

TOP

tips on parenting



IN THIS ISSUE:

1

Giving Your Child a Web-Start

4

Live to Read

6

Science Corner:
Learning How to Think



TOP is
published & produced by:

The Emma Eccles Jones Center
for Early Childhood Education

UtahState
UNIVERSITY

Giving Your Child a Web-Start

by Colleen Swain, Kara Dawson, and Diane Strangis

Today's children are growing up in what has been dubbed the Net Generation, a generation that will not remember what it was like before the Internet and the World Wide Web. These children consider it normal to keep in touch with friends and family via email, go on electronic "field trips," and interact with their favorite television characters. This is in stark contrast to their parents who typically grew up with the passive medium of television. The Net Generation is intricately tied to this interactive medium that is changing society. So how can parents help prepare their young children for life where the use of the Internet is part of daily living? We'll provide reasons why using the Internet is a worthwhile venture, ways parents and children can explore the World Wide Web together, and ideas for keeping children safe when using the Internet.

The Superhighway: A Road Trip Worth Taking

Although computer-based activities for young children should not replace plentiful opportunities to interact with people and three-dimensional materials, researchers report that children who lack access to quality educational experiences using the Internet (and specifically the World Wide Web) run the risk of falling behind their classmates in academic achievement. The phrase "information haves and have-nots" is used frequently when describing this situation. However, this does not mean that parents must rush out and purchase an Internet-ready computer. Most public and school libraries have computers with Internet connections as do local universities and community centers. Many of these agencies also have Internet safety procedures in place. Parents can take advantage of these community resources.

Exploring the Web Together

Parents and children can explore and utilize the Internet and World Wide Web together. Susan Haugland, noted specialist and researcher on young children's use of computers, software, and the Internet, and Ellen Gerzog developed a rating scale for children's Internet sites. Haugland also annually publishes a list of highly rated websites located at http://www.childrenandcomputers.com/developmentalawards/developmental_awards.htm. These websites and others contain a variety of fun, educational, and motivating activities for parents and young children to do together. Here are a few examples that parents can consider.

Learning numbers and letters

There are a variety of websites that provide young children with learning experiences. Alphabet Action (<http://www.learningplanet.com/act/fl/aact/index.asp>) allows children to point to a letter, hear the letter name, and see a picture of an object beginning with the letter. Another outstanding website, <http://www.EnchantedLearning.com/themes/123.shtml>, allows young children to play games associated with number-related rhymes. Children can interact with nursery rhymes such as Ten Little Monkeys and Three Blind Mice. There are many quality learning sites available for young children.

continued on page 2...

Giving Your Child a Web-Start

...continued from pg. 1

Visit a zoo or children's museum

Visiting a zoo or children's museum online can provide a wonderful opportunity to extend the learning from an actual visit or a virtual visit when the experience is not accessible. Many zoos and museums have websites that can provide information and problem-solving activities that engage the entire family. Sites such as <http://www.sandiegozoo.org> offer parents and children a variety of activities involving animals. Children can also extend their learning experiences to the zoo with websites such as What Do I Say? An Animal Book (<http://www.EnchantedLearning.com/whatdoisay/>).

Communicate with Relatives and Friends

In addition to sending letters to relatives and friends via the postal system, use the Internet to help children compose emails about daily events. Email should not replace cards and personal letters, but it can supplement them by allowing more immediate responses. At first a child may have to dictate their message to the parent, but over time they will become skilled keyboard users. Encourage a young child to pick out keyboard letters that are meaningful to them, such as the letters in their first name. Like reading a book, physically point out the words while reading aloud a message sent to the child to promote association between the written and spoken word.

Research Information about a Favorite Word, Subject, or Author

Authors of many children's books have websites that provide additional information about themselves, their writing career, and related items. For example, on <http://www.memfox.net/> a child can hear author Mem Fox read selections from her books. At <http://www.wordcentral.com>, children can "visit" words. The Children's Storybooks Online (<http://www.magickeys.com/books/index.html>) also allows children to read books, answer riddles about the stories, and even color pages from the book. The Children's Literature Webguide (<http://www.acs.ualgary.ca/~dkbrown/index.html>) is another good starting point for exploring literature and authors.

Filtered Search Engines for Children



Ask Jeeves Kids

<http://www.ajkids.com>

A filtered natural language search.



Yahooligans!

<http://www.yahooligans.com>

A database of about 20,000 sites appropriate for children.



Lycos SearchGuard

<http://searchguard.lycos.com/>

Once you register, all searches done are filtered.

Establishing an Internet Safety Plan

Although there are great benefits in using the Internet, it is important that parents develop a way for all family members to be safe when using the Internet. In order to keep young children safe with this learning tool, parents should seriously consider establishing an Internet safety plan for the home. Parents and very young children should explore the Internet together, not only to promote a positive relationship, but also to ensure that young children do not inadvertently furnish personally identifying information while online or access inappropriate material. The SafeKids.com website (<http://www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm>) has rules for young children using clear and simple words. Young children need to know they have ground rules that must be followed. Just as parents set limits about the length of time children watch television and videos, and about the appropriateness of subject matter, so must these boundaries be set for Internet use. Locating the computer where children can be observed increases the likelihood of parent and child interaction and the convenience of monitoring.

Excellent resources on the Internet provide families guidance in the process of establishing computer and Internet safety. SafeKids.com, the website mentioned above, offers extensive information on Internet safety as well as parent/child internet safety contracts that can be used in the home. The SafeKids.com website also maintains a list of child-safe search engines. Search engines, such as those described to the left, will permit children to search the Internet in a safer learning environment. These sites strive to block inappropriate materials but are not foolproof; therefore, monitoring should still occur.

Another way to shield young children from inappropriate material is through the use of Internet filters. GetNetWise (<http://www.getnetwise.org/>) is another fantastic resource for parents related to Internet safety. This organization provides extensive information about Internet filters and software packages, such as Net Nanny, that can assist parents

in keeping children safe as well as blocking children from viewing inappropriate materials. This website provides parents with a method to search for filters using various Internet tools based on the computer system they use. Parents should recognize that filtering software functions merely as a safety net. Because this software must frequently be updated and is not foolproof, young children must still be taught how to use the Internet and know the limits of where they should explore.

There are other resources on the Internet that parents might find useful related to Internet safety. For example, a web site appropriate for primary-age children contains an online video with animation to explain Internet safety (<http://www.brainpop.com/specials/onlinesafety/index.weml>). Regardless of a family's Internet safety plan, it is important that both parents and children pledge to support it. Parents should revisit the plan as a child matures.

Final Remarks

Singing, cooking, simple daily chores, making crafts, reading, and other activities are still critical for children's growth. However, using the Internet at an early age will give children an advantage in school and in an ever-increasingly technological society. With planning and effort, parents can take steps to keep their children safe on the Internet while providing Web-start experiences to enhance life-long learning in the 21st century. ✨

~Colleen, Kara, and Diane are assistant professors in the School of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education at the University of Florida.



activity corner

Guess That Word



MATERIALS NEEDED
Newspaper
Dark marker

To develop your child's reading comprehension, select an article from the newspaper on a topic that might be interesting to your child. Go through and systematically mark out several words (every 12th word, for example). Using contextual clues, have your child fill in words that make sense.

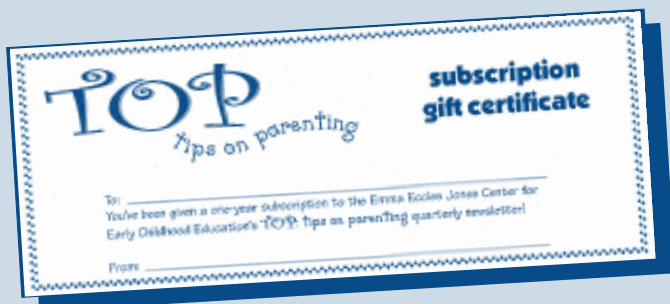
.....

Wheels, Wheels, and More Wheels



MATERIALS NEEDED
Toy vehicles of various sizes and construction
Tempera paint
Paper

Dip the wheels of the toy vehicles into the paint. Interesting pictures will evolve from driving the wheels over paper.



Give TOP as a Gift!

TOP: Tips on Parenting newsletter Subscription Gift Certificates are available for purchase! To obtain a gift certificate, please call (435) 797-8629 or send e-mail to eejcenter@coe.usu.edu. You may also download a gift certificate in Adobe PDF format from our website at <http://www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/top>.

TOP Gift Certificates make great baby shower, birthday, thank you, and holiday gifts! An annual subscription to TOP (for yourself or for a gift) is only \$5.00 per year. ✨

Live to Read

by Sabrina Brinson

Reading is the essence of success for young children to flourish in their academic, social, and emotional development. Calling all parents: On your mark, get ready, set, go ahead and introduce your children to reading as soon as possible.

Reading With Children

There is a great deal of value in sharing literature with young children. Their reading interests may increase. They become acquainted with written language and its function. Their vocabulary development increases. They learn a sense of story structure. As a result, the primary goals of literacy include the following: (1) to enhance children's awareness and connection to the world, (2) to encourage creative expression (e.g., problem-solving skills), and (3) to enrich academic growth (e.g., improve reading and writing), emotional growth (e.g., cultivate positive self-concepts), and social skills (e.g., engage in amiable interactions with peers and adults). Therefore, have lots of fun reading to and with your children, as well as letting them read to you as often as possible.

Reading Concepts Children Should Know

Foremost, children need to learn that in picture books, the pictures carry the primary meaning of the story; whereas in word books, the print carries the primary meaning of the story. Second, parents can point out that books are read front to back and top to bottom. Third, children need to learn that a line is read left to right. Fourth, the reader should focus on discussing the story and assisting children to understand. During subsequent readings the reader should move toward voice pointing, which is simply pointing to each word as it is read.

Things to Remember When Choosing Books

Orchards of children's books are abundant and ripe for the picking. However, parents should carefully inspect each book before making it accessible to children.

When selecting books to read to your child, look for topics that are familiar to them and review for characters that reflect our multiethnic, multicultural society (e.g., individuals with diverse dialects or who are differently-abled). Look for the portrayal of both genders in various roles. Read the author and illustrator notes for background information. Note award winners.

Incorporate variety into your children's book collections. Activity books facilitate interactive participation, and board books are sturdy and easy for little hands to handle. Books on tape provide an option to reading. Computer books help children become computer literate. Pocket books are convenient to transport from place to place.

Different types of books and their advantages

In addition to helping children learn about the printed word, reading provides experiences. For example, acceptance of self and others can be instilled as children read stories. To illustrate, *All the Colors of the Earth* by Sheila Hamanaka (1994) is good

- for children from birth to 9 years old because it spotlights the diversity of individuals in our society in a positive light.
- Acts of kindness shape compassionate spirits in young children.
- *Heartprints* by P. K. Hallinan (1999) is a beautiful story that demonstrates consideration of others. It is a perfect model for children aged 3 to 9 because it shows children involved in caring deeds for someone else. As the title implies, children are left with tranquil impressions to fuel the mind, heart, and soul.
- Celebrate the diversity of our families with children's literature.
- *Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers, (A Collection of Family Poems)* by Mary Ann Hoberman (1991) is wonderful for children between the ages of 3 and 8. It contains uplifting passages that pay tribute to a variety of family structures.
- Emotional issues can be eased with portrayals of empathy. For example, *The Day I Saw My Father Cry* by Bill Cosby (2000) is great for children aged 6 to 10. It deals with the passing of a loved one in a warm, comforting manner that reassures children it is okay to express grief.
- Ethnic-specific books can provide all children with information that may increase understanding about an ethnic group. Stories like *How the Stars Fell Into the Sky: A Navajo Legend* by Jerrie Oughton (1992) will fascinate children from 4 to 8 years old. This legend can nurture ethnic identity in children and create a sense of pride and belonging in their ethnic groups.
- Good humor is reinforced in a delicious book like *Dinosaur Dinner (With a Slice of Alligator Pie)* by Jack Prelutsky (1997).
- This book of poems is tailored to tickle children between the ages of 1 and 7. It proves laughter really can be the best medicine for children to become well-balanced, content individuals.
- History can be relayed in an age-appropriate manner. For instance, *If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks* by Faith Ringgold (1999) gives children aged 6 to 9 a chance to ride along with passengers of the past on a magical bus as they learn about civil rights.
- Imaginations are awakened in a swoosh with compelling tales like *Raising Dragons* by Jerdine Nolen (1998) for children from birth to 7 years old. When children get caught up in the fantasy, it can spark them to use their own imaginations and creativity for great accomplishments.
- Mystery and surprises like the ones discovered in *Miz Fannie Mae's Fine New Easter Hat* by Melissa Milich (1997) can intrigue children between the ages of 7 and 9, as they analyze clues and make predictions.
- Nature's classroom can be visited anytime by children between 5 and 9 years old. Just open up a book like *The Rain Forest* by Helen Cowcher (1988) and see Blue Morpho butterflies, anteaters, sloths, and toucans, oh my!
- Positive self-concepts are integral to healthy emotional development. For example, *A Bad Case of Stripes* by David

Shannon (1998) is fabulous for children from 4 to 9 years old. It is an appealing story with uplifting messages that reinforce self-love, self-worth, and self-confidence in young children.

Repetitive rhymes in books like *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* by Dr. Seuss (1988) are adored by youngsters from birth to 7 years old. They love chanting the nonsense lyrics that increase interactions and verbal exchanges that enhance language skills.

Special needs must be explained to children in a genuine, non-threatening manner that does not discourage them from overcoming challenges. For example, *Shelley the Hyperactive Turtle* by Deborah M. Moss (1989) is an excellent book with a positive outlook. Parents can use this type of book to help young children from 4 to 9 years old understand and cope with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Enhance Children's Literacy in Natural Environments

Home settings are full of items besides books for children to read such as magazines, television guides, flyers, and

newspapers with sales ads, crossword puzzles, articles, sports, current events, and cartoons. Whenever possible use naturally-occurring opportunities to nurture children's literacy. For example, encourage children to read incidental items they come across in daily routines like mail labels, television guides, billboards, signs, and menus. Also, ask your children to help write grocery lists and find the items in stores.

Obtain library cards together and visit libraries often to exchange reading materials. Frequent book stores to browse and attend free story times. Extend reading with follow-up activities such as acting out stories, creating your own stories or songs, or making things like puppets and paper menagerie characters from stories you have read. Finally, always remember there is a book about everything, and a book for all occasions on all levels of children's development. So live to read with your children! ✨



~ Sabrina A. Brinson, an assistant professor of Early Childhood at the University of Memphis, conducts research in African American studies, cultural competence, and children's literature.

question corner

"What do you think about large classes in elementary schools today? With lots of students, isn't it hard for teachers to work with all children; and do the slow children hold back the quicker learners?"

~ Alan in Colorado



I think class size can make a difference in what is accomplished in classrooms. Personally, I would like to see class sizes of no more than 20 children in kindergarten through grade 2; and, I think classrooms in grades 3-8 should be kept under 25 students. While I will continue to advocate for that, I realize that it is somewhat idealistic.

The second part of your question requires a longer response. The notion that low achieving children hold back higher achieving children is based on some faulty assumptions and fails to acknowledge that good teachers rise to the task of educating all children. Good teachers develop a community of learners where children learn from each other as well as from the teacher. Research suggests that children with differing abilities can be grouped to work on projects, listen to each other read, etc. The result is a positive one as children bring different perspectives, skills, and abilities to the activity while they learn content and practice skills. For example, a child who does not draw well will learn something about drawing from a child who does, a struggling writer will learn from a strong writer, and so on. The job of teachers is to structure a rich learning environment where children learn from others (teachers and students) and on their own. Yes, children also need to work directly with the teacher. They need explicit skills instruction and opportunities to engage in a variety of learning tasks with the teacher, but they do not need his/her direct attention all day.

Furthermore, any classroom has diversity among its students—diverse interest, abilities, backgrounds of experience, family traditions, etc. That is a good thing. Diversity provides children with rich opportunities to learn from the perspective of others and to develop the knowledge and skills needed to function in our diverse society. ✨

~Dr. Martha Dever, Associate Professor, Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send email to eejcenter@coe.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education • Utah State University • 6515 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6515.

science corner: LEARNING HOW TO THINK

by Rebecca Monhardt, Ph.D.

Science is something that all people do, not something done only by scientists. In our everyday lives, we approach problems in systematic ways even if we don't actually think of this as "doing science." As adults, many of us can remember being taught that scientists use a specific, step-by-step method to do their research. Do you recall something called the scientific method? More recent thinking on this topic indicates that there are many ways that scientists approach problems and there are multiple scientific methods, not just that rigid procedure many of us committed to memory.

Rather than limiting students by teaching a somewhat outdated cookbook method for doing science, perhaps it would be more useful to focus on the skills necessary in doing science. Certain processes have been identified that are common to most forms of inquiry. These procedures are called the science process skills and include such basic skills as observation, classification, communication, measurement, estimation, prediction, and inference. Practicing scientists use these skills in their work to solve problems and conduct research. These skills transfer to subjects other than science and are skills we use in our everyday lives.

Not every child will grow up wanting to be a scientist and I'm not so sure I believe the articles that give parents advice on "how to raise a scientist." However, teaching the skills of scientists will help all children learn to think and solve their own problems. You can think of science process skills as "learning how to think." (Martin, Sexton & Gerlovich, 2001).

OBSERVATION AND INFERENCE

Making observations is the most basic of all the process skills and is the primary way that children gain information about the world. Observation involves using all of the senses to gain information about objects and happenings. Making inferences is another one of the basic process skills. Inferences use observations to propose possible explanations for events that have occurred. When children come home from school, they may notice the smell of freshly baked sugar cookies. This is an observation. From this, children may either infer that someone has just baked a batch of cookies or that someone has lit a scented candle whose fragrance is "sugar cookie." Previous experience will influence which inference the child makes.

Children often need guidance in making inferences. As a classroom teacher, I often had a student report to me that another student had taken their pencil. When I asked them why they believed this to be true, their evidence was that the

guilty party had a pencil that looked just like theirs—a yellow one with a number 2 on it!

As young children begin to make inferences, parents can provide guidance in helping them develop this skill by asking simple questions. Possible questions for young children might include, "How do you know?" or "Why do you think so?" Questions for older elementary children can seek more specific detail and require higher level thinking: "What evidence supports your idea?" "Do you think this evidence is reliable?" or "Are there any other possible explanations?"

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND INFERENCE

For young children, there are several picture books that can help make inferences. In *Who Is the Beast?*, children must first carefully observe what they notice in the illustrations and the clues in the text to infer who the beast is. The ending will challenge most children's inferences. *In the Snow: Who's Been Here?* is a story that children can relate to especially during the winter months. The characters in this picture book hike through the snow and examine signs of animal life that are everywhere. Children can help the characters find the clues and infer who has left the clues. A description of all the animals at the end of the book also provides interesting science content for children.

ANIMAL TRACKS AND INFERENCE

Studying animal tracks is a way for older children to make inferences and also learn about the animal who made the tracks. The animal that made the track is no longer there, but it has left a clue that can provide a great deal of information about the animal. Track identification books can help children figure out which animal left the track, and observing the pattern of the tracks can suggest what the animal might have been doing. In winter, snow provides great surface for studying tracks. Each morning after a new snowfall, I enjoy looking at the tracks in my yard to determine which neighborhood dogs paid me a visit and whether any deer passed through on their way to somewhere else. Children can also create their own "track puzzles" in newly fallen snow. They can imagine a story they'd like to tell and then create footprints in the snow that illustrate the story. Other children or even parents can examine the clues and try to figure out the story. *Tracks in the Wild* is a wonderful picture book about animal tracks. It's a great book for the whole family to read before and after a nature walk in the snow. For those who prefer to stay inside, the activity on the next page can engage the whole family in creative thinking, making inferences, and learning about animals.



RESOURCES

Baker, K. (1990). *Who Is the Beast?* San Diego: Voyager Books. ISBN 0-15-200122-0.

Bowen, B. (1993). *Tracks in the Wild*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. ISBN 0-395-88400-4.

George, L.B. (1995). *In the Snow: Who's Been Here?* New York: Mulberry Books. ISBN 0-688-17056-0.

Martin, R., Sexton, C., Gerlovich, J. (2001). *Teaching Science For All Children*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. ISBN 0-205-32533-5.

~Rebecca Monhardt is an associate professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.



activity corner

Making Tracks!

In this activity, track puzzles will be created that tell a story. Others will make inferences based on the tracks to determine what the story is about.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Large sheets of white paper

An old rubber tire tube (places that sell tires will usually give away old tubes free of charge)

Ink pads

Small blocks of wood not bigger than the surface of the ink pad

Scissors

Elmer's Glue or any white glue that dries clear

Animal track identification guide



PROCESS

1. Write a short story that includes at least one animal character. The story can have more than one character and all the characters do not need to be animals.
2. Have children look at what kind of tracks their animals make in the track identification guide. They will need to pay particular attention what the actual track looks like, but also to the size of the track and the pattern the animal creates when it walks.
3. After determining what the track looks like, children will make a track stamp for each character in their story. Using a piece of the rubber tire tube, children will cut out a track that looks like the one in the track guide. The rubber is easy to cut and can even be punched with a hole punch if small round pieces are need. The pieces of rubber are then glued onto a block of wood, creating a rubber stamp. Children may want to create other tracks to illustrate their story, such as snowmobile tracks, car tracks, ski tracks, snowshoes, or whatever is necessary to tell their story only looking at the tracks.
4. When the glue has dried completely, children can use the stamps, the inkpad and white paper to depict their story. A great deal of thought is necessary to accomplish this task. Children will have to plan carefully to create a picture with only tracks telling the story.
5. Then the real fun begins! Other family members can try to figure out the story by playing a version of the 20 questions game. Only yes /no questions can be asked to try to figure out the real story behind the track puzzle. Each family member could create their own track story so everyone would have experience creating the story as well as making inferences as to what it is about.

Utah State UNIVERSITY

Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education
Utah State University
6515 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-6515

TOP: tips on parenting

is published quarterly by the Emma Eccles Jones Center
for Early Childhood Education at Utah State University.

Editor: DR. HEIDI MALLOY
(651) 793-1337 • heidi.malloy@metrostate.edu

Managing Editor: REBECCA COWLEY
(435) 797-8629 • rcowley@coe.usu.edu

TOP Article Review Panel:

DR. JIM BARTA Utah State University
DR. DEBORAH BYRNES . Utah State University
BARBARA DEBOER Utah State University
DR. MARTHA DEVER Utah State University
DR. BILLIE ENZ Arizona State University
DR. RENEE FALCONER... U. of Southern Mississippi
DR. THOMAS LEE Utah State University
DR. D. RAY REUTZEL Utah State University

Submissions inquiries should be directed to Heidi Malloy.
All other questions, suggestions, or comments should be
directed to Rebecca Cowley. TOP is also available in
Spanish and on our web site at: www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/top.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to EEJCECE,
Utah State U., 6515 Old Main Hill, Logan UT 84322-6515.

Items in this publication are copyrighted and may not
be published or reproduced in any form without
the consent of TOP'S Editor.

Copyright ©2002 by the Emma Eccles Jones Center for
Early Childhood Education. All rights reserved.

Thanks for reading TOP!



I'd like to subscribe to TOP!

For a one-year subscription to TOP, fill out the following information and
send \$5.00 (the cost of printing and distribution) to:

EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education
Utah State University
6515 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-6515

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY STATE ZIP: _____

VERSION: ENGLISH SPANISH

WHERE DID YOU OBTAIN THIS ISSUE OF TOP?
