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T : +44 (0) 20 7017 0730

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EDS UP

Issue 1 2008 £2
www.edsup.co.uk

NEWS

A heads up on the latest news, research and media reaction

DEBATE

Exposure to news – damaging or necessary?
Facebook Phenomenon – is it such a bad thing?

INFORM

How to help children develop skills needed to read and spell
Allergies and how to cope with them

CELEBRATE

Dads' involvement in children's play
The ups and downs of a family gap year

A heads up on cutting edge issues affecting you and your children

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EDITOR'S LETTER...

So what is Eds Up all about? Eds Up is all about portraying one simple message – watching children grow and learn is a fascinating experience. This experience is too often spoilt by the external pressures created by media scaremongering, other worried parents and crafty businesses ready to pounce with the newest pseudo-scientific fad. Eds Up is for parents, both mums and dads, who lead busy city lives who want to keep in the loop on the relevant issues and be fully involved in their children's lives without the stress of having to decipher the helpful from the hype. So our aim is to sift through this mass of confusing information on child development in order to make it simple, accessible, understandable and valuable. Providing links to resources, Eds Up will also serve to facilitate easy access to professionals, offer useful contacts and enable further discussion for those who want to find out more.

The Eds Up approach? A calm and clear editorial voice ensures that the approach to issues is non-prescriptive, fair and balanced. The purpose is to give parents the tools to see the pros and cons of each debate in order to make their own informed decisions. Emphasis is placed on the sharing of knowledge of a wide range of people: experts, educationalists, scientists, doctors, teachers, researchers, psychologists, artists, musicians, sportsmen and women, grandparents, parents and children themselves . . . Who is behind Eds Up? Meet the Editor on our back page!

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EDS UP PUBLISHING
10a Putney High Street
London SW15 1SL
Tel: 020 8789 3483 Fax:
020 8789 3483
Email: editor@edsup.co.uk
Web: www.edsup.co.uk

EDITORIAL
Editor and Publisher:
Hannah Watkins

Editorial Board:
Prof Amanda Kirby
Dr Dilly Murphy
Jill Mitchell
Diana Watkins
Deirdre Renwick

DESIGN
Concept:
Tamsin and Gail at
Bryson Loxley
brysonloxy.co.uk

Production designers:
Kirsty Boswell
Liz Hanson

Web site design:
Lotte Pitcher
paminternet.co.uk

Cover photography:
Chris Simkiss
christophersimkiss.com
07971 602003

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THE START OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Recently, thousands of members of the National Union of Teachers (the NUT) took to the streets in protest at the government's plan of a 2.45 per cent pay rise this year in the most widespread strikes since Labour came to power.

So what is behind the teachers' strike?

Teachers argue that a pay rise of 2.45 per cent is not in line with the rate of inflation and represents a cut in real terms, with living costs currently running at 3.8 per cent. This year's increase will be followed by 2.3 per cent in 2009 and 2010.

The Guardian agrees that the strikers have a decent case, but are unlikely to succeed, with ministers aware that parents are more interested in class sizes than in teachers' pay. "I think parents across the country will be annoyed and disappointed to see schools being closed today. There isn't a justification for the strike . . . Over the last 10 years teachers' pay has risen substantially," commented Ed Balls.

Parents have expressed little sympathy for the teachers' strike. The Times Educational Supplement (TES) and National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA) polled 750 parents about the

strike. Nearly a third said the action had lowered their view of teachers, 61% said it had not affected their opinion while 63 per cent believed the government's 2.45 per cent pay offer was sufficient.

"Education needs to be a joint effort by all parties to serve parents and pupils better"

The strike should be understood within a wider context, comments The Independent. Teachers' average pay has increased by 19 per cent since 1997 and figures show that thousands more teachers have been recruited: "The withdrawal of labour is an utterly counterproductive way for the NUT to make its point. Education needs to be a joint effort by all parties to serve parents and pupils better." Taking a harder line, The Economist points out that: "The strike is, in some respects, rank ingratitude."

Teachers and unionists, for their part, argue that if parents want the best teaching for their children then the strikes are essential.

Christine Blower, acting General Secretary of the NUT, explained to the TES how difficult it is to recruit

What is behind the teachers' strike?

the best people into teaching, it being impossible to compete with other graduate professions: "This campaign is about ensuring teachers have decent pay levels and that they can continue to work in a decent education service – teachers need to be respected and valued."

Anthea Lipsett of the Guardian joined the NUT rally. Louise Butler, one of the striking teachers, believes that teaching is the most important job in society; not only do teachers have to deliver information in the classroom but they also have to act as social workers and counsellors: "It's not about more pay but about fair pay." More importantly, without teachers, class sizes rise and education diminishes: "We want them to have smaller classes so that we can teach better," which is surely what parents want too.

"Teachers need to be respected and valued"

Many believe they are fighting on behalf of the rest of the public sector, the strike being the start of something much bigger.

PREM BABIES STILL STRUGGLE

There has been no improvement in survival rates for babies born before 24 weeks in the past 10 years, reports Fergus Walsh in the BBC News.

These figures are from a study called EPIcure 2, which examined premature births in England in 2006, finding that, of infants born at 23 weeks, 40% die on the labour ward and of those that live only 26% survive hospital. However, an improvement was seen in survival rates for babies who reach 24 weeks, when 47% survive, and 25 weeks, when 67% live.

This follows an earlier report this year that found Britain as having the worst rate for underweight babies of any country in western Europe with the exception of Greece.

Experts point at factors such as mother's smoking, drinking and poor diet and social changes including multiple births due to IVF and the rise in women

having babies later as potential reasons for why babies are born underweight.

A further Norwegian study of one million babies, which looked at their health from birth to adulthood, revealed that premature babies were more likely to die as children and less likely to reproduce as adults.

Social changes including multiple births due to IVF and the rise in women having babies later are potential reasons for why babies are born underweight

In commentary by the NHS, in their Behind The Headlines web advice, the NHS acknowledge the fact that a very large number of babies today are born prematurely (reportedly one in eight in the UK)

Survival rates improving slowly as social factors blamed for underweight babies

and infant mortality rates are high: "The majority of premature babies will go on to lead completely full, healthy and active lives that are no different from their full-term counterparts." It is important also to recognise that all the babies in the study were born 20 to 40 years ago.

Sir Muir Gray, Chief Knowledge Officer of the NHS added: "There is evidence that some of the very low birth weight children who survive have less than ideal health, but this has been known for years. Thanks to medical advances some of the children who do not have any health problems would have had problems if it had not been for the high quality care they had received in the special care baby unit."

Useful links www.bliss.org.uk, www.tommys.org and www.premature-babies.co.uk which details further resources.

Children are being denied access to their cultural heritage

STRANDED IN A CULTURAL DESERT

School blamed for failure to instil an appreciation of the arts

A recent Sunday Telegraph article reveals continued concerns by leaders in the world of arts, fearful that our children are growing up in a culturally polarised society.

In an interview by Chris Hastings, Nicholas Hytner, director of the National Theatre, argues that children have been left incapable of appreciating and taking part in the arts because of years of neglect by schools: "A generation has been deprived of the tools they should have been given to open a door that can otherwise seem quite daunting."

Hytner is encouraged by the commitment of those running theatres, galleries and orchestras in the UK who are trying to do everything possible to undo the damage but worries that we are unable to act quickly enough to save the deteriorating situation.

Hytner does not believe that the answer lies in dumbing down West End theatre productions and film and television shows for mass audience appeal, "For the arts to be as revelatory and transformative as they can be, they often have to be quite demanding."

Hytner acknowledges the efforts by the government to provide children with five hours of culture a week but hopes that they are made available for every child.

The Government's ambition is voiced by Ed Balls: "Many of us remember the first ever live music we heard or the first ever performance we saw. I want all young people to have the chance to both experience and take part in creative activities to help them learn and develop."

"A generation has been deprived of the tools they should have been given to open a door that can otherwise seem quite daunting"

A series of pilot schemes, including a Find Your Talent programme, have been launched which will ultimately offer children the opportunity to take part in and appreciate arts and culture each week.

Further investment in the Creative Partnerships Scheme has been promised to allow children to work with creative professionals along with a new Department of Business fund to develop the arts by investing both public and private money in the areas of high growth.

This summer – SHINE festival – a week-long schools festival between the 30 June and 4 July, will be put on to encourage schools to show their talents.

Useful link: www.shineweek.co.uk

"PLAYGROUPS CUT CHILDHOOD LEUKAEMIA RISK"

Early years social interaction appears to prepare the immune system against the disease

Children who attend playgroups or day care at an early age are 30% less likely to develop the most common type of childhood leukaemia, according to a comprehensive study, reports the BBC.

Professor Patricia Buffler and a team from the University of California, Berkley, looked at 14 previous studies. Speaking to John Humphries on Radio 4's Today programme, Professor Buffler believes that it backs up the long suspected theory that children exposed to common infections early in life gain protection from the disease.

"The earlier the immune system is prepared, the more resilient the child is to a later infection"

Leukaemia is the most common cancer found in children in the industrialised world, affecting about 1 in 2000. Scientists believe that for most types of leukaemia to develop, there must first be a genetic mutation in the womb followed by a second trigger, for example, an infection, during childhood.

While environments such as day care centres and playgroups increase the chance of infections

spreading, Buffler believes that "the earlier the immune system is primed or prepared, the more resilient the child is to a later infection." If the immune system is not challenged early in life, it may respond inappropriately to infections encountered later in childhood which, in turn, could provoke leukaemia.

"I wouldn't encourage mothers to have their children get lots of infections but I would urge them to have their children engage in normal social activities that children do rather than isolate them." Professor Buffler explained that this is even more important today with smaller family sizes to give children it opportunity to mix with others.

The studies do not, however, reveal how the two are related. Professor Jillian Birch of Cancer Research UK charity said: "Until we have conclusive evidence on the risk factors for childhood leukaemia and an understanding of a mechanism behind its link with infection, it is too early to make recommendations on how to avoid this relatively rare disease."

Useful links: [Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group www.ukccsg.org.uk](http://www.ukccsg.org.uk) [Children with leukaemia www.leukaemia.org](http://www.leukaemia.org)

"I wouldn't encourage mothers to have their children get lots of infections but I would urge them to have their children engage in normal social activities"

IN BRIEF

Superbug hits playground

A Sunday Times investigation says a superbug that children are vulnerable to has left at least 10 youngsters between the ages of six and 13 seriously ill. Pantone –Valentine leukocidin (PVL), a toxin that combines with MRSA affects the lungs, skin and bones. Doctors are concerned that PVL–MRSA appears in some cases to have been contracted in parks and playgrounds.

The government has been accused of ignoring warnings about its danger as official figures show that the number of recorded PVL infections rose from 224 in 2005 to 496 in 2006.

School fees will rise up to four times inflation rate

School fees are to increase significantly above the rate of inflation, says the Sunday Telegraph, with the average rise being 5.6 per cent.

Amid credit crunch fears, financial experts believe that middle class families will struggle but will cut back on holidays, cars, and eating out, before fees.

The Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference, representing leading private schools said fees were driven by the unavoidable costs of teaching salaries and pensions. Despite previous fee increases, private school pupil numbers have continued to grow over the last 10 years.

Ban sought on food colourings

The Food Standard Agency is pressing for a voluntary UK ban of six artificial colourings from food and drink by the end of next year because of an "accumulating body of evidence" linking them to hyperactivity.

Research carried out by the University of Southampton found evidence of increased hyperactivity in children when they consumed a mixture of sunset yellow (E110), quinoline yellow (E104), carmoisine (E122), allura red (E129), tatzazine (E102) and ponceau 4R (E124) and the preservative sodium benzoate, used in many fizzy drinks.

IN BRIEF

No more growing pains

A new range of children's shoes can grow as your child's feet grow. Altered by pressing a button on the shoe and pulling out to the required length, the Inchworm shoes can extend a full shoe size.

Growing in half sizes, numbers on the heel explain the sizing. Making life easier for parents, they also help if the child has one foot slightly bigger than the other. The shoes are distributed by Fat Shoes Day and are right now hot –footing it out of every shop.

Education centres sweep supermarkets

Explore Learning is helping out where schools cannot, by offering private tuition to children while their parents do their weekly shopping.

With a ratio of one tutor to six children, they are taught using an integrated software package. The company believes that the private sessions boost confidence and help kids catch up. Lessons are twice a week for an hour and a quarter and kids can drop in as and when it is convenient – or when the kitchen cupboards need replenishing!

Hammocks help premature babies

According to a BBC report, doctors in Colombia are using specially-designed hammocks to allow premature babies to lie on their backs. The hammocks measure just 50 cms in length and are placed in the incubator to support the baby's weight and allow him to breathe easier. It also appears to help them sleep longer and reduces the risk of apnoea, a common respiratory disease in premature babies.

P.6

EMPHASIS ON PRAISE REWARDED WITH GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Celebration of achievements encourages motivation and discipline

Rewards rather than punishments could be the way forward to encourage good behaviour. Schools where pupils' achievements are celebrated, however small, encourage pupils to be self-motivated and self-disciplined, says a new study from the Institute of Education.

Professor Susan Hallam, co-author and expert in behaviour and attendance, cautions that attention to any behaviour is likely to increase its frequency so it is better "to ignore poor behaviour where possible and instead reward good behaviour, because this will lead to their repetition and bring about change."

The report advises the use of systems whereby pupils are able to understand any sanctions applied and acknowledge them as fair. This should encourage children to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Professor Hallam believes that it is far better to address problem behaviour when necessary, rather than simply labelling a child difficult, a stigma which will follow him through school.

In the comprehensive review on behaviour and attendance at school, the co-authors, Professor Hallam and Lynne Rogers note that parental aspirations are more important than social class in influencing a child's engagement with education.

"Ignore poor behaviour where possible and instead reward good behaviour"

Schools should also consider ways to encourage school-shy children to come to school such as the provision separate social spaces for different ages, quiet study rooms and calm play areas and clean loos.

Useful link:
Institute of Education, University of London,
www.ioe.ac.uk

"All parents can make valuable contributions to their children's education by helping them learn at home, discussion, support and the sharing of hopes and values"

WORRYING RISE IN MEASLES

MMR vaccine shun blamed for continued rise in measles

An outbreak of measles in Lewisham, South London, has affected an estimated 74 children so far, reports Sophie Goodchild, Health Editor of the Evening Standard.

Measles can give children a fever, rash and cough for up to two weeks. One in ten children suffer ear, chest or brain infections that in severe cases can lead to permanent disability.

Experts blame the current outbreaks on continued scares about the safety of the triple MMR vaccine. Public confidence in the MMR vaccine fell in 1998 after a medical journal reported links to autism.

Parents called for single jabs but the government refused, only offering the MMR on the NHS.

Consequently, many opted not to have their children vaccinated.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Consultant Epidemiologist with the Health Protection Agency (HPA) said: "Measles is a highly infectious and dangerous illness which can spread easily so we are urging parents to ensure that children are fully immunised with two doses of MMR."

HPA figures show that in the first ten months of 2007, 768 cases were reported in England and Wales compared with 756 cases in the whole of 2006.

Useful links:
www.hpa.org.uk
www.immunisation.nhs.uk

WE ARE WHAT OUR MOTHERS EAT

Eating cereal for breakfast may increase a woman's chances of having a baby boy, reports Lewis Smith, Science Reporter for The Times.

According to studies carried out on 740 women by scientists from Exeter and Oxford Universities, 59 per cent of women who get pregnant after eating high-energy breakfasts produced sons, while only 43 per cent of women, who always missed breakfast, had boys. This ratio was also reflected when daily eating patterns were studied.

The findings, which have been published in the journal, Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, also showed that the quantity of potassium, vitamins C, E and B12, and calcium consumed influenced gender.

Scientists are still unclear as to how this occurs, although IVF researchers have found that high levels of glucose enhance the growth of male embryos. The Exeter and Oxford team said that missing

breakfast caused glucose levels to lower. The body is believed to interpret this as a sign that food is in short supply. Dr Fiona Mathews, of the University of Exeter noted connections to our hunter-gatherer roots: "If a mother has plentiful resources then it can make sense to invest in producing a male because he is likely to produce more grandchildren than a female."

There could be something in the old wives' tale that if you want a boy you must eat bacon and bananas, added Dr Mathews on the Radio 4 Today programme, but she was quick to point out that there are plenty of other old wives' tales that have no credence at all.

The NHS point out that the sex of the baby is ultimately determined by the fertilisation of the egg by a sperm carrying either an x or y chromosome, not by eating a particular food.



JOIN A YOUTH GROUP PROTECT THE HUMAN



Today in the war-torn region of Darfur, 4 million people are struggling to survive: 1.8 million of them are children under 18.

Children reaching their fifth birthday will never have known peace.

In the UK, your children can join or set up an Amnesty youth group to learn about worldwide human rights and how to do something to help make a better world. There are over 600 groups in the UK who write letters, raise funds, organise events - and have fun in the process!

To find out more and to order a free DVD for your young activists visit:
www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

Parents working in the City are prime consumers of the world's media. It gives us a heads up on major events that directly affect our daily working life. Sifting through this mass of information is a challenge for adults but arguably even more difficult for children.

They are visual sponges and will soak up information. They will also pick up on other peoples' stress or fear. They often act out what they cannot express verbally. Mimicking what they see on screen gives them inspiration for real life play. It is therefore often argued that the younger the child the less exposure he or she should have.

THE MEDIA HAS A PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OVER EVERYONE'S LIVES. CHILDREN LIVE IN THE REAL WORLD TOO AND HAVE TO LEARN FROM AN EARLY AGE TO BECOME MEDIA LITERATE. PARENTS ARE ABLE TO BE IN CONTROL SO THAT THIS DOES NOT GET OUT OF HAND

We encourage our children to be globally aware – a child at a recent interview for entrance to a London day school said to the Head: "Please ask me about what I have been reading in the newspaper because I have been made to read it everyday for a month" but is there a danger now that so much news is bad news?

A recent Channel 4 documentary – Cotton Wool Kids – focussing on parents and children who fear being snatched or murdered, featured a 4 year-old discussing, in minute detail, the story of Madeleine McCann.

Do we protect our children or do we expose them to the reality in which they are growing up in

Stories and images of missing children, war, natural disasters, terrorist attacks and mass shootings can now be broadcast into our homes, onto the web and into the newspapers within seconds.

So what do we do? Do we protect our children or do we expose them to the reality in which they are growing up – or the reality portrayed by the media?

Protection

A number of research projects into cognitive behaviour and the effects of trauma point out that children of different ages will have varying issues in interpreting media coverage of current events.

2–3 year olds cannot differentiate between fantasy and reality. They will believe that 'In the Night Garden' TV programme, for example, is real. Experts believe that media coverage of bad news has an impact on very young children as they do not have concepts of context and background or the understanding of basic properties of reality that older children have.

2–3 year olds will believe that 'In the Night Garden' is real

4–5 year olds are able to start to differentiate between fantasy and reality but often think that bad things will happen to them as there is no concept of local verses global. At this age, they may think that everything is happening on their doorstep. Also, they may not understand that the repeated media coverage is a replay. They may think that each replay is a new event.

Older children can understand the finality of death but will start the thinking process of 'what ifs'

7–12 year olds have a better understanding but may be confused by the complexity of events. They can understand the finality of death but will start the thinking process of 'what ifs' and relate it to concerns about their own safety and that of their family's.

Initial research analysed by the Dart Center* on responsible media coverage of crisis events impacting children, notes that it can be more frightening for older children because they understand news stories better and make greater risk appraisals.

They also want to see a conclusion to the story – who was caught? – how will they be protected in the future?

Perhaps, for this reason, stories that don't yet have an ending such as the Madeleine case, become a source of intrigue and concern.

Margot Sunderland*, child therapeutic counsellor, comments that the children who are probably the most disturbed by what they see or read in the news are those children who don't have grown ups they can turn to as a reliable source of comfort, who don't have a sense of their human rights and who don't realise that it is ok to protest.

Research carried out in the US post September 11th and the Oklahoma Bombings* found preliminary results to show that there is a definite link between exposure to media coverage of tragedy and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder amongst children. However, it is unknown whether upset children seek out media coverage of the tragedy or rather have distressed parents who seek out such news to share with them.

DEBATE ➤

PREPARE OR PROTECT

Debate surrounds the issue of protecting our children from the constant streaming of news that permeates our waking hours. We look at the arguments for and against and consider a way forward

Exposure

The media has a pervasive influence over everyone's lives. Children live in the real world too and therefore have to learn from an early age to become media literate.

Teresa Orange and Louise O'Flynn*, in their book *The Media Diet For Kids*, are straight up about it. Your child should be as media savvy as you seek to be. As your child grows up he "has to learn to take on his or her own media responsibility". He must understand the role of media in his life, how to use it effectively, how to interpret its messages.

24 hour access to global news also plays a fundamental part in informing and educating children on current affairs, cultural diversity and global awareness

Children naturally show delight in the gruesome side of any bad news stories. Some may be turned off and not want to hear any more whilst others want to hear more and more – just as children want to watch frightening films or hear about the wicked witch over

and over again. It could be argued this is a natural desire as they rehearse life through fantasy and that protection from exposure fuels the intrigue even further.

It is virtually impossible to protect children from images of traumatic current events. Children will always pick up information from somewhere, whether from friends, the playground, teachers and other children's parents.

What to do?

- Watch or read the news with your children, if at all possible, and talk about what they are seeing.
- You may need to explain that an event shown over and over on news footage was actually a single event on one day. Orange and O'Flynn suggest: "Help your child interpret a situation where the reality verses the fantasy distinction becomes blurred."
- Put news into context. Explain what is local news and what is happening elsewhere in the world.
- Children should be encouraged to ask questions if they misunderstand something. Discussions don't need to be forced and information can be provided on a need to know basis.

- Reassure them that there are people who are doing all they can to find out why something happened, to catch the perpetrator, to make it safer in the future.
- Make sure that their watching or reading does not get out of hand. Redirect attention onto other activities and set clear limits when necessary.
- Consider providing the information from newspapers or web pages where you can screen the information first and help prepare the children.
- If your child continues to feel frightened there are two great books: 'Helping Children with Fear' and 'Teenie Weenie in a Too Big World' by Margot Sunderland, Speechmark Publishing Ltd and available on amazon.co.uk.

*Teresa Orange and Louise O'Flynn are authors of *The Media Diet for Kids*, Cromwell Press, 2005

*Margot Sunderland is a registered child therapeutic counsellor

*Research on Responsible Media Coverage of Crisis Events Impacting Children by Dr Jessica Hamblen Ph.D written in collaboration with the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, 2003

WAVE THE ECO FLAG

Outdoor learning experiences are now high on the agenda of every playgroup, nursery and school

Every Child Matters is a government initiative to ensure the wellbeing of children. With five major components, be healthy, stay safe, achieve economic well-being, enjoy and achieve and make a positive contribution. Outdoor learning experiences are now high on the agenda of every playgroup, nursery and school.

Supported by the Sustainable Development Commission in their recent reprint 'Every Child's Future Matters', educators are charged with encouraging outdoor discovery and actively promoting alternatives to indoor sedentary pursuits. They realised that knowledge of the natural world was being lost and have urged adults to nurture an appreciation of our surroundings whilst campaigning for greater pedestrian access to green spaces.

Parents can help by sharing the excitement of young people who are out to save the world and really believe they can!

Many children will be involved in the Eco-Schools international award programme for promoting environmental awareness in schools involving pupil participation in decision – making, planning and activities.

It rewards schools that demonstrate commitment to these initiatives initially by accreditation with certificates and then by the coveted 'Green Flag' award to symbolise their environmental achievement.

Children in schools all over the country are making bird boxes, growing and cooking their own vegetables, recording how much energy they use in their homes and are also getting involved in healthy eating.

There is no end to the inventive ideas that they have for re-using and recycling. In one small school, there were over 160 ingenious ideas from cutting up washing-up gloves to make elastic bands, to using skins of used lemons for lemonade. Waste Action Teams deliver exciting workshops which help the children make dreams into reality and parents can help too, by listening and encouraging, getting involved and sharing the excitement of young people who are out to save the world and really believe they can. Throw away your cynical thoughts and learn something yourself!

LINKS

www.eco-schools.org.uk
www.wiltshirewildlife.org



reused CD sculpture

follow the innocent tree trail

Hello

Trees are great and woods are even better. And May is a brilliant month to get out and about, visiting your local forest or park for a spot of walking and tree hugging.

We've teamed up with The Tree Council's Walk in the Woods Month to come up with the innocent tree trail, just for kids.

By following the innocent tree trail and collecting bark rubbings and drawings of bugs and leaves, there's a chance to win a whole load of smoothies and a nice new tree for your local school or community.

Here's how it works:

- Download our worksheet at www.innocentkids.com/tree
- Head to your nearest Walk in the Woods event (you can find more details on our website) or just pop along to your local park for some squirrel spotting.
- Upload a picture of your kid's completed tree trail and perhaps your favourite tree to our flickr site www.flickr.com/groups/we-love-trees and we'll announce the winners at the end of the month.

Happy walking



We're growing 144,000 trees in India and we're hoping to grow even more. To find out how have a look at

www.innocentdrinks.com/tree

We are told in Iona and Peter Opie's book of Classic Fairy Tales that the King and Queen, in the story Sleeping Beauty, chose for their little princess, godmothers from all the fairies that they could find in the Kingdom so that she could be the most 'beautiful person in the world', 'have the wit of an angel', 'admirable grace in everything she did', 'dance perfectly well', 'sing like a nightingale' and 'play upon all kinds of music to the utmost perfection'.

There are many ways that we, as parents, can help without waving a wand, giving our children magic pills, or toting them round extra classes.

One way round this is to stop worrying and find something that we can do that will make a positive difference whilst taking on board the advice of the professionals.

Jill Mitchell, teacher and advisor to the ISC*, suggests that parents keen to help should be encouraged, not thwarted. One way parents can really help their children is by giving them the prerequisite skills for reading and spelling.

IT IS A NATURAL INSTINCT TO WANT OUR CHILDREN TO BE THE BEST THEY POSSIBLY CAN BE. YET, WE ARE OFTEN UNJUSTIFIABLY PERCEIVED AS PUSHY PARENTS. ONE WAY PARENTS CAN POSITIVELY HELP IS BY GIVING CHILDREN THE PREREQUISITE SKILLS FOR READING AND SPELLING

They would probably be labelled pushy parents today but the story remains just as relevant, it being a natural wish of all intelligent, loving parents that their children be given the best start in life.

Unfortunately, not many of us have friends that can bestow such gifts so easily and the rest of the story only serves to remind us what happens to the best laid plans.

Our children grow up in spite of us! They are their own people, not extensions of ourselves. Yet this puts parents in a difficult situation.

We have an in-built biological need to nurture and help our children to be, as Margaret Goldthorpe* advocates, 'the best they can be'.

Professor Amanda Kirby* urges us to remember that children develop at different rates and that just because one 3 year old child is able to catch and throw a ball, it is quite common for another to still be at the stage where he is content to look on watching, not sure of what to do: "Each child may develop along a different route but not necessarily have difficulties."

Parents keen to help should be encouraged, not thwarted

Whilst there is so much written about what not to do, parents often feel de-skilled and nervous about what they can do. Sue Palmer*, in her book Toxic Childhood, sums up the problem that faces so many of us. She relates to the feelings of panic that new parents suffer: "There's a lot to learn so the sooner they get on with it the better" or "if **some** children can start reading at the age of four we can expect them **all** to manage it." Like Professor Kirby, she warns that "all children are different and develop at different rates, and the younger they are the more significant these differences are."

These skills include discrimination and sequential memory. Children have to learn to use both the visual and auditory channels needed to become competent in written language. Spot the difference pictures, jigsaw puzzles and shape sorters all help to build the visual discrimination skills necessary to differentiate letter shapes – n from u, and b from d are tricky to master for a young child.

One letter following another and one word linking to the next are sequential concepts that have to be learned, just as a baby, when he first picks up a book, does not understand which way up it is.

For example, making mosaics and listening to nursery rhymes develop an awareness of the visual and auditory patterns necessary to spell correctly. Listening to a story whilst watching an adult's finger tracing the words develops sound/symbol correspondence; the linking between sight and sound when processing written language. It also strengthens the left to right orientation necessary to read.

To help develop Auditory Skills

Game One

- Clap a simple sequence.
- Can your child copy it?
- Extend the sequence as appropriate.

Game Two

- Whistle, hum or play a sequence on a musical instrument.
- Ask your child to reproduce the sequence from memory without him seeing you play the notes.

Game Three

- Read out a sequence of numbers.
- Ask your child to reproduce it. Start with a short sequence and extend as appropriate.
- Ask your child to repeat it backwards.



FEATURE ED ➤

THE BEST THEY CAN BE

Diana Watkins, Headteacher, discusses how, with the little time available to us, we can positively help our children develop the skills necessary for reading and spelling – giving them the best start in life

Physical activities such as threading little beads, playing ‘pick up sticks’ and cutting out develop the fine motor skills necessary to make the small controlled movements of handwriting.

A lot of children start school with the muscles on their hands so underdeveloped that they physically cannot control a pencil to write. This can be remediated very easily by giving children a stress ball to kneed.

Physical activities develop fine motor skills to make controlled movements of handwriting

Jill Mitchell suggests that these ideas can all be adapted to suit the age, interest and aptitude of the child. Just ten minutes a day on a fun activity will make all the difference.

She stresses, however, the need to start with an activity that can be completed successfully, gradually increasing the challenge but always finishing with the child doing well: “The result of this will be to give them a real sense of achievement and boost their self confidence – which is what it is all about!”

To help develop Visual Skills:

Game One

- Find 2 packs of cards.
- Take a series of playing cards from your pack and place in a line (start easy: one suit only, 3–4 cards).
- Let your child study the sequence for up to 30 seconds then ask him to reproduce the sequence from his own pack.
- This challenge can be developed by adding more cards and mixed suits.

Game Two

- Use a simple noughts and crosses grid.
- Draw a pattern of noughts and crosses.
- Ask your child to recreate your pattern from memory.

Game Three

- Place lots of objects on a tray.
- Ask your child to take one minute to study the tray.
- Take the tray away.
- In secret, remove one object.
- Bring the tray back.
- Which one is missing?

Game Four

- Buy some coloured counters or use Smarties.
- Ask your child to look away whilst you swap some around or pretend to swap.
- Ask what is changed or is it the same?

*Margaret Goldthorpe is an author and expert trainer for the promotion of self-discipline in children’s learning and behaviour.

*Sue Palmer, writer broadcaster and consultant, is the author of Toxic Childhood on the effect of modern life on our children.

*Professor Amanda Kirby is the medical director of the Dyscovery Centre, Newport, which helps children with living and learning difficulties.

*Jill Mitchell is Deputy Head of an IAPS Preparatory School and on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) advisory committee for the Independent School Council (ISC).

*Diana Watkins is Headteacher and Chairman–Elect of the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS).



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INFORM ↗

CODE CRACKERS

Education terminology changes almost daily. Ellie Brooksby explains how to get to grips with school jargon, so you, your children and their teachers are all speaking the same language

Watch this space. You may have to crack other codes as they grow up with ever-present plans for education system change just to keep you on your toes.

Reception entails looking round your 4 year-old's new class, not meeting a helpful girl behind a welcoming desk!

Once you have got the hang of the structure there are more pitfalls along the way. PSE can start as young as 3 years old but it can morph into PSHE as your child moves through the school.

So, Personal and Social Education, where your child will learn to be self confident and be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, dress and undress, becomes Personal Social and Health Education when all this dressing and undressing leads to needing to know about sex education and healthy eating!

The SATs or Standard Assessment Tasks give you data on how your child is doing compared to national norms in English and Maths at the end of Key Stage 1, that is the end of Year 2 at the age of 6–7 years old. At the end of Key Stage 2, Year 6 at 11 years old, Science is added to the tests and by the end of Key Stage 3, Year 9 at 13–14 years old the tests are in English, Maths and Science. The TA's (teacher assessments) cover all the other subjects.

Of course if you are in the Independent Sector there could be more codes to crack. Many Pre-Prep (Foundation and Key Stage 1) and Prep (Key Stage 2 and 3) follow the National Curriculum or a very similar equivalent but they often pride themselves on the breadth of the curriculum and prepare the children for additional examinations as well as or instead of the SATs.

Many Independent Schools have their own entrance requirements and the Head Teachers will always be happy to share their knowledge with you.

Traditional Public Schools will often require CE (Common Entrance) which can be taken at 11 years old in Maths, English and Science or at 13 years old where French, Geography, German, Greek, History, Latin, Religious Studies and Spanish may be added to the core curriculum subjects of Maths, English and Science. You are getting the hang of it now!

Assessment is constant, you may come across VR and NVR (Verbal Reasoning and Non Verbal Reasoning) and CAT tests – Cognitive Ability Tests – which help the teachers identify a child's potential.

Your child may be labelled as SEN which means that they have Special Educational Needs or even GT. Not the Gin and Tonic that you will definitely need once you have cracked the code but Gifted and Talented which you, as their parents, must be to have got this far!



THE MAZE OF TERMINOLOGY, ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND INITIALISMS IN EDUCATION IS MIND BOGGLING AT BEST BUT, AT WORST, MAKES US FEEL LEFT OUT OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLUB



They say that the team who cracked the enigma code shortened the Second World War by two years and you may need to do some quick code cracking of your own before you can feel comfortable when talking to your child's teacher.

We all think we know about schools because most of us went to them but the 'Edu Speak' of today's 'Gate Gossip' can leave you feeling less than confident. Of course, once you know that 'Foundation' is the class where children cover

the 'Foundation Stage' you realise that we are not talking 'make-up' here and being taken to Reception entails looking round your 4 year-old's new class, not meeting a helpful girl behind a welcoming desk! Whatever happened to 'the Infants'?

The 'Edu Speak' of today's 'Gate Gossip' can leave you feeling less than confident

It gets a bit easier when you learn that your 5 year-old enters Year 1 but confusing if he has been at school since he was 3 and has already been two years at the school! Why not Year 3?

Ah well . . . you see Year 1 is the first compulsory class which means that for some children this is the beginning of their education which will see them through four Key Stages – countless national tests, Standard Attainment Tasks (SATs) and Teacher Assessments (TA's) until most children take their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE's) in Year 11 when they reach the end of compulsory school at the age of 16.

SUMMARY

Foundation	3–4 years	Year 6	10–11 SATs
Reception	4–5 years	Year 7	11–12 Start of Key Stage 3
Year 1	5–6 years Start of Key Stage 1	Year 9	13–14 SATs
Year 2	6–7 SATs	Year 10	14–15 Start of Key Stage 4
Year 3	7–8 Start of Key Stage 2	Year 11	15–16



ASDA Kwik Cricket is a simple game for all boys and girls from 5 years of age upwards

It forms part of Key Stage 1&2 of the National Curriculum.

You can play it at school or at your local cricket club.

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THE BODY ➔

WHAT DADS DO . . .

Freddie Flintoff MBE acknowledges a debt to his father for his love of cricket. Speaking when he launched the 2007 ASDA Kwik Cricket tournament at Regents Park he told of how his father took him and his brother around the club cricket circuit from a very early age.

But it is not only those who have reached the top of their sport who have benefited from sharing the passions of those who they already respect and love.

The good news is that, despite long hours of work, when the pressure is on, dads are still finding ways to spend time with their kids. Surprisingly, a recent University of Maryland study reported that in 1965 dads spent 2.5 hours per week with their kids and that by 2003 this had risen to 7 hours per week.

Modern technology is allowing more fathers to use time saved in travelling less to make a significant difference to their children's development

Boys are programmed to learn the gross motor skills needed to become hunter gatherers, but fathers playing with their girls can also be very beneficial in helping develop the neural pathways that can easily atrophy if girls are not exposed to pursuits that have traditionally been seen to be more risky.

Roland Warren, President of the National Fatherhood Initiative in the USA comments: "It is easy for a dad to get sucked into the provider role and stay at work where he has control of his environment . . . but a good father is guiding and nurturing too." The benefits are obvious for both dads and children.

Fathers use different vocabulary, have different interests, enjoy physical play, the rough and tumble that strengthens limbs and the sense of competition

Kevin Bowring, Head of Elite Coaching for the RFU, says that it is vital to give children "fundamental multi-sports experiences" in the early years. The emphasis is on the fun to lay good foundations and prevent our best sportsmen and women peaking too early. The good news is that at this stage you don't have to be an expert to make a really valuable contribution.

The English Cricket Board is building on this research to provide a really practical structure with Kwik Cricket, where boys and girls compete together in an atmosphere that develops social and physical skills. Above all, it is a game that families can play together.



Kwik Cricket Rules:

- The game is played with a plastic bat and ball.
- Each team has eight players with at least one girl – the more the merrier! – and bats for eight overs.
- The team is divided into four pairs with each pair batting for two overs each.
- You start with 200 runs, and that's not a bad starting point. "England would be happy enough if they started every game with 200 on the scoreboard!"

Then it's time to play cricket!

- Every member of the fielding side has to bowl one over each – overarm if possible, but don't worry if you can't, underarm is fine.
- Every time the batter gets out, five runs come off the total and the batters swap places.

SUMMARY

And the kids say:

"I like playing with Daddy because sometimes he is more sporty – Mummy doesn't really play sports normally – but she's fun too!"

Thomas Ward aged 6 years

"My Dad's more adventurous and daring – when I'm with him I can do stuff my Mum doesn't let me do"

Keira Hughes aged 11 years

"I like playing football with my Dad because he's a bad goalkeeper!"

Emilio Nelson aged 4 years

THE BODY ➤ ALLERGY EPIDEMIC A 21st century disease?

Dr Dilly Murphy helps us understand the key facts and how to deal with the problems of living with allergies



As allergy sufferers, it is important to remember that your children are not abnormal and they are not alone. Current statistics reveal that the numbers affected by allergies have trebled over the last 20 years with over 25,000 now in danger of fatal or near-fatal reactions to peanut allergies.

Experts continue to debate whether this is due to the immune system over-reacting to allergens; because we have been brought up in a sanitised environment; abstaining from eating certain foods during a child's early years; or that globalisation has introduced us to foods that we didn't have in our diet 20 years ago.

Some researchers believe that a tendency to develop allergies is primarily inherited, noting that a child with one parent with allergies has nearly 50% chance of developing allergies. Whilst, for a child with 2 allergy-suffering parents, the likelihood increases to 70%.

Allergies on the increase

Whatever the cause the facts show that in the population:

- One in three suffers from an allergy.
- Over 5 million are asthma sufferers.
- Over 15 million suffer from hayfever.
- 40,000 children born each year have a nut allergy.
- Hospital admissions for anaphylaxis have risen fivefold since 1990.
- Between 1990 and 2003, 49,000 people were admitted to hospital with severe allergic reactions.
- Eight foods account for 90% of allergic reactions – peanuts, tree nuts (including walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios and pecans), fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, wheat and soy.

What happens during an allergic reaction?

Allergies occur when your immune system is hypersensitive or over-reactive. Antibodies produced by the immune system mistake an allergen as an 'invader' and attack it.

Common allergy symptoms include localized itching, skin rash, swelling, sneezing, runny nose, tearing, earache, sore throat, gastrointestinal symptoms like diarrhoea. Red bumps on the skin may appear in food allergies, drug allergies and allergic reaction to

insect stings. Gastrointestinal symptoms are most common with food, food preservatives and food additives.

On rare occasions a sudden allergic reaction triggers a whole body response. This is called anaphylaxis. Wheezing or rapid breathing and constriction of the airways may be present in anaphylaxis. Cool, moist and pale skin alongside rapid pulse and low blood pressure could be signs of related shock.

Where can I get help?

There are currently some 90 allergy clinics, but only a handful of centres that specialise in allergies in London.

If you suspect your child has an allergy, talk to your GP first – he or she can advise if tests may be necessary and refer you to a specialist.

Allergy specialists will undertake various tests including:

- Scratch test – small amounts of suspected allergens are placed on the skin surface and development of a bump or rash indicates an allergic response. They can also be injected under the skin.
- Patch test – adhesive patches are applied with allergens to the skin to see if they trigger an allergic reaction.
- Challenge test – suspected foods or medications are eliminated over a period of time and then small amounts are reintroduced to see if they trigger an allergic reaction.
- Immunotherapy – allergy shots or under the tongue pills in a series of increasing doses to desensitise the allergy sufferer.

Treatment often requires a combination of approaches with the goal of allergen avoidance, control or relief of the symptoms or desensitisation.

Adrenalin (in EpiPen injections) is prescribed for people who suffer with severe food allergies, wasp and bee stings, latex allergy and drugs.

How do I tell school about my child's allergies?

Your child's allergy will need to be managed effectively at school:

- Discuss your child's allergy with the headteacher and class teacher.
- Supply an up-to-date photo along with an individualised management plan describing how to manage your child's condition, medication and your contact details.
- Check that staff are trained in the use of EpiPens and know where to source them. Make sure your child knows who to ask if they feel any symptoms.
- Discuss school meals as they will usually be able to provide suitable alternatives. Encourage a good rapport between your child and the catering staff so they get to know each other.
- Keep an open communication channel with your teacher so that you can work together in recognising potential triggers and symptoms.

What do I do if my child has a severe allergic reaction?

- Assess your child's condition, note symptoms and any changes in symptoms. Get them to talk about how they feel.
- Decide if the reaction appears to be mild, moderate or severe. If mild or moderate, give our child the prescribed antihistamine.
- Monitor continuously to make sure the symptoms do not progress to a secondary phase reaction (after the initial reaction has been treated).
- If there are symptoms of anaphylaxis, or difficult breathing, or your child feels faint or floppy, call an ambulance and administer the adrenaline EpiPen into the muscle on his upper, outer thigh.
- Keep the child calm and sitting still in a position that is comfortable for him. Do not move him. When the ambulance arrives provide all possible information including medications, stating times given.

THE BRAIN ➤ FACEBOOK PHENOMENON



Social networking sites appeal to our British natural reserve but how will they colour our children's generation. Dilys Morgan, journalist and counsellor, looks at this new phenomenon



So apparently Britain leads the way when it comes to 'social networking'. We log on more often and spend more time online 'talking' to our friends through Facebook, Bebo and MySpace than any other nation in Europe.

Thousands of us are sharing music, photos and information about ourselves, keeping others updated with when we're up, what we had for breakfast and what our plans are for the day. We can review our friends' taste in music and rate how fit they are. We can 'poke' someone to remind them of our existence . . . and all this from the comfort of our living rooms.

Perhaps this shouldn't come as a surprise . . . maybe it fits in with our natural British reserve and shyness. We've always been difficult people to get to know. We avoid eye contact; we keep ourselves to ourselves; we value our privacy. Yet here we are embracing these social networking sites as if we're really keen to make and keep as many friends as possible. Could it be that these sites appeal because they allow us to have loads of friends without too much real emotional involvement?

We can 'chat' for hours without revealing much about ourselves. We can appear open and friendly whilst hiding behind laptop screens. We can sound enthusiastic and outgoing yet keep people at arms' length. We can decline invitations, say 'no'

without embarrassment and maintain as much privacy as we like.

But how do you nurture a relationship without any real-life involvement? How do you know what others are feeling – and what they need from you – if you can't see them? How are young people to learn about social skills if they never witness them in real life?

We've all heard stories of people 'dumping' or being dumped by text and, sadly, too many instances of bullying by text or online. These are such good examples of distancing, of being able to be nasty without any comeback. Not having to face up to the person you're insulting, upsetting or leaving makes the whole process so much easier. You can probably pretend you're not hurting someone if you don't have to see their face and their reaction.

SUMMARY

49% of children 8–17 have an online profile

18% of 8 to 17-year-olds with a profile use Facebook

59% of 8 to 17-year-olds use social networks to make new friends

33% of parents say they set no rules for their children's use of social networks

BUT HOW DO YOU NURTURE A RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT ANY REAL-LIFE INVOLVEMENT? HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT OTHERS ARE FEELING – AND WHAT THEY NEED FROM YOU – IF YOU CAN'T SEE THEM? HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEARN ABOUT SOCIAL SKILLS IF THEY NEVER WITNESS THEM IN REAL LIFE?

So what does this mean for the future of our young? Will they grow up hard-hearted and cruel? Will they never know the joy of having a true friend and sticking with them through thick and thin? Are we breeding a generation of even shyer youngsters who only ever feel confident in the virtual world and withdraw into their shells in real life?

Somehow I don't think so. The young have a wonderful opportunity to keep friends rather than lose them. In the past, once someone moved and changed phone number you could lose touch forever. Nowadays, no matter where people go in the world they're available online. The next generation has the chance to remain in touch with everyone they've ever known. They won't see all those people all the time. They probably won't have any more true friends than the rest of us. But they will have a vast network available to them – literally at their fingertips – and they'll be able to chart each others' lives constantly through updated photo albums and messages.

The time will surely come soon when the novelty of telling someone you're 'just going to the loo' will wear thin, but the sites themselves will remain a really rich resource – far superior to the old Little Black Book in content and flexibility – and enabling people to keep in touch with favoured friends for the rest of their lives.



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THE BODY AND RELAX . . .

Claire Strickland looks at the holistic alternative to competitive sport – yoga for kids

The discipline of Yoga originated in India
some 5,000 years ago and the benefits for
adults have been long recognised as a
holistic approach to a balanced, healthy
lifestyle. Over the last few years, however,
research and practical experience have
found that an adapted form of Yoga for
kids has assisted children with various
needs including stress, shyness, asthma,
Dyspraxia and Asperger's Syndrome but
also as just a fun alternative form of
non-competitive sport for children to
keep healthy.



Yoga appears to reduce stress, and help with sleep

Children are under more pressure than ever before to
perform well at school, compete with other children,
and accept busy parents and packed schedules.
Yoga appears to reduce associated stress and help
with sleep.

It is becoming more popular for yoga teachers to
adapt their classes to specifically cater for and appeal
to children. Classes are structured as an adventure
where movements are incorporated through
storytelling and games.

Children can often become better at poses than their parents and this gives them a wonderful sense of achievement and confidence

Fenella Lindsell of YogaBugs, now franchised
countrywide, says, "Yoga gives all children the
opportunity to shine. Children can often become

better at poses than their parents and this gives
them a wonderful sense of achievement and
confidence. One boy came to my classes as a very
shy and introverted little chap but after a few weeks
just loved the class and really came out of himself."

Research on the effectiveness of yoga indicates a variety of beneficial effects

Yoga works the whole body through a series of
poses, some are flowing moves, others are held.
The belief is that this can work on many levels
to assist a child's wellbeing through demanding
concentration, therefore focussing the mind, and
working physically on both the internal muscles and
superficial muscles, resulting in postures that are
designed to stimulate circulation and massage
internal organs.

The health benefits, if practiced regularly, can include
enhanced flexibility, strength, coordination, improved
stamina, better body awareness and better
concentration levels. The theory being that these
factors can promote self-esteem and assist
relaxation holistically and more permanently than
other quick fixes.

Research on the effectiveness of yoga indicates
a variety of beneficial effects. Whether these are
unique effects or a potential cure for certain
disorders remains to be scientifically proven.

There are numerous new yoga classes for kids now
throughout the UK and classes are becoming
increasingly integrated into primary school curricula.
Yoga can cater for all ages of children. Older children
can also benefit, as Fenella explained, "Our class for
8-12 year olds can boost confidence through
breathing, vocalisation and visualisation techniques."

LINKS

The Yoga Bugs website: www.yogabugs.com
Yoga Bugs caters for children between
2½-7 and Yoga'd Up for 8-12 years old:
www.yogadup.com

The British Wheel of Yoga website:
www.bwy.org.uk

The British Wheel of Yoga is the governing
body for Yoga in the UK.

The Yoga Biomedical Trust:
www.yogatherapy.org

Yoga Directory: www.yogadirectory.com

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works in oils on canvas,
and having lived and
painted in both Spain
and Guernsey, now lives
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Portes Ouvertes

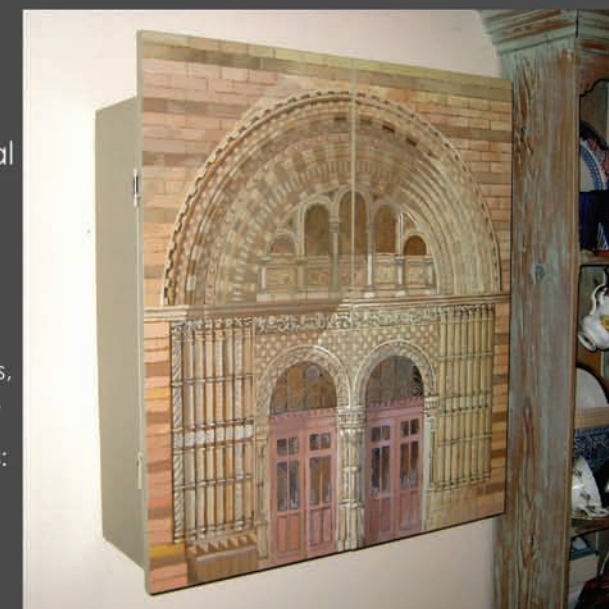
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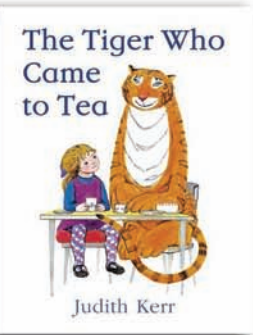
There is no end to the potential - buildings, objects,
clothing to store dvds, books, spices, medicines...

check out the website for suggestions and details:
www.joycepinch.com/cupboards
then contact John and Joyce at:
jpinch@toucansurf.com
to discuss your ideas



EXPLORING THE SENSES ➤ OLDIES BUT GOODIES

Oliver Nicholas jogs his memory and looks back with a chuckle at some classics that got him started and that he believes are still as good today for his kids as they were when he was little



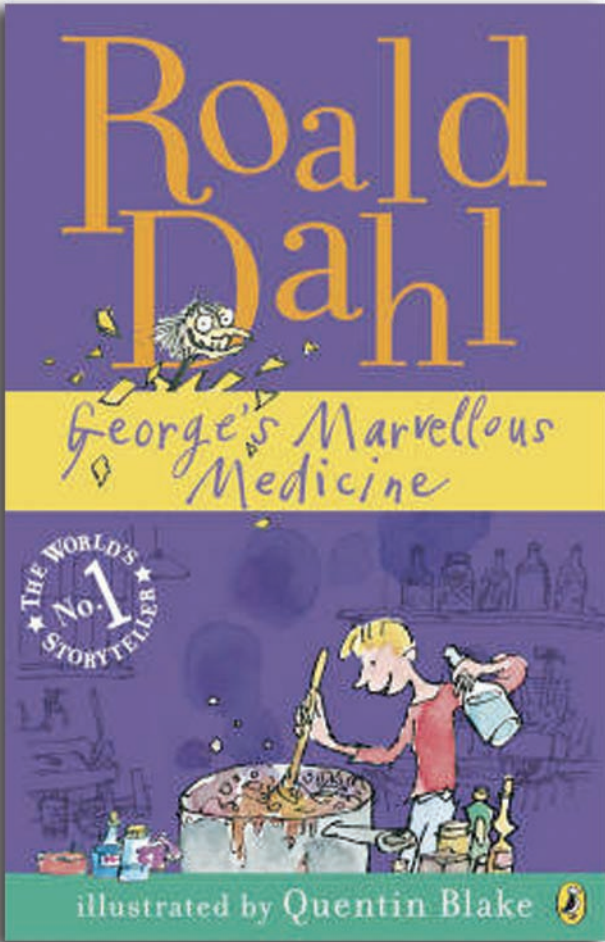
The Tiger Who Came to Tea by Judith Kerr

A classic tale of magic realist proportions as Sophie opens the front door to find a tiger sitting on the step. A bizarre comedy ensues as the uninvited guest sits down for tea, drinking from the kitchen tap and polishing off all the food in the fridge. Sophie's reaction, as if it was the most normal thing to ever happen is understated to say the least. Perfect for reading together out loud and for younger children to read to themselves over and over.



The Velveteen Rabbit by William Nicholson and Margery Williams

"When a child loves you for a long time . . . then you become Real," the wise old Skin Horse explains to the Velveteen Rabbit in the little boy's nursery. The rabbit is not the 'best' toy in the boy's collection or the most interesting. The Skin Horse teaches the Rabbit that, it isn't in the flashy paint and moving parts that true love grows. True love makes one real. "It doesn't happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby." This is one of my favourite stories of all time, and always makes me cry.



Tom's Midnight Garden by Philippa Pearce

Lying awake during a summer break at his aunt's house, Tom hears the clock in the hall strike every hour. Eleven . . . Twelve . . . Thirteen! During this special hour, Tom discovers a beautiful garden with other children in it. Pearce's story telling is haunting and sends a shiver down your spine. You will never be able to hear the clock striking twelve again without the vague hope of being able to open the door and escape into a magical otherworld.

George's Marvellous Medicine by Roald Dahl

George's Marvellous Medicine is rude, it's funny and it's got bottoms in it. This is probably the reason that it was the only book I read from the age of 6 to 9! Dahl knows what makes children tick and giggle naughtily: made-up words, revolting old people and dastardly plans to get back at grown ups, especially grandmas. George's terrible plan to give his grandma her just deserts is terrifyingly calculated and ingenious.

For a serious dose of Roald Dahl and a day out, visit the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre where you are given a Story Ideas Book to write your thoughts down, can dress up in Mr Twit beards, and learn about the man behind the books. The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre, 81–83 Great Missenden, Bucks, www.roaddahlmuseum.org, open 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Sunday, closed Saturday and Monday – 01494 892192.

FROM OLD LOOS TO FASHIONISTAS OF THE FUTURE

Rebecca Davison jumps on her magic carpet to get an overview of exciting new workshops bringing children into London's latest art exhibitions and galleries



FURTHER INFORMATION

National Gallery – Free family Sundays. Storytelling Sundays from 11.30am to 12pm for under 5s and workshops for over 5s at 11am and 2pm www.nationalgallery.org.uk/what/families Take One Picture exhibition runs until 13 July 2008

Design Museum – Sunday workshops for ages 5 to 11 from 2pm to 5pm www.designmuseum.org/kids or 0207 9408783

Tate Galleries – www.tate.org.uk

Royal Academy of Art – www.royalacademy.org.uk

V&A – www.vam.org.uk

Museum of Childhood – www.vam.org.uk/moc

Parents are under increased criticism for pushing their children into a test-driven existence and failing to give them the time or the tools to explore the arts. Whilst the majority want to instill in our next generation an understanding of our cultural heritage, it is sometimes difficult to encourage kids when we have little time or lack a full understanding ourselves. Today, London's art galleries, have reinvented themselves to get kids and parents into the galleries together, to get their hands dirty and to get them hooked on the art that surrounds them.

The National Gallery

The National Gallery has come up with a cool way of getting kids involved in the appreciation and understanding of art even before the age of 5. With a programme of Magic Carpet Storytelling, each Sunday the magic carpet comes to land in front of a different painting for half an hour of fantastic stories featuring the chosen picture.

Worth visiting: The Take One Picture exhibition of work by primary schools inspired by Rubens's 'A View of Het Steen in the Early Morning'.

Design Museum

See how a British architect has changed the skylines of many cities; he has built iconic buildings in London, Paris, Madrid and even Cardiff. The winner of the Pritzker Prize in 2007, Richard Rogers is featured in the Design Museum's main exhibition through until August. A self-confessed dyslexic, his designs have had untold influence on contemporary buildings around the world.

One of the most dynamic ranges of Sunday workshops is offered by the Design Museum, where children can use their imagination and creativity by getting involved in fashion, graphics, furniture and millinery projects.

The Tate – Britain and Modern

"Families have a great day out at the Tate." The Tate Galleries have extensive family, kids and educational programmes. A quick visit to their website will reveal all.

Their programmes are inspirational – from on-line art games to becoming an art detective, from writing a story based on one of the Tate's works of art to making and wearing carnival masks. You can even create your own art collection.

Beware! You may get the awkward question: "Is that art?" when you view Duchamp's urinal on display until the 26th May.

Royal Academy of Art

The annual Summer Exhibition is a great opportunity for children to experience art of all shapes and sizes from professional and amateurs alike. It can seem overwhelming to adults, let alone children and is certainly very popular. We suggest you choose your time carefully and be selective as to what you look at and how much time you spend in each gallery.

A very good way of involving your children is to play the "art game" – get your child to choose their best "picture" but it must be through careful observation. They have to describe the picture and tell you why they liked it.

Victoria and Albert Museum

"The world's greatest museum of art and design". With the Olympics coming up in August and a lot of interest in the burgeoning economy the China Now exhibition is on until 14th July. There are also workshops for 13 – 18 year olds on various related subjects. An interesting workshop during half term is "Create Fantasy Furniture" – Museum of Childhood.

Also visit the V&A's Museum of Childhood located in Bethnal Green. Often overlooked, it has an extensive programme of events and activities for children, plus things to do and make at home. Forthcoming events include a Poetry Day with Michael Rosen, a Father's Day event as well as a Refugee Week.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ➤

TRUST THE TEACHERS OR GET A TUTOR?

My child is currently in year 5 preparing for exams to senior schools. A number of the parents in the class have employed tutors in order to get their child into the desired school. Should I get a tutor to coach my child through these exams?

Melissa Hope, Fulham

There seems to be a growing obsession with employing outside tutors to assist with entry into senior schools. Whilst I do not believe that the employment of tutors per se is a bad thing and handled carefully can be beneficial, the trend is reaching epidemic proportions and the added stress and pressure put on children appears to be having a hugely detrimental effect.

Recent research has shown that children, particularly girls, can become so panic-stricken that the thinking part of their brain can cease to function effectively when faced with tests or exams. On questioning of the children in my school, over 80% of our present year 5 confessed to being really frightened by the prospect of exams. Whilst it is completely understandable that parents want to give their children the best chance, this obsession with extra work is actually having the opposite effect.

The following guidelines may be useful to bear in mind when thinking of employing a tutor. Consider the use of a tutor if:

- This has been advised by the school for a specific reason.

- You are unable to help your own child without this ending in tears.
- You do not have time to sit down for half an hour a week together with your child.

In preparation for exams, children should have no more than one hour a week – half an hour practice and half an hour one to one with an adult. This is a particularly good idea during the holidays to keep the brain sharp.

Work with the school – working against them will not help your child but will give them extra stress from the conflicting information they receive increasing their levels of anxiety. It is important to remember that it is in both the school's and your interest that your child achieves their potential within a happy, stress-free environment in which they are able to blossom. And, at the end of the day why would you want to push your child into a school to which they are unsuited and where they would ultimately be unhappy?

Diana Watkins – Headmistress of Leaden Hall School, Salisbury

NURSERY DILEMMA? TRUSTING THE CARE

I am trying to make an informed decision about which nursery is best for my two year old daughter. Since watching a recent documentary about poor standards of care, I am really worried about leaving her. How can I make sure she is safe?

Gina Johnson, Wimbledon

You are right to be cautious because although all nurseries are monitored by Ofsted (the body responsible for guaranteeing nursery standards). There are obviously some organisations that have managed to mislead the inspectors.

The most important thing you can do is ask lots of questions, use your eyes and ears and make sure you have a thorough look round. Check how many qualified early years specialists are working in each room, watch and listen to how they speak to the children, look at the equipment to see that it is well looked after and clean.

Ask to see the loos and changing facilities and try to be there during meal time to see how the

children are fed and whether the staff ratio allows each child to take time to eat in pleasant surroundings.

However, by far the best test is to look at the children. Are they happy, purposefully involved and able to look you straight in the end eye? This will tell you more than all the inspection reports.

If you think you would be happy working in this environment there is a very good chance that your child will feel comfortable too.

Natalie Daubney – Qualified Nursery Assistant and mother of two

Get in contact to shed light on issues that are worrying you or you think you can help others with. Write to us at empowered@edsup.co.uk and together we can have a go at putting the world to rights!

POINT OF VIEW ➤

PLIGHT OF THE MOON BEARS

In this Clued Up section, young people discuss what worries them most in their daily lives and in the world around them. Their perspective and preoccupations are often quite different from world-weary adults and offer an insight into what issues actually make an impact on their lives. In this issue, Georgina Terry, aged 13, discusses her concerns about the mistreatment of animals



"It disturbs me to think that there are people in this world who have such vastly different ideas of how animals should be treated."

As a thirteen year old, one of the things that concerns me is the mistreatment and possible extinction of some of the world's most extraordinary species of animals. Take the plight of the moon bears.

Moon bears are black bears, found in Southern Asia. They are called "moon bears" because of the crescent moon shaped patch of cream fur on their chest. They live in families and the baby bears stay with their mothers until they are over three years old. They are highly intelligent animals and have a very keen sense of hearing and smell. It is said that moon bears can smell honey from a distance of over three miles. They mostly live in mountain forests where they sleep in nests in tree branches or caves. Sounds idyllic doesn't it? It was, until man came along and spoilt it for them.

Now imagine a cage. A cage with metal bars that is hardly any bigger than a bear. Picture a mother bear being torn from her baby and put in one of these cages. A metal tube called a catheter is then implanted into the bear's gall bladder. Through this tube the bear's bile is drained twice a day and stored in a container. You may wonder why somebody would do such a cruel thing. As extraordinary as it may sound, the bile of moon bears is used in Chinese medicine.

The Chinese have many weird and wonderful remedies. The medicine for which the bile of the moon bear is used has resulted in over 10,000 bears in China being kept in cages on so called "farms." In their tiny metal cages the bears have no room to lie down, to stretch or even to move. Their bodies are pressed against the bars of the cage continuously. Boredom and frustration drives them to bite the bars of the cages. This often breaks their teeth, giving them toothache. Some are in pain from severe infections caused by the catheters inserted into their gall bladders; and some have head wounds caused by banging their heads against the bars in desperation.

There is a campaign called China Bear Rescue which is trying to help the moon bears reclaim their natural life. When the moon bears are rescued they need a lot of care and attention. They are bone thin, desperately ill and terrified. A vet is needed to take the catheter out and to treat their wounds and infections. Then they need to have physiotherapy to build up their muscles so they can walk again.

I have no idea if the bile of moon bears is of any medical value. Even if it is, there is no way that such barbaric treatment of the bears could be justified. It disturbs me to think that there are people in this world who have such vastly different ideas of how animals should be treated.

Georgina Terry

BUDDING AUTHORS

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WORLDLY WISE

Can travelling the world make all the difference?

Hannah Watkins talks to the Potter family who embarked on a gap year and asks them whether the riches of the adventure that saw them travelling around the world outweighed the downfalls of missing out on school



THE GIRLS HAVE SEEN A LIFE THAT THEY COULD NEVER HAVE POSSIBLY UNDERSTOOD IN THE CLASSROOM. THEY ARE AWARE OF HOW THE REAL WORLD WORKS FROM THEIR OWN FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

In the summer of 2006, James and Clare Potter decided to fulfil their dream of travelling the world again but this time with their children.

With 2 daughters, Ella and Rosie, aged 8 and 5, they knew that this could be a once in a lifetime experience but could also be a risk taking them out of school at a potentially crucial stage in their educational and social development.

Having met whilst working in Uganda and travelled through Africa together, the couple always had in

the back of their minds that they would head off travelling again.

Real life took over with the arrival of their children and James found himself working his way up through the rungs of the corporate ladder.

Travelling by moonlight across Argentina on the Trans-Patagonia sleeper train whilst watching Happy Feet was a surreal experience

Then, for Christmas, Clare bought James a book on an American family upping sticks and travelling the world with three children – and thought it would likely be left on the bookshelf. But by New Year, both had read the book and both were hooked on the idea.

Egged on by friends, they broached the subject with Ella's headmistress. The response was unexpected – "Go for it!". With no excuse to back out, they set in motion the grand plan, renting out their house, asking a neighbour to look after the dog and James leaving his job.

One of the most difficult decisions was where to go. They were each allowed to choose one country and experience.

Ella opted for swimming with dolphins and visiting Greece after studying Greek civilisation at school. Rosie was keen to meet a "friendly" elephant and a kangaroo in Australia. James chose New Zealand and Clare Argentina. The trip also took in Chile, Costa Rica, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, China and Europe.

It seemed a sensible option to start with easy travelling visiting friends in Canada and heading South down the West Coast through to San Francisco before flying to South America. There, they rented an apartment in Buenos Aires for a month before travelling by train through Patagonia, by "refurbished" cargo ship up the coast of Chile and onwards to Australia and beyond, staying in hostels, hotels, holiday lets and with friends and family.

Did the riches outweigh the downfalls?

An amazing trip – but a substitute for learning amongst their peers in a settled daily routine? The Potters believe that the girls have seen a life

that they could never possibly understand in a classroom environment:

Seeing Angkor Wat, the Great Wall of China, visiting museums, attending school in Bangkok, getting up close with New Zealand farm animals, dolphins and elephants, travelling by moonlight across Argentina on the Trans-Patagonia sleeper train involving a surreal screening of Happy Feet on the onboard cinema with the train engine chugging away in the background!

It was important not to say – do you know how lucky you are? – but instead show the girls how to empathise and understand

The girls studied when and wherever possible, through the use of workbooks. While best laid plans to keep diaries, encouraged by their school, lasted only 6 months, the girls studied and produced fact sheets on each country that they had visited. Homework was done al fresco: times tables learned during hikes through national parks, interspersed with stops for geology, geography and science

lessons in the Rockies, the Argentine glaciers, the Iguazu waterfalls, and the Mekong Delta.

There were times when it was incredibly lonely and tiring during the trip, missing friends and underestimating how hard work it is to keep everyone going. Would they do it again? Absolutely

There was also time to play: ballet in Buenos Aires, stuck in the mud with Vietnamese girls in Vietnam, swimming and surfing. The daily routine shifted depending on where they were staying. A little backpack of toys also travelled with them with Uno played when conversation dried up.

continued on P30

Difficult experiences

Clare notes that, in South East Asia, it was difficult to judge whether the children should be protected or exposed to the reality. They struggled with the decision of whether to visit the Cambodian Killing Fields. They found that Rosie was too young to take it in but Ella was more affected by it and still finds it uncomfortable to talk about.

Ella's eyes were also opened to extreme poverty on visiting poor communities in Cambodia where she met young children and was given a baby to hold.

However, Clare believed it was important not to say – do you know how lucky you are? – but instead show the girls how to empathise and understand.

The girls are aware of how the real world works from their own first hand experience now even as far as the simple survival techniques of dodging traffic in big cities.

Effect on the children

It has been interesting for the Potters to see how their children developed during the trip and how they have adjusted on their return. In Rosie's case, travelling during a crucially formative stage and having previously only attended play group, they found that, for the first six months everything was

just going in one ear and out of the other. Then suddenly something clicked, she started to get the hang of it and her reading progressed.

Ella, naturally a very sporty child, was able to swim, run, swing through the jungles of Costa Rica and learn to ski but also thinks that the trip developed her reading: "I love reading now."

Claire acknowledges that "children are what they are, they aren't going to change hugely, you just give them the experiences to draw from."

The main issues on return seem to have been more social rather than academic with learning to reintegrate and make friends again and adjusting to the everyday routine taking a little time.

Family

Clare and James admit that the first month was hell. The stress of extricating themselves from society and finding themselves relying on the family unit 24 hours a day was very difficult. James felt that it took three months to get out of the work mindset and fully relax.

"There were times when it was incredibly lonely and tiring during the trip, missing parents and friends and underestimating how hard work it is to keep everyone going." Would they do it again?

"Absolutely. Though next time perhaps travel less and stay in each place for three months to integrate, learn the language, sample the real life and then move on."

Money

The Potters budgeted £40 a day for accommodation, £40 on food, drink and ice creams (bribery on long walks) and £25 daily allowance.

Transport was the most expensive part so hiring cars was found to be the most cost effective.

Flights came to £5,200. They planned the trip themselves – this brought down the costs and enabled them to pick and choose their destinations. The flipside of this being when things went wrong, there was no travel agent to rely on for help.

They estimate that the trip cost £50,000.

LINKS

www.tripadvisor.com
www.lonelyplanet.com
www.i-escape.com



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CELEBRATION ➤

GET TOGETHER

Marina Fogle and Vanessa Teague talk to Hannah Watkins about the changing face of family parties

I have a vivid childhood memory, almost dream-like, of the comfortingly familiar smell of my father's aftershave as he kisses me good night, the sparkles on my mother's evening dress catching the light as she gently closes the bedroom door, the sound of her high heels tapping sharply on the hallway floor, disappearing into the distance as they leave to go to a 'grown-ups' party . . .



. . . and a second reminiscence of partying in spectacular fancy dress, re-enacting incongruous plays, screaming down waterslides and cooling off afterwards with lemonade made brilliant green by added drops of food colouring . . . but my dad doesn't appear in that image, he's never there . . .

We complain about the conflicting pressures that pull us away from our children but increasingly work/life balance is becoming a primary goal in our lives. This generation of fathers, in particular, recognise the importance of being involved in their kids' lives, including all the good times.

If you don't meet at the school gates it is incredibly hard to meet your children's friends and other families

Today, there is a phenomenon afoot in the way we celebrate together, say Marina Fogle and Vanessa Teague, founders of Kasimira Party Organisers who specialise in some of London's most fantastical and inventive party experiences. They have seen, at first hand, a perceptible and conscious move away from traditional after-school parties and a return to big, weekend garden events where family and friends get together and generations mix.

If you don't meet at the school gates it's incredibly hard to meet your children's friends and other families. "Entertaining as a family rather than as a couple gives families the rare opportunity to spend time together," says Vanessa, "and what better way than mixing socialising in a relaxed atmosphere with your children careering around amongst you, having the time of their lives."

The children, caked in mud, invented their own game of galloping round the dog agility course set up for family dogs

Vanessa and Marina recall an amusing party in Holland Park for both adults and children. For the children, there were amazing circus stalls and activities with an area of mini tables and chairs for a tea party, and for the adults, a standing drinks party. As the long summer evening progressed, the adults' party started to look a little sparse on numbers; the fathers having moved to sit together, putting the world to rights, on the tiny chairs, their knees around their ears and their children clambering all over them.

There is a simultaneous concerted move toward traditional party games and outdoor fun, with the onus on the children to take part rather than look on. Two of Vanessa and Marina's most memorable days involved large amounts of water.

During a classic British August day at a big outdoor party held every year in one of London's squares, thunder and lightening didn't stop the fun as children, caked in mud, invented their own game of galloping round the dog agility course set up for family dogs who preferred to stay inside and out of the torrential rain.

The second was a "Water Fight" party in which two war-painted teams had to take part in activities such as blowing arrows and pin the tail on the donkey to collect points for their team. The more points each team got, the more waterbombs they were provided with for a grand finale in which bombs were hurled in a carefully orchestrated onslaught.

Don't forget who you work for

There is not only a social change occurring in our home life. The commercial world is realising that, to keep the best of the best beyond the age of 30, it needs to look beyond employees to the wider picture. They understand that people work hard and no longer want to spend every evening going to work parties or evening parties.

City companies are starting to see the benefit of including families and children. One City bank director at a family day in the office commented: "Children at parties add a buzz that you just never get normally in this environment. It puts a smile on everyone's faces."

And Marina believes that it is not until you meet your clients' and your colleagues' partners and children that they become a real person – a complete picture.

Such parties and events are certainly huge fun and spectacular, but over the top in today's world? The girls believe that the shift towards families and traditional parties coincides with a desire to show social conscience: "We are now seeing a breed of parents who have worked very hard but don't want their children to lead this life by default and this is reflected in the parties."

“THERE IS A CONCERTED MOVE TOWARD TRADITIONAL PARTY GAMES AND OUTDOOR FUN”

LINKS

Kasimira Party Organisers
www.kasimira.com

Mutsy Urban Rider
4 Wheel Chassis £225.00
Mutsy Urban Rider rain cover £24.00
www.poppets.co.uk



Bugaboo Parasols £24.95
www.pramworld.co.uk

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sleeping bag £39.99
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EDSUP



I was 6 weeks old when I first went to school! My mother had given up her job as Head of Department in a London comprehensive. She pictured herself staying at home with me and driving us out and about in her little MG Midget sports car, my carry cot wedged between the tonneau cover and the front seats – no seat belts! But a desperate phone call from a local headmaster sent her scurrying back to the classroom and I went with her, tucked under her arm.

I've been told I used to crawl from classroom to classroom, sweat pea like, being scooped up and sat on the work benches to "help out". The boys used to look after me at break – it was always the boys who wanted to look after the baby!

Growing up in schools, with my mother later becoming a headmistress, I was determined I would never teach, so after A levels I hot-footed it off to South America where I found myself – teaching. Working in a home for street kids in Paraguay was eye-opening after my privileged childhood, with the shock of realising that the kids I taught during the day were working the streets at night. If ever there was a learning curve, I climbed the steepest one there – child development in its rawest form. I even found myself in prison visiting 8 year olds each week.

Spanish and Portuguese at Bristol University allowed me back to South America three years later, this time to work on the Buenos Aires Herald newspaper, where, each night, I proof read and corrected the English and, each morning, the Argentine editor came in and changed it all back because he liked his English better!

Law conversion followed, mostly because I wanted to continue coxing university rowing teams. Having to organise, motivate and challenge 8 men to push themselves beyond all imaginable pain limits set me in good stead for six years as a solicitor in the commercial litigation department at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. It was here, as more and more of my friends started families and began to panic about what they should and shouldn't be doing, and with no time to find the information they wanted, that I had an "epiphany" moment.

They say when you start a business you should begin where you have some experience. Law, education and magazines seemed a good place to start and the result is Eds Up!

Hannah Watteins

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