Drink Up to Prevent Obesity

Add a new water bottle to your back-to-school shopping list. A recent study from Germany revealed that elementary school kids were less likely to gain weight and drank more water when they were given a new water bottle at the beginning of the school year and water fountains were installed in their schools. Teachers also talked with students about the benefits of drinking water.

Reprinted from Womansday.com, September 1, 2009

Parent-Infant Financial Aid Program Now Open

Information for the AG Bell 2010 Parent-Infant Financial Aid Program is now available on the AG Bell website, www.agbell.org. The deadline for applications is September 24, 2010. The Parent-Infant Financial Aid Program was established to provide financial aid support to families of infants and toddlers who have been diagnosed with a moderate to profound hearing loss and who are in pursuit of spoken language education for their child. Grants are awarded to help with expenses associated with obtaining services such as auditory support services and speech-language therapy or to help with the cost of purchasing hearing aids or other technology for the child. Visit the AG Bell website, www.agbell.org for more information or to download an application.
Parents, early educators, and researchers all generally agree that preschoolers, or children ages 3 to 5, are capable of having friendships. There’s also ample evidence that children younger than 3 can also have friendships, though these early friendships often differ from the friendships of more mature children. We know that while children with special needs may have more difficulty forming friendships, having friends is beneficial to and possible for all children.

Most of us would readily acknowledge that our friendships contribute to our overall happiness and feelings of well being. The same is true for childhood friendships. Young friends serve as sources of emotional support, even for children who get plenty of support from their family and other caregivers. It’s often with the support of their friends that young children feel confident or brave enough to try out new skills, including communication, problem solving, motor, or interpersonal skills, and seek out new adventures. As such, spending time with friends is good for a child’s development.

What can adults do to support these important early friendships? First, adults need to be able to identify friendships that have already started to develop and to figure out where there is potential for future friendships to take hold.

Features of Friendship

Friendships involve two people, and true friendships are also reciprocal in that each person considers the other to be a friend, there must be some mutual affection or interest for the relationship to be a real friendship. Friendships are generally positive relationships. Friends enjoy being with each other and have more “happy times” than times when they are not getting along. Friendship is also voluntary. Even though adults can encourage relationships by arranging play dates and grouping children together for activities, friendships must emerge from the children’s own interest in each other. By being aware of the signs of friendship, early educators and parents can better identify friendships that have already developed and then help promote further development of these budding relationships. Adults can also help spark promising new friendships.

### Three Signs of Friendship in Young Children

The most obvious sign of friendship is togetherness. Two children who choose to play together frequently, or just “hang out” together as a pair, are likely to consider each other friends. Two friends can also play with others as part of a larger group and may also play with other children, separate from each other. Togetherness is one of several signs of friendship, but it is not enough by itself. Another sign of friendship in young children is similarity. Toddlers and young children who are observed doing the same thing or being in the same play area might be friends, especially if they appear to highlight their similarity to each other. Two children who actively copy or imitate each other might be friends. Even toddlers can use imitation to create an extended interaction. Doing the same thing creates a feeling of togetherness that is stronger than simply being near each other. It can also create a sense of responsiveness to each other, and can at times turn into a fun imitation game. Older, more verbal children can use their language abilities to highlight their similar interests and thus mark their togetherness. They use “we talk” such as “we’re building a giant tower” or “we like playing dress up” to announce their common bond to each other and others. Such behaviors are sometimes seen in established friendships but are more common in emergent friendships. The third major sign of friendship is positive affect. Children who share their enjoyment with each other and who frequently express or share positive behaviors such as smiling, giggling, and laughing, are likely to be friends. Being able to make each other laugh is both a sign of friendship and a quality that helps establish friendships. It can be evident even in toddlers, who can transform an accidental fall by one followed by laughter by the other into a game of repeated pratfalls and joyful giggling.
What Early Educators and Parents Can Do to Support Friendships in Early Childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies to Support Established Friendships and Encourage New Ones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To support established friendships, early educators can allow the pair some interpersonal “privacy.” Being able to be together as a pair allows them to concentrate on their relationship, even if it means that they occasionally exclude others. It’s easier for young children to interact in sophisticated ways with just one other person rather than a group. Once the friendship is well established, the pair may need private time less frequently and may become skilled at finding those opportunities themselves, even in a busy classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educators should communicate with parents about budding and established friendships. Parents can then arrange play dates outside the classroom with one friend at a time to help friendships along. Parents should also be encouraged to talk to their child’s teacher about classmates their child frequently talks about. By talking about friendships, families and educators can support these important relationships both at the home and in the classroom, which, in turn, promotes social, language, and cognitive development in these young friends. Educators can also arrange the classroom environment with pairs in mind. This can be accomplished by creating small, cozy spaces just big enough for two. Teachers can also incorporate toys, playground equipment, and other materials that require the participation of two partners.

Educators can ask two friends, or two children who seem to have potential to become friends, to do tasks together. This strategy of actively arranging for the pair to do tasks together is even better if the task is one that both children will have fun doing. The same strategy can be used for older children or for groups that are larger than two. Typically the more fun children are having the louder the play becomes, with this in mind, young children should be allowed to engage in vigorous, noisy, or silly play whenever it’s appropriate. Children who are friends do silly things together, and children who are not yet friends may discover a potential partner when they have noisy, vigorous fun together. There is nothing like shared laughter to bring children together and help them feel close.

| Educators and parents may need to be creative and flexible and provide extra support to some children. For instance, children who are shy, who are not as socially skilled as their peers, who are very young, or who have special educational needs may need extra guidance. While the techniques adults should use are not different, they do need to be tailored to the child’s developmental level and specific needs. |

It’s also worth noting that not all young children are ready or interested in having friendships. Accepting that what attracts peers to each other can be unpredictable, adults can still be on the lookout for glimmers of interest or common bonds between two peers. This information can be used as a basis for arranging for these “potential friends” to be together, so they can be in close proximity. Sometimes simply being near each other while having the right props nearby will nudge a friendship into being.

Adults sometimes need to more actively facilitate joint activity between two children by joining the pair at their level. When adults do become active participants, however, they should not direct the play but instead support and extend it, keeping the interaction going. For example, when joining an activity with a child whose communication skills are just emerging, an adult might interpret the children’s behaviors to their peers. This would help the children learn to understand each others cues and would help maintain an interaction that might otherwise fall apart. Adults can also participate by constructing pretend play with children. However, it is important that the adult’s agenda be strictly to help the children do what they would naturally want to do, even if this strikes the adult as being silly or not what adults would do.

With a little help, all young children can find playmates. With thoughtful assistance from early educators and parents, and a little luck, all children can form friendships that will enrich their childhood and contribute to their development.

Reprinted from: The Magazine of the National Head Start Association, Spring/Summer 2007 Children and Families, Written by Barbara Davis Goldman, Ph.D., Tactics for Teaching, Strategies for the Classroom and Home, UNC , PFC Child Development Institute
Meet The Teacher

A parent–teacher conference is not only for learning about your child’s progress, but for sharing your insider information on what makes your child tick. These tips can help you prepare:

- **Bring Notes.** Record questions about areas of concern or the curriculum and identify recent changes in your child’s behavior, positive or negative.

- **Focus.** Leave your phone in the car and your other kids at home. Make the meeting a priority by eliminating distractions.

- **Get to the Point.** Your time is limited, addressing pressing issues, like homework trouble or anxiety over classroom cliques, is most productive.

- **Ask for Examples.** If the teacher says that your child seeks the approval of others, for instance, specific examples will help you watch for the behavior at home and encourage growth where needed.

- **Collaborate.** Teachers see and hear things that parents don’t. If there are concerns regarding your child’s behavior, refrain from defending or explaining his actions. Instead work with the teacher to find solutions.

Reprinted from: Scholastic Parent & Child, November 2009

21st International Congress on the Education of the Deaf addresses issues of the 1880 Milan Congress

At the opening of The International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) 2010 Congress, July 19th, organizers addressed the Deaf Community’s concerns regarding the Milan resolutions of 1880, which banned sign language in educational programs for deaf children.

“‘Partners in Education’, the theme of ICED 2010, emphasizes the importance of working together,” said Claire Anderson, Congress Chair. It is with respectful partnerships of educators, parents, students, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities that we will maximize the opportunities for meeting the educational needs of our students. To this end, the Vancouver ICED 2010 Organizing Committee and the British Columbia Deaf Community worked together to develop a statement, which addressed the issues concerning Milan.

This statement “A New Era: Deaf Participation and Collaboration” was introduced to Congress participants as the beginning of a dialogue to promote healing and set the path for future collaboration. The statement:

- Rejected all resolutions passed at the Milan Congress that denied the inclusion of sign language in educational programs for Deaf students.
- Acknowledged with regret the detrimental effects of the Milan Congress,
- Called upon all Nations to ensure that educational programs for the Deaf accept and respect all languages and all forms of communication.

The audience, both deaf and hearing, spontaneously responded with an outpouring of emotion and a standing ovation. “History has been made today and the words of the Vancouver Statement can replace the hurt caused by the Milan decision,” said Joe McLaughlin, subcommittee chair, in his closing remarks.

More information about the ICED Conference can be found at www.iced2010.com

Texas Math Sign Language Dictionary

The Texas School for the Deaf has a very nice resource for families struggling with finding math signs. The Texas Math Sign Language Dictionary shows you signs for Math from A to Z, for words such as Add, Angle, Multiply, Quarter, Scientific Notation, all the way to Zero. The signs are for students and parents from Kindergarten to 12th grade. The dictionary features signs in American Sign Language or Signed Exact English, they also offer the words in English and Spanish.

If you are looking to help your child with their math homework, this is the website you don’t want to miss. Visit their Math Sign Language Dictionary at http://www.tsdvideo.org/index.php?lvl=all