her private practise in Toronto. She graduated from University of California at Berkeley and completed post masters training at Mount Zion Psychiatric Clinic, San Francisco, California.*

## Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine asks Judith Deutsch to respond to the following question:

It has been said that organized sports for young children can actually interfere with the likelihood that a child will develop a life long interest in a sport. There also seems to be controversy about whether or not competition is beneficial for children. **Do you think competitive experiences help or hinder young children?**

### Judith Deutsch:

**C**ompetition covers such a broad area. Children begin to experience competitive feelings as early as the toddler stage, and finding a way to manage these competitive feelings is a task people work on throughout life — from preschool years, into adolescence and through adulthood.

Children start to compete in formal and organized ways when they start to play games with rules — the mental and emotional capacity to play games with rules usually begins with the school age child (sometime around or after 6 years); before this, children are more likely to work out their competitive issues in fantasy play. For example, young boys love to pretend to play Power Rangers, vying for the strongest position at times, and at other times, working together as a team to combat evil. School-age children, with the development of conscience, start to want some distance from their fantasies that contain aggressive images and thoughts. Their desires to “beat” get expressed more subtly as they try to beat an opponent through sports or games.

For young children, competitive feelings and frightening aggressive feelings go closely together — children want what they want, they brook little delay, and they can be pretty indifferent or even cruel to those who stand in their way to fulfilling their desires.

Because young children do not yet know the “duration” of real time or how long things really take, and they also find it harder to distinguish past/ present/ and future — so consequently, it is much harder for them to wait. Also, it is harder for



To allow children to benefit fully from sports, it is very important that teachers, parents and coaches stress over and over that a game is just a game.

them to remember good experiences in the past or to hold onto hopes for the future when they feel very frustrated in the present. To a child at this stage, what we might call “winning” in the areas in which children feel competitive — to sit in the front seat of the car while siblings go in back, to get the biggest cookie, to chose the T.V. program — all carry an emotional feeling of getting something and being loved.

At this stage, the capacity to postpone the reward (not to try as hard as they can to get what they want) is very difficult for children, and competitive feelings, as every parent knows, can completely over-whelm children, leaving them furious.

Games can help children manage these very real difficulties and can help children develop important aspects of what we call “ego functioning”. This means that certain forms of competition can lead to a greater sense of mastery over aggressive feelings that emerge when children are competing. Games can help children learn that to wait one’s turn can make the game more fun for every one, hence helping them learn the value of being to postpone one’s desire to “be first”. The fact that games involve predictable steps and sequences, games help

children have the experience that “winning” (or successfully achieving any goal in life) does not happen all at once. Games can teach them, in a way parents or teacher never can through discussion, the value of perseverance. It is from experiencing pleasure and success through persevering at the game that the child becomes convinced that there is value in sticking to something and continuing to try, even when success is not immediate.

Younger children do not understand that they can have some control over what they want and some ability to work to have wishes satisfied. For example, a young child who is shunned by playmates might have no idea how he might find a way to be accepted by them. Adult suggestions of how to make friends make no sense to him; he simply believes he is unlikeable. He may feel completely over-whelmed, and withdraw from his peer group when they will not accept him. He feels hopeless and helpless, having no idea what to do.

Some games and sports require specific skill and thought in order to do well at the game. As children discover, through enjoyable games and sports they can do better if they think ahead, plan strategies or concentrate on how to make their bodies move, they begin to understand that they may increase their own competency in many of life’s circumstances through trying hard, developing their own skill etc. The experience of playing the game or sport motivates them to want to develop skills in other areas of life and to feel more competent. To return to the example of the child shunned by playmates, with many experiences of figuring out how to win at a game or sport, using his own capacity to think ahead, he might gain enough confidence in his cognitive skills that he could think ahead to how his actions might affect his friends. He may then be able to modify his actions in a way that would make him acceptable to the group. He no longer feels helpless; he feels able to tackle what was previously an insurmountable problem.

Games and sports stir angry, aggressive feelings in children, as they feel strongly that they want to be the winner. Parents and teachers can help children modify their aggressive feelings by reminding them that there are little, medium and big angry feelings, and that because a game is still just a game — that children can think first, and do not have to react so immediately with anger — they may keep their angry feelings within reasonable bounds. With this support from adults, children learn to recognize that it *is* just a game, and that the big angry feelings really need not be so big. As

they learn to modify big angry feelings to a form they can manage, they develop a skill of modifying anger that they are then able to use in other life circumstances.

In sports, as well as in other games, (as long as competitive feelings are kept under control) no one really gets hurt because of angry feelings. In sports we “hit”, “smash”, “whack”, “cream”, “slap”, “kick”, and “kill”, yet no one gets hurt! These actions help children feel some distance from their own urges to smash, hit, slap etc. yet allow them to experience some pleasure from these aggressive acts without ever hurting or having to feel guilty. This is known as *sublimation*\* and is a way of getting aggressive energy “out of the system” without actually acting aggressively.

Anyone who enjoys sports will recognize the glow of satisfaction that can come from a game well played — full of smashes, hits, killings, etc. — for both the winner and the loser. Part of this is due to the discharge of aggressive energy through symbolic means - where no one is ever hurt. Also well-documented, especially in professional sport, is where aggressive urges are not well-contained and real fights break out. In this case, the aggressive feelings are not contained and break out in a real way. Participants are left with raw, angry, maybe guilty feelings and do not experience the glow of satisfaction that comes from sublimation when real fighting and aggression break out. To allow children to benefit fully from sports, it is very important that teachers, parents and coaches stress over and over that a game is just a game. This helps children control the big angers discussed earlier. Finding ways of “toning down” those aggressive feelings allows children maximum benefits from playing sports and games.

Organized, competitive games also give children a chance to understand and master their feelings about winning and losing — losing is always at least a little bit of a blow to the pride, but within the context of games children know they can try and try again; and also they can be reassured that just about everyone loses sometimes. Through this process they feel less of a “loser” inside when they lose. They can also learn to deal with feelings about winning — like keeping their desire to brag about how good they are in check. They understand that no one wins every time, that today's winner could be tomorrow's loser. If they treat the loser kindly and with respect, rather than like an inferior, the chance of their own tender, slightly wounded feelings will be treated well by others when they end up the loser.

Also, sometimes children and even grown-ups actually feel guilty and uncomfortable about winning — and they will somehow sabotage their own good efforts near the end of a game and then lose. This can be related to feelings of guilt — the person who is winning feels too much like they are actually “beating” rather than figuratively beating their opponent. Or they may be feeling guilty about other aspects of their lives and do not feel worthy of being

a winner. Noticing this pattern of behaviour in a child, a teacher or parent might help by reminding children that people do not really get hurt in games; that losing, although not as much fun as winning, does not make a hurt that lasts a long time. It really is “only a game”.

Another advantage to game playing, especially unstructured games where children determine their own rules, for example tag or hide and seek, is to give children an experience of learning about rules. Optimally, children can learn something about how rules are made cooperatively, with the aim, in games, of promoting fun, challenge and safety. Thinking about rules, about who makes them and what they aim to do, is an intrinsic part of acquiring moral standards for oneself. When children benefit from rules, through games being more fun and feeling safe, children come to recognize that rules benefit them rather than interfere with their enjoyment. This helps children “come onside” with the rules of society, established for the benefit of all.

Parents and teachers can help children learn to value cooperation and good sportsmanship by supporting children through difficult moments in games and sport. Rather than banning a child showing poor sportsmanship from the game, discussion about how to make big angry feelings into more manageable ones might help. Pointing out how much fun a game is, volleyball for example, when everyone works to keep the ball in the air, helps kids understand that passing the ball to their neighbour can enhance the enjoyment of the game for all more than smashing the ball down the first time it is in the air.

It is also important that adults expose children to games and sports appropriate to their level — for example, not so challenging that it is well nigh impossible for children to acquire a sense of competence. Pushing children to higher levels of achievement - encouraging them to try for rep teams etc. sometimes suits child, but

Parents sometimes seem to not understand how many positive aspects of sport their child will miss if the focus is only on winning.



sometimes reflects the wishes of the parent rather than the child. The child will not experience the thrill that comes with striving if she is not striving to achieve her own goal.

On the other hand, adults need to support a child's ability to deal with frustrations so that “dropping out” and not playing do not become the child's solutions for dealing with problems around winning, losing and competing. Urging the child to return to the sport, talking about upset feelings etc. can encourage a child to overcome difficult feelings and try again.

As always, it is important to listen to what your child has to say about any of these activities and to help your child establish reasonable goals for himself. It is certainly possible for children to enjoy competitive activities without being overwhelmed by worries and frustrations — after all, many of these games are centuries-old; but it is often up to adults, especially through the school-age years, to help set the stage for fairness, cooperation and a healthy attitude about dealing with competition.

The competitive feelings of parents can emerge in profound ways when children begin to play organized sports. Parents can feel, unconsciously, like “a loser” when their child's team loses and experience very aggressive feelings while watching their children play sports. Their own aggressive impulses can break out; they can experience very angry feelings towards referees, other parents or even their own child. In these cases, parents may not have had enough opportunity as children to be supported in their efforts to cope with competitive and aggressive feelings. Therefore, these feelings emerge with fresh energy in reference to their children's experiences.

Parents sometimes seem to not understand how many positive aspects of sport their child will miss if the focus is only on winning. Again, parents, coaches and teachers can help tremendously by committing to the credo that “a game is just a game”, and even creating “rules” for adults to follow regarding their behaviour at a game. Just as the rules can help children keep their aggression under control, the same principal can help parents who experience very strong emotions at children's sporting activities. The opportunity to help the personality and ego strengthen is lost when children are pressured to perform, criticized, and left feeling inadequate or incompetent.

Indeed, competition is a part of human nature and through games with rules, organized sport and spontaneous play and made up games children can develop aspects of “ego functioning” that will strengthen their personalities in very important ways. These strengths prepare them well for the increased pressures they will face as adolescence and adulthood.

*\*sublimation: Developmental process by which instinctual energies are discharged in non-instinctual forms of behaviour.*

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*Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine expresses deepest gratitude for the support of Dr. and Mrs. Furman and Dr. Otto Weininger during their illustrious careers.*

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**Robert A. Furman M.D. 1924 - 2002**

Pediatrician, Psychoanalyst, Training & Supervising Child, Adolescent & Adult Psychoanalyst, Author of numerous papers on childhood development, published in both North America and Europe.

### LETTER

## Effeminate 5-year-old

Re: Effeminate 5-year-old ([www.barbaraburrows.com](http://www.barbaraburrows.com) column Feb 27/04)

Dear Ms. Burrows,

I'm going to make this email short and to the point. I must say that while reading your response to a 'concerned parent', I was hoping to find that somewhere in your answer you would indicate that there is nothing wrong with a male child or adult being different from the majority in terms of maneurisms. I was hopeful near the end of the article...where you said: "I don't think you need to worry about these effeminate qualities..." then you go on to add "...at this stage". Obviously, your statement tends to lead the reader to believe that it's nothing to worry about now...but later on...well, that's a different story.

Before you try to recant your meaning, please take the time to re-read your article and pay special attention to the tone of homophobia that you, in the end, incite very clearly.

I, as a lesbian mom of a 13 year old daughter who feels the effects of homophobia every day in the classroom, schoolyard and in the media (media in all its forms) am very offended when I see the oppression of my brothers...gay men...being perpetuated in articles such as yours. My 13 year old daughter is much more socially advanced than most adults I know because she knows that gay men and women are wonderful and should not be judged in any way, shape or form. I will certainly be paying closer attention to your articles from now on.

The message should have been: We are not created from unique molds. We are all different. If the fear is that her son is gay (and yes, for your information Barbara, we are *born* that way, and even if we weren't, who is anyone to judge another person's maneurisms? as long as it doesn't hurt anyone) then she should be trying to learn about homophobia and its impact on human beings.

## Barbara Burrows Parenting Magazine

# welcomes

...your questions, comments  
or parenting stories  
that you wish to share with others.

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