



From the Head of School

In the world of school, January is traditionally a calm time in the classroom. Children settle into the routines of class, comforted by the knowledge of what the ebb and flow of the day feels like. With the excitement of the holidays in the rearview mirror, they are better able to focus on school work, taking their academic experiences deeper. Feeling the long stretch of cozy winter days, teachers too find it easier to focus on following the children. Work cycles are drawn out and the shelves slowly fill with exciting extensions, reaching out to invite the children to the next level. A quiet pace settles into the classroom, lulling teachers and children into a busy hum of activity.

Over the past several years, I have noticed a disruption in this homeostatic peace, brought on no doubt by societal changes. January has increasingly become the time to look forward, all the way to the beginning of the next school year. Parents feel the pressure to apply for schools, to explore the options that abound. Unfortunately, this process of searching and figuring out what to do next infiltrates your children's lives. Either sensing your stress, or feeling their own internal puzzling over the future school choices, the children tend to display anxiety that often distracts them from settling into calmer routines. They are more distractible, moodier, and often engage in self-soothing behaviors like thumb-sucking, or shirt-chewing.

In Denver, the school choices are, simply put, quite overwhelming. Having enrolled in Children's Garden, do you keep your child here through Extended Primary? Or do you apply to a preschool program in a school that also has an elementary program? Do you send them to public school or private school? If your child is kindergarten age, do you stay here for their kindergarten year, send them off to an elementary school, or do you "red shirt" them, waiting to enroll them for a year in hopes that they will be more ready for school the following year?

Parents cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the task at hand. As teachers, we hear your questions and sympathize with the daunting choices. The academic environment is always changing. It is difficult to keep up with all the options, and even harder to feel confident that you

FEBRUARY 2015

Dates to Remember

- 2/13 **NO SCHOOL**
President's Day
- 2/16 **NO SCHOOL**
President's Day
- 2/20 **NO SCHOOL**
Teacher Work Day



Details for these events are included within the newsletter or on the school calendar.

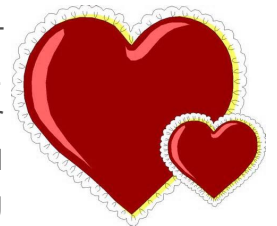
are making the right choice. While we understand your dilemmas and have a lot of knowledge about your options, we are not experts in what comes next. No one is really an expert in this field because the best answer depends deeply on the individual. Each choice needs to be made based on the needs of your child and your family.

That said, the most important thing to remember is that there is no wrong choice. As parents who have watched your child from birth, you know your child. You know how your child excels and how he struggles. You know her passions, her dreams, and the things she despises. You also know your values and what you find important. As you look at schools, trust your gut. Ask questions about elements that you find important. Maybe your child is a quiet introvert who is gets anxious in crowds. Then, you should ask about class size. Maybe your child follows his own passions with gusto, but resists academic areas like math. Then, you should ask about curriculum. Listen to the answers, and try to imagine your child in that environment. Listen to your inner voice and apply to the schools that speak to you. Our school benefits from a well-educated parent community that understands how to advocate for the needs of its children. Know that you will make the right choice, and trust that you can help your child to navigate any troubled waters that he or she might encounter along the way.

Once you have chosen, take a deep breath and let your own anxiety go. Remind yourself that all will be well. Remember that your child can sense your anxiety. Assure him that all will be fine. Avoid dwelling on the future and focus on the here and now. The future is so far away, especially for a child. Even five-year-olds cannot embrace the concept of how long a month really is. As you explore your options, minimize the impact these decisions have on your child by assuring her that her time here at Children's Garden is far from over. Remind him that he will continue to play with his friends on the playground, to learn from his teachers in the classroom, and to continue with the daily routines that give him comfort. As the calm resettles, we will all benefit and be able to delve deeper into the work before us.

Bekke Howell

Valentine's Day is just around the corner and, although those adorable cards and candies are tempting, we ask that you do not send them to school. The children will have valentine related activities and will be making Valentine's for the numerous businesses and people who help keep the school running. Candy and cards for each classmate can get out of hand so we appreciate your understanding and cooperation!



Consistency: Building a Firm Foundation

I consider consistency to be one of the most essential tools in working with children. Without it, nothing you apply will be successful. I think of it as equivalent to laying a strong, even, sturdy foundation for a house. No matter how many fancy embellishments you may add further down the line, if your foundation isn't solid, your house will collapse.

Providing consistency for children means providing a stable environment where the rules do not change. Children know what to expect and so do not experience the anxiety of trying to keep up with constantly shifting expectations. They know what is required of them and so are able to develop a sense of responsibility. Having unchanging family rules can also make enforcing these rules so much easier. I can express sympathy for a child who doesn't want to wash their hands, while at the same time shrugging my shoulders, and saying, "I understand that you don't want to, but it is the rule." Nothing personal, that's just the way it is.

As a teacher, I tend to learn best through trial and error. And, as with most things, I have learned the value and necessity of consistency through my own errors. Out of my teaching duo, I have, in the past, tended towards more of an easy-going attitude, wondering "What is really the big deal with allowing exceptions to the rules every once in a while?" This comes less out of a strong urge towards finding joy in spontaneity and rebellion, and more out of a desire to appease a child in the moment. I want to make them happy and I want them to like me. But, when you decide to waive the rules willy-nilly, it confuses the heck out of the children.

It is one thing to have a hard and fast rule – for example, we only eat at the table. It is simple and clear. There aren't a lot of ways to test its construction. Do we eat on the living room floor? No. Do we eat on top of the bathroom cabinets? No. Just at the table. The rule is the same all of the time and for all members of the family. It is easy to understand. Once you make an exception, however, you introduce levels upon levels of chaos and confusion. If we USUALLY eat at the table except for sometimes when dad is tired and mom doesn't feel like holding the line, then the child is left to wonder, "What is it that makes the rule change?" Is it the day? The people around? No. None of the external circumstances have changed, so the child must conclude that what changes the rules is him. Maybe if he cries or throws himself on the floor that will change the rule. The child now has an incentive to negotiate, push back and test limits. The rules have become personal and changeable.

The good news is that it is never too late to go back and set a solid foundation. This will likely require a little bit of planning and a lot of communication between the caregivers in your child's life. It is not enough to be consistent, if the children are getting totally different messages from the adults in their life. So sit down as a team and decide what the rules are. Decide what is important to your family and settle on rules that you will be able to consistently enforce. Decide what things you can let go and consistently let them go. If something has to change, explain to your child why – "We only eat at the table, but this month the kitchen is being renovated so we are making an exception until it is done."

It may initially seem like a lot of work, but in the end, it will make for a simpler life with secure, responsible children.

*Rose Henson
Toddler Teacher*

Just a Few Reminders

- * February 1st is the final day to return re-enrollment forms and fees to insure that your child will have a space for 2015-2016.
- * Please check the lost and found basket in the lobby. It's overflowing...
- * When there is snow on the ground, the children need snow pants and boots in order to play freely.

Thank You

We would like to thank Giada D. for the cakes for the teacher and the humidifiers for WHAM; Angela F. for the Duplo blocks; Maren H. for the fudge; Brooke B. and Griffen O. for the cookies and David I. for shoveling snow..

Also, many thanks to the studio helpers for filing the children's art.

A very special thanks goes out to Sarah W.— Toddler PM parent— for bringing Chipotle for the staff. What a surprise and treat!



See more at:

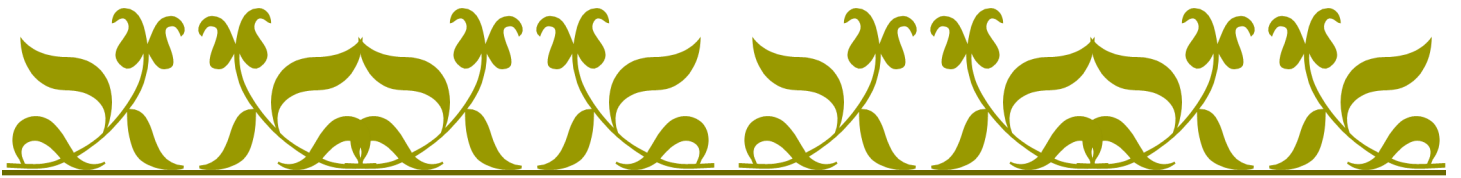
<http://natureandchild.blogspot.com/>

I was visiting with friends Sunday when someone said, "I have to go back to work tomorrow" and a groan erupted from the group...all excepting me. I wake up on Monday mornings thinking, "I get to go to work today". Why? It is simple: your children inspire me daily with their insights, creativity and courage, my fellow teachers consistently encourage me to grow as an educator and person, I work within a community of families who are a pleasure to know and collaborate with. I am grateful for what I do.

I created **Mindful Dialog** as an opportunity for us to share and learn as a community around topics relating to early childhood. I am always trying new ways to communicate studio experiences with families and to learn from you as well. ***The timing of our Dialog is not working for most families and so, for now, all Mindful Dialogs are postponed.*** Bekke has crafted a survey in an effort to gather information on how best to serve the needs of our community with regards to presentations, dialogs, parent education and more. Please take the time to fill it out. This will inform the timings and subject matter of future community events of this kind.

As always thanks for the opportunity to serve your children!

Angelina



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