

EDS UP

A child in a dark swimsuit and cap is running on a sandy beach towards the water. The child is holding a beach ball with a colorful swirl design. The background is a vast expanse of water with shimmering reflections of the setting or rising sun, creating a golden glow across the entire scene. The child's reflection is visible in the wet sand in the foreground.

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NEWS

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

DEBATE

Encouraging children in sport – where to draw the line?
Nutrition – the key ingredients for young children?

INFORM

Instilling a love of reading in children
Cyberbullying and how to deal with it

CELEBRATE

The fun art of telling stories
The magic of African adventures

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EDITOR'S LETTER...

The feedback from our first issue has been beyond our wildest dreams! How so many of you have found the time in your busy lives to write and thank us continues to make it all worthwhile. It has been great to get such positive feedback and the response has shown me that what I set out to achieve has really been appreciated. The Daily News Update on the website has been a huge success and good news too that there has been a growing number of requests for copies to be delivered straight to your door through our subscription service.

But we are not going to rest on our laurels. We are determined to stay true to our founding principles to give you a balanced, fair view of issues that really do affect you and your children. That's our promise. Summer is coming – let's hope it's a good one!



CONTENTS

EDS UP PUBLISHING

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➤ **HEADS UP 4–6**
CURRENT RESEARCH, MEDIA
REACTION, SENSIBLE SUMMARIES

➤ **UPSHOT 8–10**
DEBATE: ROOTS TO GROW AND
WINGS TO FLY
We look at how important it is to encourage children
to play sport

➤ **FEATUR ED 12–14**
FEATURE: FUEL CRISIS
Getting the balance of diet right for young children.
What are the key ingredients?

➤ **IN THE LOOP 16–17**
INFORM: PASSIONATE
ABOUT READING?
Inspiring children to have a love of books is the greatest
gift a parent can pass on

➤ **PHYS ED 19–22**
THE BODY AND BRAIN:
CYBERBULLYING
What can we do to avoid or respond to cyberbullying
while promoting the safe use of modern technology
Plus: Roz Hanby on quick assessment of childhood
sickness; and
Claire Strickland on the benefits of baby massage

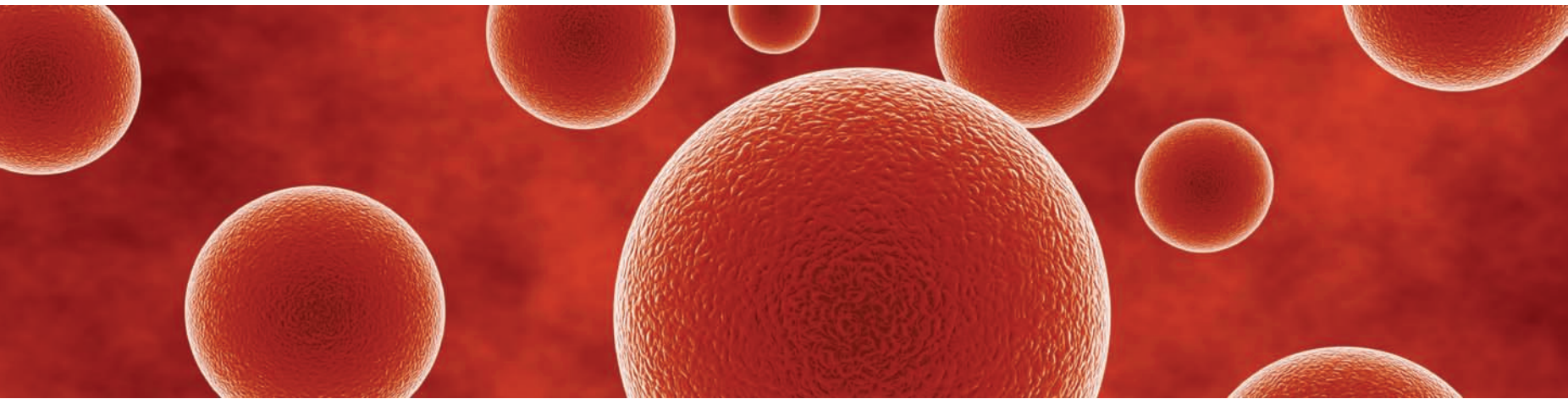
➤ **CREAT ED 24–25**
EXPLORING THE SENSES:
ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?
Oliver Nicholas reviews audio books for long holiday
car journeys
Plus: Brilliant ideas for summer

➤ **EMPOWER ED 26**
QUESTION AND ANSWER TIME
Zoe Sinclair on answering kids' tricky questions
and absent dads

➤ **CLUED UP 27**
A CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW:
THE WORLD I WANT
This issue, Georgina Brown tells us what sort of world
she would like to see

➤ **THE ROAD LESS
TRAVELLED 28–30**
ALTERNATIVE LIVES: AFRICA! AFRICA!
Families and tutors discuss the magic of Africa and what
it can teach children

➤ **LIGHTEN UP 33–35**
CELEBRATION: WATCH OUT FOR
THE WIGGLY WOOS
Kristina Stephenson, writer and illustrator, talks about
her book and the art of story-telling



EARLY YEARS DEBATE CONTINUES . . .

Curriculum for under-fives under continued scrutiny

The Early Years Foundation Stage continues to invite comment, both positive and negative. The government says the curriculum for under-fives is flexible and play-based and will bring a good standard of professional development to all providers of care and education for this age group. This is backed up by a collection of 69 learning goals that they believe will give all children an excellent start in life.

It has not been as cut and dried as this implies. Developmental milestones for some spell the end of childhood. Sue Palmer, author of *Toxic Childhood* and former head teacher, is reported in *The Telegraph* as saying: "Toddlers are still working at a very emotional level. They should be told stories and allowed to sing and play."

Michael Spinney, Chairman of the Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS) talking on Radio 4, expressed the fear that any curriculum imposed by the government on independent schools "struck at the very root of our independence." He reserved the independent school right

"to design our curriculum according to the needs of our children and what we believe is right and proper in constituting a good education."

Developmental milestones for some spell the end of childhood

Beverly Hughes, the Children's Minister, recently allayed these fears after discussions with a number of experts including David Hanson CEO of IAPS and members of the Steiner School lobby. New changes announced very recently in the House of Commons will see the EYFS "watered down".

The government has always insisted that the goals were aspirations not targets but are now seeming to allow child care providers to apply for exemptions from elements which they view as being in conflict with their principles about children's learning and development.

Campaigners against the framework will be delighted, reports Alexandra Frean in *The Times*. Many feel that without these concessions there would have been the danger of producing "a tick box culture that relies too heavily on formal learning and not enough play."

For countless other nurseries and pre-schools, government guidance in the delivery and monitoring of the under-fives curriculum will prove to be an aid to good practice and, as such, a welcome support

New changes announced very recently in the House of Commons will see the EYFS 'watered down'

COT DEATH BACTERIA LINK PROBED

Researchers have highlighted two common bugs that may play a role in unexplained cot deaths

A recent study, published in the *Lancet* medical journal, potentially goes a step closer to understanding what causes cot deaths with the research finding that many babies who died suddenly were carrying potentially harmful bacteria.

Cot death is often used to describe a sudden and unexpected infant death that is initially unexplained – 'sudden unexpected death in infancy' (SUDI). Cot deaths that remain unexplained after a thorough post mortem are usually registered as sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Researchers looking into the recent connection made with bacteria, caution that: "The link is merely an association. They cannot be sure that infections found during autopsy were what caused the deaths," reports *The Guardian*.

The team from Great Ormond Street Hospital and the Institute of Child Health undertook a review of post mortem records of 500 babies at Great Ormond Street Hospital who had died unexpectedly between 1996 and 2005.

"This research does reinforce the need for parents to follow existing advice on minimising the risk of cot death"

The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths explained how the research was carried out: the researchers categorised the cases as either unexplained; explained with evidence of bacterial infection likely to cause death; or explained by non-infective causes such as heart defects.

"The bacteria in the unexplained cases were in almost the same concentrations as in cases where the cause of death was determined as infection", reported Rebecca Smith in *The Telegraph*. The bugs included *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Escherichia coli* which can cause serious damage without showing any outward signs.

Professor Nigel Klein, one of the research authors, believes that there could be three potential explanations for the result: coincidence, a role for bacteria causing the death,

and the presence of bacteria due to an unrelated factor which increased the risk of cot death such as children's exposure to smoking: "So this research does reinforce the need for parents to follow existing advice on minimising the risk of cot death."

The NHS also advises that the findings should not alter current recommendations i.e. to avoid smoking around the baby, to put the baby to sleep on its back, and to keep the baby at a comfortable temperature with its head uncovered.

The rate of cot deaths has fallen by almost 75% since the Reduce the Risk Campaign highlighting recommendations to minimise the risk was launched in 1991. In 2005, there were 300 unexplained infant deaths in the UK.

Useful links:

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths www.fsid.org.uk and helpline 020 7233 209

Child Bereavement Charity www.childbereavement.org.uk

BREAST IS BEST BUT WE ARE STILL NOT SURE WHY!

Studies say: “Breast-fed children are brainier” and “Breast-feeding protects girl babies”

“If breast milk can trigger a protective mechanism against respiratory infections, the next puzzle will be to understand why it is more easily activated in girls than boys”

New research into breast-feeding has hit the headlines in two different studies to come out in the last few months. “Breast-fed children are brainier” was the first to attract media attention after 14,000 children in Belarus were monitored over six and a half years. The doctors found that those who had been exclusively breast-fed scored 7.5 points higher in verbal intelligence tests and 5.9 points higher in overall IQ tests. The study was well prepared and control groups set up, leading the researchers to believe that their results were more reliable than earlier studies. However, the research led by Michael Kramer, a Professor of Paediatrics, at the McGill University in Montreal, said that the results failed to answer the question of exactly what it is about breast-feeding that boosts intelligence.

Doctors found that those who had been exclusively breast-fed scored 7.5 points higher in verbal intelligence tests and 5.9 points higher in overall IQ tests

The same dilemma faced researchers in Buenos Aires. In a much smaller study, 119 infants were monitored to see if breast-feeding helped to protect the babies from severe

chest infections. In this study, the babies were premature and from a low socio-economic group, but the results seemed to show that girls fared better. Dr Polack from the John Hopkins Children’s Centre in Baltimore reports that breast-feeding did not affect the number of infections baby girls caught but reduced their severity. Strangely, the evidence showed that the same protection was not afforded to boy babies as nearly one fifth of boys developed respiratory infections severe enough to need hospital treatment whether they were breast-fed or not.

Like Michael Kramer, Dr Polack had to conclude that there is still a lot to discover: “If breast milk can trigger a protective mechanism against respiratory infections, the next puzzle will be to understand why it is more easily activated in girls than boys.”

The NHS Knowledge Service gave out an important message to doctors on their website. Regardless of any limitations of the two studies: “The benefits of breast-feeding are clearly established” and these studies only “serve again to promote the idea that breast is best.”

Useful links: www.nhs.uk
www.nct.org.uk/breastfeeding

IN BRIEF

Multilingual babies

Babies who hear foreign speech in their first 9 months find it easier to learn languages at school, reports The Telegraph. Psychologists from Bristol University found that a baby’s brain goes through a period of “programming” and filters sounds to help it understand words.

Dr Nina Kazanani, a linguistic psychology expert, said that when a baby is born it can distinguish every type of sound, including foreign vowel sounds: “By 6 months an infant can only recognise vowels from its native language and within another 2 or 3 months the same happens to consonant sounds. So, within around 9 or 10 months, a baby’s universal language ability is reduced to its native language.”

Need to nurture young entrepreneurs

Teachers fail to nurture young entrepreneurs, says a Prince’s Trust commissioned survey. The FT reported that 73% of survey respondents felt that schools and colleges only promoted “safe” careers. The rigidity of the education system was blamed along with a teacher-aversion to entrepreneurial schemes generating financial rewards.

Three cheers

Cheerleading is the new big thing in school PE. Dancing, chanting and pom pom routines are now being promoted by the Youth Sport Trust to encourage girls who don’t like competitive sport to exercise. Cheerleading is now recognised as a discipline by the governing body, British Gymnastics.

Pick up a penguin

Only in The Sun . . . A trip to the zoo left teachers at a German school perplexed when they discovered that their pupils had smuggled a penguin onto the school bus . . .

GSK WIN CERVICAL CANCER JAB CONTRACT

Cervical Cancer Jab Programme to start in September

GlaxoSmithKline announced recently that it has received a three year contract from the Department of Health to supply the immunisation programme for the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, Cervarix.

Around 300,000 girls per year are expected to receive the HPV vaccine, according to Reuters Health, starting in September. HPV is believed to trigger 70% of cases of cervical cancer and research released earlier this year suggests that vaccinating 70% of girls would ultimately halve the incidence of cervical cancer.

HPV is believed to trigger 70% of cases of cervical cancer

As the virus is sexually transmitted, the vaccine has to be given before the girls become sexually active to offer maximum protection. So, the goal is to vaccinate girls aged between 12 and 13, with a catch up campaign for girls up to 18 years of age starting August 2009, reports The Times.

The government has been accused of putting cost before health with the choice of GSK’s Cervarix over its rival Gardasil, a vaccine by Merck and Sanofi-Aventis. Cervarix, the cheaper option, offers immunity to two strains of HPV whilst Gardasil protects against four strains of the virus along with genital warts and lesions. Countries including the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland have or will be using Gardasil.

The vaccination programme has faced opposition from religious groups that argue that vaccinating promotes teenage sex, while The Royal Society of Health charity, charged with promoting awareness of the issue through schools’ involvement, argues that in the UK, every one of the 2800 cases of cervical cancer per year and 1,100 deaths is associated with a previous HPV infection: “This is why we are keen to introduce an educational programme into schools which raises young people’s awareness of this serious health risk.”

It takes between 10 and 20 years for a cancer to develop after HPV infection so any benefits in relation to cervical cancer won’t be seen for quite a long time, states Cancer Research UK, and “the trials done so far have only looked at preventing HPV infection. These vaccines haven’t been designed to treat women already infected with HPV. A UK trial is planned which will look at a vaccine to treat women already infected with HPV.”

Useful links:
[The Royal Society for the Promotion of Health](http://TheRoyalSocietyforthePromotionofHealth.org)
www.rsph.org
[Cancer Research UK](http://CancerResearchUK.org) www.cancerhelp.org.uk
[Cervical Screening \(NHS\)](http://CervicalScreening(NHS).org)
www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical
[Jo’sTrust Cervical Cancer charity](http://Jo’sTrustCervicalCancercharity.org) www.jotrust.co.uk

“We are keen to introduce an educational programme into schools which raises young people’s awareness of this serious health risk”

IN BRIEF

Vitamin D in pregnancy

Women “should take vitamin D in pregnancy to stave off rickets in their babies,” reported The Daily Telegraph, after a US study looked into deficiencies in babies and toddlers. The research suggested that babies fed on breast milk by mums who did not take vitamin D supplements were more likely to show a deficiency than bottle-fed babies. For UK guidance on vitamin D during pregnancy go to www.nhs.uk/livewell/pregnancy and our Feature section on page 12.

The “Grey Pound” supports kids

A recent YouGov survey indicated that almost two thirds of grandparents now make financial contributions towards grandchildren's pocket money, school fees and even first cars and homes. Whilst today's parents are burdened with mortgages and high living costs, grandparents have benefited from decades of property booms and now hold a relatively high proportion of the country's wealth.

Other recent research found that 2 in 3 families with 2 working parents rely on grandparents to help with childminding, saving them over £2,500 a year.

The Magic of movies

Schoolchildren are being introduced to the classics in a scheme to show films for free in schools.

FilmClub has secured government funding and will be rolled out to 7000 schools over the next 3 years. Children will be shown fairy-tales, silent movies, Hollywood classics, Bollywood extravaganzas to teach them the wonders of cinema. www.filmclub.org

HELPFUL OR DESTRUCTIVE

Parental involvement in school has mixed response

Headlines in the media during the past term have left both parents and teachers feeling confused and undervalued. On the one hand, Ed Balls, School Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, addressing a conference of head teachers, is pledging government support to tackle parents who refuse to accept that teachers have a right to discipline their children. On the other hand, the government is encouraging schools to set up separate Parents Councils and are allowing parents to trigger Ofsted inspections.

The Parental Involvement in Children's Education survey discovered that 92% of parents found school to be welcoming to parents

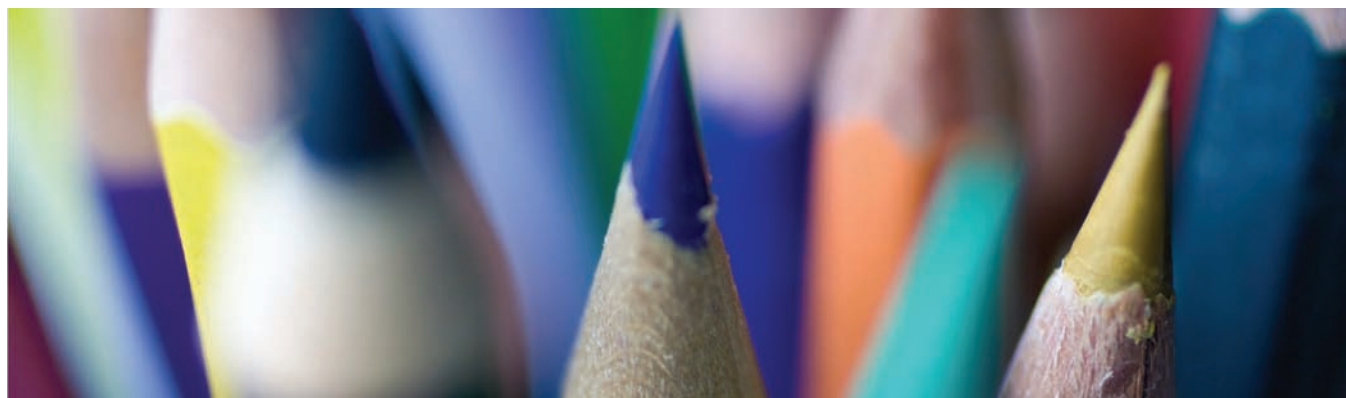
Mick Brookes, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers feels that the pendulum is swinging in favour of the 'consumer'. Speaking to Nicola Woolcock of the Times, he notes that the government is encouraging

parents in their sense of entitlement when, in fact: “In schools, working with parents is absolutely essential and the best relationships have an equality of understanding.”

“The most ideal situation is when the parents and teachers respect and trust each other,” says Diana Watkins, Chairman-Elect of the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS). Parent forums that come together with the head teacher to discuss the school, attitudes to discipline, bullying, rewarding good behaviour, breadth of curriculum and current educational issues are much more likely to develop good working relationships. In this way, parents know what to expect and, if they have a problem, they understand the basis on which the head teacher and staff make recommendations.”

The Parental Involvement in Children's Education survey discovered that 92% of parents found school to be welcoming to parents. They also noted a moderate shift in parents' attitudes away from a child's education being the school's responsibility towards it being more equal or mainly or wholly a parent's responsibility.

The most ideal situation is when the parents and teachers respect and trust each other



PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN SHOULD LEARN ABOUT VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Out of 88,000 children who were labelled as high achievers when they left their state primary school only 50,000 were deemed to be in that category at the age of 16

Research from Stafford University earlier this year showed that few students know about the possibility of financial support on offer at university. This has been endorsed by the findings of a recent report commissioned by the Sutton Trust based on children who started secondary school in 1997. They have discovered that out of 88,000 children who were labelled as high achievers when they left their state primary school only 50,000 were deemed to be in that category at the age of 16. However, many of those who failed to go on to higher education were the least privileged pupils.

Some schools are content to raise overall standards while failing to stretch the more academically gifted

There was a positive message to come out of this research. Poorer children who went on to take A levels were just as likely to enter university as their more advantaged peers. The importance of inspiring students to embark on these A level courses appears vital. BBC News quotes Dr Lee Elliot Major, the research director of the Sutton Trust: “The

study showed there were significant numbers of bright young people with academic potential who do not progress to university.” This research begs the question – what happens in the first five years of secondary education to cause this decline? Shadow Universities Secretary, David Willets, says the report only serves to confirm his worst fears: “Bright children from poorer backgrounds are being failed by the education system. It is a shocking waste of talent.”

These sentiments seem to be endorsed by John Stannard, the National Champion for the Young Gifted and Talented Programme, who warned that some schools are content to raise overall standards while failing to stretch the more academically gifted.

Summarising all these findings, Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust, concluded that this is “a further reminder that support and guidance about higher education needs to start early on at primary school . . . so that no young person loses out.”

Useful links:

The Sutton Trust www.suttontrust.com

Young Gifted and Talented Programme www.ygt.dcsf.gov.uk

Big deal.



'Three more mouthfuls of broccoli.'

'Oh come on, two.'

'Telly off in five minutes.'

'Make it ten.'

'Four more thank-you letters.'

'How about one?'

'Back by eleven.'

'Say half past.'

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DEBATE ➤

“ROOTS TO GROW AND WINGS TO F

Hannah Watkins talks to Kevin Bowring,
Head of Elite Coach Development for the RFU,
about encouraging children in sport

Summer's here and with it this year the added bonus, for sports enthusiasts at least, of the Beijing Olympics, pitched to be the biggest and best yet.

Ok, so we didn't even get a look in at football's Euro 2008 which is a pretty depressing state of affairs given the amount of money spent but we have high expectations for our sportsmen and women to bring home the medals this summer.

So how far can parents encourage and where should the line be drawn before becoming a pushy parent?

Frank Dick, a former British Olympic coach believed: "There are two important items for children's enjoyment of school sport – give them roots to grow and wings to fly."

The benefits of sport go far beyond the need to keep children healthy. Sport teaches children to work together and co-operate.

They learn to be part of a team, to lead at times, to be led at others and to be able to gauge when and how to act appropriately in different situations. These skills are transferred into every day social and working life and stay with children forever

Despite British involvement in the invention of a vast majority of the world's most popular games, we appear to be good at "taking part" but, with some notable exceptions, never quite being at the top of our game.

Funding for sport is not the whole issue, as has been proved in football. What lies behind these facts is the lack of comprehensive sports education for all in Britain which stems from the belief held by modern educationalists of the 1960s, that the fostering of competition in young children would somehow damage creativity.

The benefits of sport go far beyond the need to keep children healthy. Sport teaches children to work together and co-operate

Sadly, this was compounded in the 1990s when school sports suffered a massive decline due to the selling off of school playing fields, the lack of desire to organise extra-curricular matches in an already crowded school day and the emphasis placed on schools being non-competitive environments. Gordon Brown, last year promised to give all children the chance to play five hours of sport a week by 2010, challenging the beliefs of the schools and local authorities who had long been focusing on participation rather than competition.

Where does this leave parents who are in the middle of this clash of ideology? One minute we are being told that our children's generation is suffering from an "obesity epidemic" from poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle, and the next we are pilloried by the press for being pushy parents if we encourage our kids to achieve in sport. Judy Murray, mother of British tennis ace, Andy Murray, has highlighted the dilemma. She has spoken out recently in the press on her concerns about the danger of parents forcing their children into playing competitive tennis from too early an age.

They learn to be part of a team, to lead at times, to be led at others and to be able to gauge when and how to act appropriately in different situations. These skills are transferred into every day social and working life and stay with children forever. Sport also promotes discipline, self-confidence and wellbeing along with achieving personal goals and individual potential.

I recently discussed the issue with Kevin Bowring, Head of Elite Coach Development for the Rugby Football Union, who believes that some parents live out their sporting ambitions in their children. Although, in the elite rugby academies, he sees both "pushy" parents and supportive parents, he feels that what is key is to encourage and support but not push.

"I think it's the kid's decision. Let them follow their interests." Adults should be there to support that interest rather than drive children towards a goal they may not want. They have to participate in sports or activities because they **love** the sport and they **want** to play.

It takes 10 years and 10,000 hours to make an elite performer

Kevin's concern is that of early specialisation. Putting pressure on children at an early age to play sport competitively takes the fun out of it. It is important to offer children lots of different sport experiences letting them play and participate in different activities: "Give them the balanced physical development opportunities and they can then choose. Let them try out everything. If you notice that they love climbing or walking on their hands, for example, encourage it. Go along to a gymboree class, see if they have fun."

Kevin highlights the findings of scientific research which concludes that it takes 10 years of training and 10,000 hours for a talented athlete to reach elite levels (Bloom 1985 Ericsson et al. 1993). This is known as the 10 year or 10,000 hour rule.

10,000 hours of training over a 10-year period amounts to around 3 hours of hard training a day to make an elite performer. If a child starts at 5 focussing on one sport, he or she will peak at 15 – well below the age at which the majority of sports require peak performance. The majority of team sports are “late” specialisation sports.

“The essential aspect is that fundamental movement skills should be practised and mastered before sport-specific skills are introduced”

There are, however, exceptions where children do need to specialise, for example, gymnastics because children’s bodies need to be supple and their peak comes at 14. Gymnasts usually start at about 4 years old so this fits in with the 10 year rule.

Both Kevin Bowring and Libby Craig, Chairman of the IAPS Sports Committee agree that there is a balance to be sought between academic work and the affects of sports and the general wear and tear on the body. Libby Craig believes that children are better off being “all rounders” and starting their sporting career as late as possible.

What is being done in the UK?

The Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Plan is an approach to sport development which, by progressing through a series of developmental stages, prepares children to be involved in sport and physical activity and also enables talented athletes to be identified so that they fulfil their potential.

Currently a commonly accepted model in the UK, the plan was developed by a Canadian, Istran Balyi, who split the model into 6 phases that have to be fulfilled in order to become and elite performer. The Youth Sports Trust works with UK Sport to develop a performance pathway from PE to elite performance which is based heavily on this LTAD model.

FUNDamentals

The first stage is all about the FUNdamentals and is based upon the building of core skills that are the basis of most sports. The current focus on this is through a multi-skill approach with the emphasis on FUN. This stage is for children aged between 5 and 7.

The focus is on the ABCs of athletics: Agility, Balance, Co-ordination and Speed are achieved through running, jumping, turning, hand-eye co-ordination, dance and rhythm and the KGBs of movement: Kinaesthesia (the feel of it), Gliding, Buoyancy and Striking. These skills are essential for talent development and long-term involvement in sport. The Youth Sport Trust note that: “The essential aspect is that fundamental movement skills should be practised and mastered before sport-specific skills are introduced.”

The more traditional games for this age are 5-a-side football for spatial awareness, “implement” sports such as soft tennis, kwik cricket, mini-rugby and pop lacrosse for hand-eye co-ordination, swimming to teach buoyancy and gym to develop body management and understanding.

It seems to be that encouragement of participation in as many sports as possible is key.

Development

Between the ages of 7 to 12, motor development is very important. Speed, power and endurance are developed. Technical skills are refined through ball passing, catching



and evading; tactical brains are developed using fun games needing spatial awareness and working together as a team; mental skills are honed as the children are introduced into the laws of the game, the ethics of playing sport, learning to cope with winning and losing, respecting opponents and referees and setting their own goals for achievement. This is the stage at which sport specific games are introduced, where the basics are learnt and where talent really starts to be identified.

It's important to remember that there are a lot more opportunities than just rugby, soccer, cricket and netball

But, as Kevin Bowring says, it has got to be something that captures the imagination: “It’s important to remember that there are a lot more opportunities than just rugby, soccer, cricket and netball. However, if the imagination of an 8 year-old child is captured by rugby, and he wants to be the next Jonny Wilkinson, then our coaching and encouragement of that interest must incorporate the principles of LTAD.”

For young children, the government is promoting a new programme, Start to Play, for children up to 5, which will compliment the Early Years Foundation Scheme. Playing will develop communication skills, language, understanding and colour recognition through the provision of exciting equipment for play and physical activity.

Where?

Schools vary dramatically depending on the interest of the headteacher, the commitment and training of staff and the facilities. However, sport now seems to be appearing higher on many schools’ agenda. Physical Education is also being promoted through Multi-Skill Clubs and Academies which are delivered through a network of School Sport Partnerships.

The out-of-school clubs in already established sports clubs or offered as part of the local authorities sport development give 7 to 11 year-olds the chance to have a go at different sports whilst developing fundamental skills. Multi-Skill Academies continue from these beginnings and offer a talent development programme through sports colleges and partner schools for children in Year 6 and 7 of primary school.

Our own hosting of the London Olympics has brought children’s participation in sport into the limelight again too. Famous sports personalities like Dame Kelly Holmes are spearheading new initiatives such as the UK School Games this August, (see links below).

Unsporty?

Children who have positive experiences at an early stage are unlikely to dislike sport. There is something for everyone and it all depends on the transference of enthusiasm from adult to child. The most important thing to remember is that it is not about you (“I was no good at sport”) but about them. Starting with a “can do” approach, as Kriss Akabusi advocates, and your children may surprise and delight themselves, and you.

LINKS

www.youthsporttrust.org

www.nc.uk.net – National Curriculum Guidelines, appendix 6

www.talentladder.org.uk

www.sportengland.org

www.sainsbury.co.uk/activekids

Start to Play Scheme contact:
starttoplay@youthsporttrust.org

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Shocking or extreme health issues usually make it on to television documentaries and into the newspapers to sell copies but in the last few months the press has reported on worries by doctors and controversial claims by children's charities that toddlers are eating too much fruit and vegetables, something that will likely be of concern to all of us.

Does this not conflict with the messages we keep hearing that we should try to eat healthily, cutting out the fat and sugar and eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day?

giving children excessive amounts of fruit and vegetables stems from an easy misunderstanding that we should be feeding 1 to 4 year olds a healthy diet based actually on advice designed for adults not children.

Such an adult diet does not take into account the range of nutrients, sugar, fat, protein and carbohydrates that children will need in the early years to grow properly and develop body and brain.

Children need food and nutrients to form muscles, strong bones and teeth, body tissues and strengthen their immune system. This early years growth needs huge resources of energy.

GIVING CHILDREN EXCESSIVE AMOUNTS OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES STEMS FROM AN EASY MISUNDERSTANDING THAT WE SHOULD BE FEEDING 1 TO 4 YEAR-OLDS A HEALTHY DIET DESIGNED FOR ADULTS NOT CHILDREN

This is all very confusing and we no longer all have health visitors or close-knit families to pass on advice to us about diets. How do we find out what toddlers and young children can be fed, why do they need certain foods and not others and how on earth do we, as parents, positively encourage a healthy diet in our children?

Dr Alex Richardson*, founder of the charity Food and Behaviour Research, speaking at the National Children's Nutrition Conference in June, recognised that parents don't usually have "easy access to reliable information about just how important good nutrition is to their child's development - and especially to their child's brain and behaviour."

What we do know is that children under 5 years old have very specific dietary needs. The current issue of potentially

Sam Montel of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) believes that it is great to let children try fruit and vegetables but it is important to remember that they need a nutritious, balanced diet. "They are very active, they are growing. They need a lot of fat in their diet and less fibre."

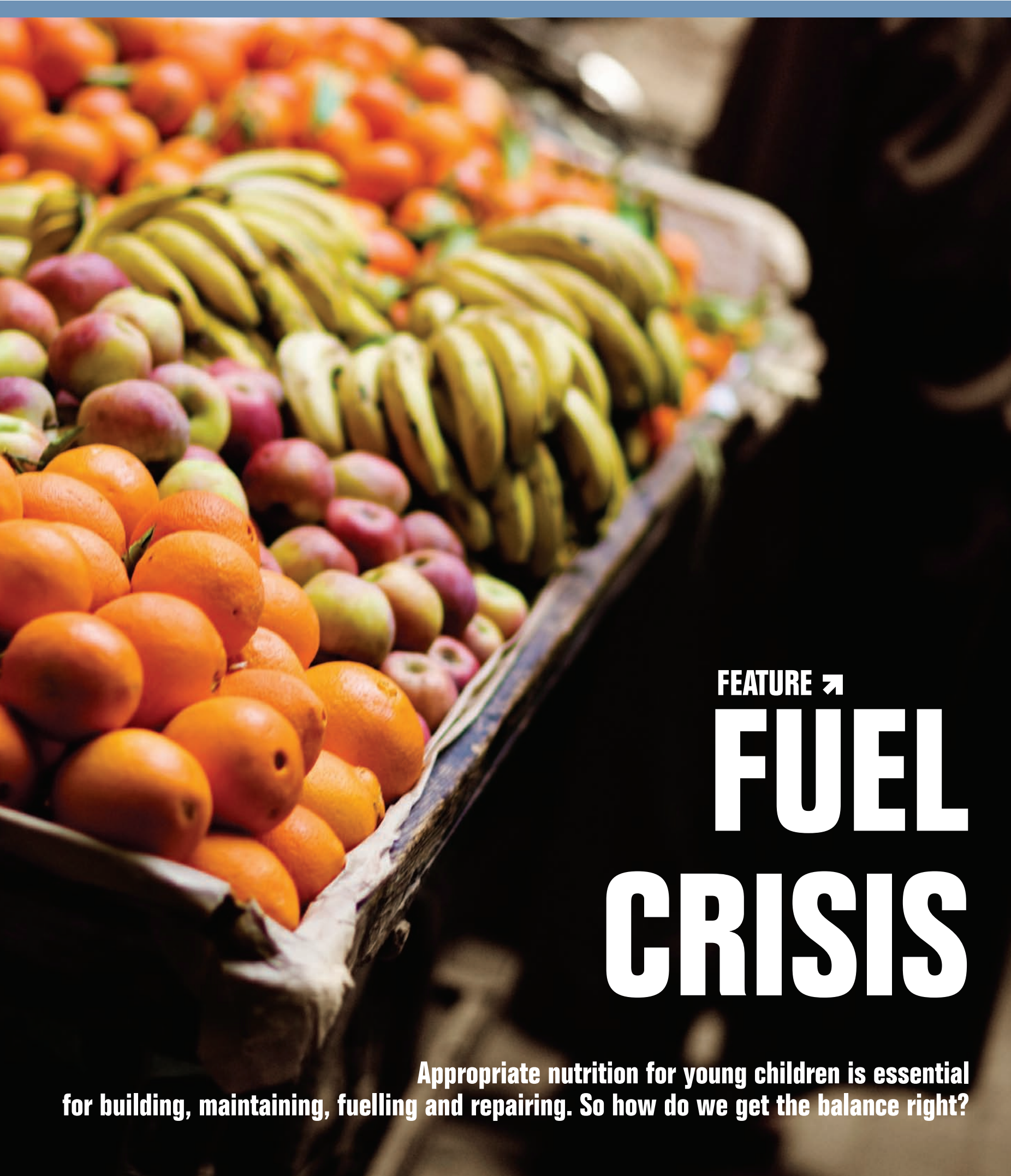
The British Nutrition Foundation also advises that toddlers continue to need energy-dense diets:

"Care needs to be taken over the amount of fibre eaten. If the diet is too bulky due to too many high fibre foods, there is a danger the child will be unable to eat enough food to satisfy its energy needs."

Children under 5 years old have very specific dietary needs

Iron	Needed to make red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body. The immune system also needs iron	Meat, liver, fortified cereals, bread, dried fruit, eggs, beans, pulses and green leafy vegetables like cabbage, spring greens, broccoli and green beans
Calcium	Important for strong bones and teeth, blood clotting, nerves and muscles	Milk, yoghurt, cheese, fromage frais, dark green vegetables, sesame seeds, sardines, fortified orange juice and pulses
Zinc	Essential for cell division, growth and tissue repair, normal reproductive development, immune system and healing of wounds	Milk, cheese, meat, eggs and fish, wholegrain cereals and pulses
Vitamin A	Formation and maintenance of skin, hair, and membranes, needed for bone and teeth growth, normal vision and immune system	Yellow and orange fruit and vegetables (carrots, peppers, tomatoes, mango, apricots), dark green leafy vegetables, liver and dairy products
Vitamin C	Essential for structure of bones, cartilage and muscle. Helps the immune system and the absorption of iron as well as acting as an antioxidant	Citrus fruits, berries, and vegetables (provided that they aren't cooked until very soft), tomatoes, potatoes and fruit juice
Vitamin D	Aids in bone and tooth formation and helps the heart and nervous system. Important for absorbing calcium and phosphorus from foods	Oily fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, sardines), fortified margarine, eggs, meat and dairy products. Most is obtained through the action of sunlight on the skin





FEATURE ➤

FUEL CRISIS

Appropriate nutrition for young children is essential for building, maintaining, fuelling and repairing. So how do we get the balance right?

Different foods contain the different but necessary vitamins and minerals. No single food contains everything we need so the key is an overall balance of foods to provide enough energy and nutrients. It is just a matter of getting this balance right, says the FSA: "Too little protein can interfere with growth and other body functions, too much fat leads to obesity and heart disease."

This is something that the British Heart Foundation is keenly aware of but the charity also notes that: "Babies and toddlers up to the age of 2 years depend on high fat foods like whole milk and margarine for the fat-soluble vitamins A, D and E they contain. Between the ages of 2 and 5 years they can make a gradual transition to lower fat products and start to adopt more adult-type eating habits." It is interesting to know that breast milk has over 50% energy from fat. After the age of 2, toddlers' diets move gradually to lower 35% energy from fat recommended by the age of 5.

So, what nutrients do children need?

There are four main suitable food groups and a small fifth group of fatty and sugary foods which can be dipped into every so often. These are:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Bread, rice, potatoes, past and other starchy foods
- Milk and Dairy products
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein
- Foods high in fat and/or sugar

The balance of these food groups is shown in the Eatwell Plate below. If children's intake, as far as possible for each meal, is based on these groups all the important nutrients will be provided. Children should still strive to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day, a portion being the size of a child's hand.

In these developmental years the nutrients children need and get from these five food groups are:

- Calcium
- Starchy carbohydrates
- Protein
- Fat
- Iron
- Zinc
- Vitamins A, C and D

Vitamins A, C and D are essential but can often be missing in diets. Iron requirements, for example, are high at this age but a child's dietary intake is usually low.



At the National Children's Nutrition Conference, Dr Paul Clayton* highlighted a key problem with children under the age of 5 being the iron and vitamin A deficiencies. Research has shown that up to 80% of toddlers have iron deficiencies and up to 50% have lower than recommended levels of vitamin A. The foods that provide these nutrients are highlighted in our summary box on the previous page.

It is a natural stage of development that, in their second year, children become fussy eaters. This is an evolutionary response to stop them eating things that might not be food or that might be poison

This is all very well but toddlers are notoriously difficult with food so how do they get the nutrients they need? It is a natural stage of development that, in their second year, children become fussy eaters. This is an evolutionary response to stop them eating things that might not be food or that might be poison.

It is a normal phase and children need to take a while to learn that these foods are ok, that they are familiar to them. As their mouths develop, they also have issues with texture

so advice focuses on offering foods that are familiar to children. It is good for them to see other people eating them and slowly they will start to accept them and begin to eat them. It can take up to 15 times of being given a certain food for a child to accept it. Dr Gillian Harris of Birmingham Children's Hospital featured in the ITV programme "My Child Won't Eat" says: "Try to keep calm at meal times and not get stressed or increase anxiety about food. Let them eat what they want and slowly introduce new foods."

It can take up to 15 times of being given a certain food for a child to accept it

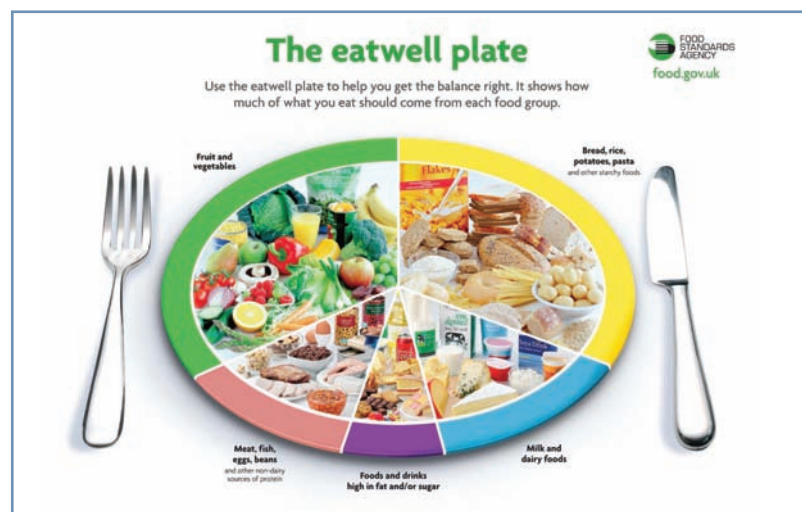
Getting children to understand how food helps their bodies, by involving them in the cooking process and eating together whenever possible, especially at the table, right from very early days is thought to get children's 'buy in' in relation to food. It helps children understand where food is from, how it effects their health and starts them taking responsibility for their own bodies and minds whilst learning practical and social skills that will stay with them for life.

Professor Kevin Morgan of Cardiff University sums it up. He has researched school food systems throughout Europe and the US, finding the best school food system to be in Rome where children were given a starter of pasta and tomato sauce, followed by meat and vegetables with cut up fruit for pudding. One of the teachers who sat on the table with the children and ate the same food as them explained: "Food is a pedagogic moment: the children eat what I eat. Without knowledge, how do they know what food to choose."

Dr Alex Richardson is founder of the charity Food and Behaviour Research www.fabresearch.org and author of 'They Are What You Feed Them'

Kevin Morgan is Professor of European Regional Development, Cardiff University

Dr Paul Clayton is Immediate Past President, Forum on Food and Health, Royal Society of Medicine



LINKS

British Nutrition Foundation – www.nutrition.org.uk

Food a fact of life – www.foodfactoflife.org.uk

Food Standards Agency websites – www.eatwell.gov.uk and www.food.gov.uk

Tips to help you get 5 a day – www.5aday.nhs.uk

The British heart Foundation – www.bhf.org.uk

www.activekidsgetcooking.org.uk

www.thekidscookeryschool.co.uk



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INFORM ➤ PASSIONATE ABOUT READING?

The main challenge for parents is not whether to help your child with reading but how best to ensure a love of books that will probably be the most important gift you can share



Until recently, many schools dissuaded parents from teaching their children to read. There were fears that, somehow or other, things would go wrong and the child would end up being disadvantaged or, worse still, bored, whilst the other pupils in the class caught up.

Luckily, things have changed and all the recent research points to the fact that adults are the best role models to inspire the young. Unfortunately, many families are busy and time for personal reading may only be saved for holidays

but the good news is that it is the quality of the shared experience not the quantity that seems to make all the difference.

Just listening to a child decode words is not going to help fluency or understanding

Many people feel that hearing a child read on a daily basis is the sign of a good teacher but just listening to a child decode words is not going to help fluency or understanding. The Secretary of State for Schools, Children and Families, Ed Balls, has hit the nail on the head by

saying: "Getting your children — both boys and girls to be passionate about reading is something all parents can do," and whilst he advocates reading to your children for ten minutes at bedtime this does not have to be a one-sided experience.

Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Director of the 'National Year of Reading 2008' explains that for boys: "Football programmes, blogs, newspapers and sports magazines are just as valuable reading as fairy tales."

Excerpts from stories of travel, endurance, adventure and discovery written for adults can equally appeal to children if they are being read to by someone who really wishes to share their enthusiasm. In this way, vocabulary will be extended and most importantly reading is elevated beyond just something that is done by kids at school.

Helen Gillott* suggests choosing stories where it is easy to form a strong mental picture and urges parents not to forget the value of choosing text with humour to capture a child's imagination.

“The capacity of the brain to mimic others is an important one to use. Learning by watching an expert can be a really useful way to learn”

The old adage ‘imitation is the sincerest form of flattery’ is as relevant to reading as it is to following the latest fashion craze, particularly if you love and respect the person that is reading to you. Bill Lucas* explains that: “the capacity of the brain to mimic others is an important one to use.

Learning by watching an expert can be a really useful way to learn. In most families, much of the learning takes the form of copying other family members. And the use of role models and the modelling of certain behaviours at home and at work are powerful methods of passing on learning.”

There is no reason why this shared experience can't start early. Helen Gillott encourages parents not to give away their children's baby and toddler books: “These are a wonderful resource, it is a huge boost to early readers to read stories they have previously only heard read to them. Little people are thrilled when they recognise the words and confidence is all when children begin to read.” It works in exactly the same way if a child is given a nursery rhyme book to read: “When they suddenly realise that the words they are reading trigger off memories of learnt songs, you can often find children happily singing away to their reading book. There couldn't be a more effective way to learn how written words convey meaning.”

The National Literacy Trust believes that putting families at the heart of the literacy challenge is the way forward after recent research showed that nearly a quarter of pupils stated that no-one in their family encouraged them to read.

Honor Wilson-Fletcher makes an important point: “Reading is the best private investment you can make in your child's education, it's free and makes you feel like the best parent on earth.”

Jill Mitchell is a member of the expert group on the Independent School Council

Helen Gillott is an ISI Inspector for Early Years

Bill Lucas is the co-author of *Help Your Child to Succeed*, *The Essential Guide to Parents*

LINKS

Bill Lucas, “Discover your Hidden Talents” – www.networkpress.co.uk

National Literacy Trust – www.literacytrust.org.uk

National Year of Reading – www.yearofreading.org.uk

“READING IS THE BEST PRIVATE INVESTMENT YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION, IT'S FREE AND MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE THE BEST PARENT ON EARTH”



Reading Together

- Start early readers with their favourite baby and toddler books and books of nursery rhymes to boost confidence
- Choose reading material that will be of interest to you both
- Talk through the illustrations to extend vocabulary and help make meaning of the text
- At the first sign of hesitation over an unknown word, cover part of the word to reveal only the first syllable and gradually expose each syllable
- Look for patterns eg ‘ight’ saying ‘ite’, ‘tion’ saying ‘sh’n’ and point out words with the same pattern
- Encourage reading for understanding by asking your child to predict what might happen next
- Above all, enjoy the experience and make sure it is a happy time for all concerned

Developing the Passion

- Read to your child from as many different sources as possible
- Share reading material that interests you, that can encourage conversation and extend vocabulary and imagination
- Use newspapers, magazines, blogs, comics or sports programmes as sources of reading to share
- You read a paragraph followed by your child reading a paragraph
- In a book where there is a lot of dialogue and different characters, read a paragraph and ask your child to read the same paragraph as you have just read. (It is amazing how confidence and fluency grows by mimicking your voice)
- Create a book swap shelf for children's books at work

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THE BODY ➤

TO SCHOOL OR NOT? THAT IS THE QUESTION



Hannah Watkins talks to nurse, Roz Hanby, on helpful ways to make a quick assessment of your child

On my little brother's first day at school, I was charged by my mother with watching out for him. I took the responsibility on with all the seriousness of a 6 year old and looked after him during break time. As the bell for the end of break rang and he was taken away from me, I became increasingly upset at being parted from him and not fulfilling the promise to my mum.

The next thing I recall, I was being asked by my teacher whether I was ok and if my tummy really hurt. Confused, but still upset, I went along with it and my unamused mother was called back from work to collect me! When I was put to bed once home, I stayed silent for a few minutes before uttering the immortal line that has remained a catchword in our family ever since: "Mummy, I'm skiving . . ."

Quite a lot of children get sent to school because their parents think they are 'skiving'. However, Roz Hanby has a strong belief that happy, well children do not, on the whole, want time off school and if you get the emotional and physical health of children right they will flourish and give of their best. By knowing what to look for, taking time to listen to children and using her experience she can make judgments about how best to respond effectively. Here, she shares her expertise on helpful ways to make a quick assessment of your child.

So when should we keep our children home?

Even after years of working as a school nurse, I still feel this is a tricky question. I know that my own daughter would sometimes show a sad and peaky look at me just as we were getting ready for school, or would announce that she had a really, really sore throat/tummy/head!

It sounds obvious but it's worth asking the child if they feel they can go to school, I'm amazed at the number of children who say I'd like to try and go back to class! Especially if they feel that their symptoms have been acknowledged and that they are able come back to sick bay or go home if they still feel unwell.

All schools differ in their 'stay at home' rules. Boarding schools are better equipped to deal with a child who feels unwell but obviously no schools are happy to accept children with any of the following:

- Diarrhoea and/or vomiting even if only one episode
- Temperatures above 37.5°C
- Fits or blackouts that have not been assessed by a doctor
- Chicken Pox. Children can go back to school 5 days after the onset of the rash as long as they are feeling well
- Scabies – until medical treatment has started
- Impetigo – until medical treatment has started

What if they have a fungal infection, ringworm or Athletes' Foot?

There is no need to keep children away from school. Treat with antifungal cream available over the counter or try washing feet in anti dandruff shampoo regularly to help treat and prevent Athletes' Foot. It works brilliantly!

Can they go to school even with a temperature?

I recommend investing in an 'ear thermometer'. They are accurate, quick and easy to use. It is worth remembering that a 'normal' temperature varies from person to person but most are within a range of 36.5–37°C. I tend not to have hard and fast rules such as 'if you haven't got a temperature then you must go to school'. Some children are genuinely unwell particularly in the prodromal phase while sickening for a virus, while others play around happily with a temperature of 37.5°C or more. Running around and hot weather also have an effect on body temperature. I'm a great believer in looking at your child and having confidence in your own instinct. It's worth being aware that any child who has a temperature whether on and off or constant for more than 5 days should be seen by a doctor.

What are the obvious signs of sickness?

Obvious signs are:

- Skin colour – paler or more flushed than usual
- Breathing – breathless or wheezy
- Mood – lethargic, quiet, irritable or agitated
- Skin temperature – hot head, cold or bluish coloured hands and feet
- Vomiting and sickness – I have found a lot of children say that they have 'been sick' and when they are asked a little more, you find that they haven't actually vomited but have felt sick (unwell) and have a 'nasty taste in their mouth'.
- Dizziness – another word that children use for feeling unwell. In order to differentiate I ask if the room is 'going round' or if their head feels fuzzy.

Can you differentiate between viral and bacterial infections?

How many of us have been sent home empty handed from the GP with a poorly child and the 'it's a virus' diagnosis? There are still quite a lot of people who ask for antibiotics 'just in case'.

Viruses can be serious but rest, plenty of fluids and time usually work their cure. Sometimes, bacterial infections set in 'on the back' of viral illness e.g. sinusitis after a cold. One diagnostic tool to differentiate between viral and bacterial infections in children is that temperatures remain consistently high in bacterial infections whilst in viral infections temperature tend to 'spike' (in an up and down pattern).

The threshold for antibiotic therapy has changed in the battle against resistant strains of bacteria and conditions like uncomplicated ear infections are often treated 'conservatively' with painkillers. In these cases, parents are often given a prescription to use if needed after a few days.

Can worrying make children ill?

In my experience, worries often manifest themselves in children looking and feeling unwell. With children who come to our sick bay regularly, once they have been checked physically, I often explain to them that worries can make tummies ache, and that I find sharing a worry can be a 'miracle cure'. Worries can come from such things as being frightened by something on television to missing a parent when they first start school. Friendships also become increasingly important to children especially as they get older. Arguments at home, which I explain, are a normal part of family life, often worry children who sometimes feel that parental arguments are 'their fault'. I have found that a short reassuring chat works wonders with children even as young as 6 or 7.

What about home remedies?

Paracetamol syrup is still the favourite painkiller in most households and is effective. Ibuprofen syrup is very good for inflammatory pain for throats and ears. These work very well together. You can give paracetamol 4 times a day and ibuprofen 3 times and if you alternate doses through the day, remembering to keep a dose for bedtime, this works very well. This combination can also be used to help bring temperature down, but NICE* now recommend not using medication for this reason alone if your child is otherwise well, there is now some research that shows that raised temperature in children may help their immune system. Medication should of course be given if the child feels or looks unwell.

LINKS

NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

*NHS National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). Quick reference guide 'Feverish Illness in Children' www.nice.org.uk/CG47

DVD 'Spotting the Sick Child', from the Department of Health and supported by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, £29.99 from www.ocbmedia.com

THE BRAIN ➤ CYBERBULLYING

Information technology is fantastic but in using it, children also open themselves up to unwanted attention and bullying. We take a look at the phenomenon of “cyberbullying”



As Dilys Morgan discussed in our last issue, whatever we believe, information technology, as an integral tool in our children's lives, is here to stay.

The internet breaks down barriers and gives young people a place to hang out and develop their identities and mobile phones keep parents and children in contact. Exciting times also lie ahead with a whole world of creative opportunities waiting to be explored beyond the click of a button. We are also one click away from opening ourselves up to unwanted attention and making ourselves easy targets for bullying.

We are all potentially guilty of perpetuating such behaviour. How many of us have forwarded amusing photos or tales of friends' antics without stopping to think how the object of the joke might feel?

So how do we keep a balance and promote the use of technology for good ends to our children?

Will Gardner of Childnet International, a charity which promotes safe use of technology, believes that we must recognise that parents and young people use technology differently. Referring to parents as technical migrants – using the internet for email and web research – and children as technical natives – immersed in interactive technology, he argues that parents need to keep up to date with technology and children's use of it.

There is a fundamental difference between our children's technical knowledge and an adult's wisdom – children need guidance in understanding how to behave in a virtual world. But it is almost impossible to constantly guide our children in their viewing or creating online. Mobile phones, switched on for 24 hours a day, are even harder to supervise.

Cyberbullying – what is it?

Bullying via technology is now a fact of many children's lives. A recent study carried out by the Anti-Bullying Alliance found that 22% of young people reported being the target of cyberbullying.

It is important to firstly recognise bullying in its simplest form. Bullying can take the form of such behaviour as: aggressive behaviour, harassment, impersonation, outing, exclusion, denigration, stalking and threats. It can be intentional, unprovoked and often repeated over a prolonged period with the main intention to deliberately upset someone else.

How is cyberbullying different?

Cyberbullying can be more complex than playground bullying:

- There can be no respite from it as it can be 24 hours a day
- It invades our home or personal space
- It can rapidly get to a mass audience and escalate as messages are forwarded
- It is easier for the bully to remain anonymous

LINKS

www.childnet-int.org
www.kidsmart.org.uk
www.thinkuknow.co.uk
www.kidscape.org.uk
www.getsafeonline.org
www.internetsafetyzone.co.uk
www.stoptextbully.com

BULLYING VIA TECHNOLOGY IS NOW A FACT OF MANY CHILDREN'S LIVES. A RECENT STUDY CARRIED OUT BY THE ANTI-BULLYING ALLIANCE FOUND THAT 22% OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORTED BEING THE TARGET OF CYBERBULLYING.

- The target can be children, parents and teachers
- Anyone can perpetuate the bullying by simply passing on information or humiliating images

However, it can be unintentional and children are as likely to unknowingly hurt someone through technology as become targets themselves. Often, children lack the awareness of the consequences of their actions and the depersonalisation by the distance in communication means that they cannot see the reaction of the target.

How is technology used to cyberbully?

Technology can be used in the following ways:

- Mobile phones – calls, texts, humiliating images or videos
- Instant Messenger (IM) – nasty messages, using someone else's account to send messages via their contacts list
- Chatrooms – nasty, anonymous messages, groups decide to pick on or exclude individuals, pretending to be someone else to get personal information
- Emails – sending messages or forwarding unsuitable images, videos and viruses
- Social networking sites – sending nasty comments, images, accessing others' accounts and sending messages, deleting information or making private information public, fake profiles to pretend to be someone else
- Webcams – making and posting embarrassing films on video hosting sites
- Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) school sites – posting messages, hacking into accounts and deleting schoolwork or posting inappropriate content
- Gaming sites and virtual worlds – players may pick on weaker, less experienced users



How do we prevent cyberbullying?

Children may not recognise that what they are receiving is a form of bullying. They may feel like no one would understand and feel powerless to know what to do about it.

Childnet International suggests that parents can attempt to:

- Understand and talk about it – what it is and what the impact is
- Promote positive safe use of the internet and mobile – “netiquette”
- Show children that you understand the technologies they use or get your children to teach you and make the virtual world seem far less secret
- Teach children to respect others and be careful what they say online and what images are sent – get them to think before they send
- Keep passwords secret – only give mobile number or web address to trusted friends
- Use tools on internet provider services and turn on in-built safety and privacy features

“Cyberbullying can be far more complex than playground bullying”

Responding to cyberbullying?

Will Gardner of Childnet advises parents to:

- Reassure children that telling someone was the right thing to do
- Make sure children know not to retaliate or return the message
- Keep relevant information and evidence – don’t delete messages and take screen capture shots and print outs
- Change contact details, block contacts, leave the chatroom, check what information your children have on their homepage
- Contact mobile phone operators who have nuisance call centres and procedures to be able to change numbers
- Social networking sites and IM providers have Report Abuse, Help tabs or Contact links and can remove illegal content or content that breaks the terms of use and can delete accounts
- Police can advise on what needs to be done in cases of illegal content
- Report to school if it involves another pupil so they can take appropriate action through anti-bullying procedures.

SUMMARY

What else can we do?

SMART rules are an easy set of rules to chat through with your children to remind children how to have fun but use technology wisely

- **S** = Safe – be careful not to give out personal information, name, email address, phone number, home address or school name
- **M** = Meeting – can be dangerous so only meet with parents permission when they can also be present
- **A** = Accepting – emails, IM messages, opening files, pictures and texts from people you don’t know or trust can lead to problems – they may contain nasty messages or viruses
- **R** = Reliable – someone online may be lying about who they are and the information you find on the internet may not be reliable
- **T** = Tell – tell your parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried

THE BODY ➤

BABY MASSAGE

Claire Strickland looks at a massage therapy for babies which seems to help promote wellbeing



An ancient art used in many cultures over hundreds of years to promote healthy physical and brain development in babies, 'baby massage', is now becoming an accepted and popular therapy throughout the UK.

Whilst some argue that it is an unnecessary practice that is naturally incorporated into care routines for mothers, the therapy is ever gaining in popularity, with many mothers reporting that their babies seem happier and less tearful with regular massage.

Research suggests that massage can improve babies breathing, circulation, digestion, help with teething and growth, as well as concluding that babies sleep longer and have less colic.

Touch is central to the development of bonding between mother and baby

The International Association of Infant Massage claims that: "Massage enables you to learn about and respond to your baby's body language." Founded by Vimala McClure in the US in 1981, the International Association of Infant Massage has trained practitioners now throughout the world.

During the 1970s, Vimala McClure left the US to work in an orphanage in Northern India where, amid a tough routine of daily chores, she was taught how to cook local dishes and how to massage little ones with mustard seed oil.

It was there that she discovered the practice of infant massage and realised the potential it could have for babies of all cultures. On her return, and after years of researching and closely observing the potential scientific benefits and uses of massage with babies, McClure incorporated Swedish Massage, reflexology and yoga into the massage practices she learned in India to develop the baby massage curriculum which is now practiced and taught in over 30 countries.

Bernard Brazelton, a child psychologist, believes that 'touch' is central to the development of bonding between mother and baby. Therapists hail the effects that the process of massage and the intimate time spent together has on bonding. Further they see it as an early natural form of communication which helps provide the foundation for a positive relationship and a confident, secure child.

LINKS

The International Association of Infant Massage website, www.iaim.org.uk, provides a good directory of classes and practitioners as well as more information about the treatment.

The Guild of Infant and Child Massage www.gicm.org.uk

The National Literacy Trust website, www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby/babymassage includes a list of resources, training courses and classes

The Touch Research Institute www.miami.edu/touch-research is a centre dedicated to the study of touch

Some claim that post-natal mothers are likely to avoid post-natal depression or will recover more quickly if they regularly massage their babies

Lucy, mother of Iona and Max comments: "I found baby massage a great way to bond with my newborn. I found it particularly useful for calming down both colicky baby and busy toddler at the end of the day."

Jo, mother of Ellie, and also an advocate for baby massage says: "It was a relaxing and rewarding experience and by the end of the lesson, Ellie was smiling broadly and then went on to eat her largest meal so far and slept through the whole night."

What is of real interest is the claim that post-natal mothers are likely to avoid post-natal depression or will recover more quickly if they regularly massage their babies.

Some scepticism has been recorded by The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health who comment that although some babies seem to benefit from the treatment, there is not enough research to provide conclusive proof of the benefits.

Perhaps in time there will be more conclusive evidence to prove things one way or another, but for now it seems that many are enjoying the benefits of baby massage, whatever they might be.



Your Great Little Adventures start here...

Enjoy inspirational, unforgettable days out or breaks with your family. Visit greatlittleadventures.co.uk to discover a wealth of free independent online reviews of child friendly activities and experiences across Britain. From sandy beach to stylish chic we have something for everyone!



Great places to eat



Great places to stay

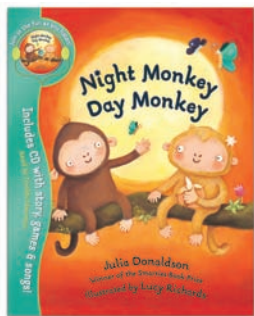


Great things to do

EXPLORING THE SENSES ➤

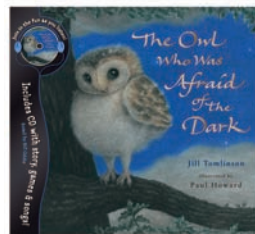
ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

Having become seriously bored with listening to the Harry Potter books over and over again, Oliver Nicholas decided to look into alternative audio books to keep children happy during the long summer holiday journeys



Night Monkey Day Monkey by Julia Donaldson and read by Imelda Staunton (age 3+)

Written by a Smarties Booker Prize winner and the author of the much loved Gruffalo, this book has been recently re-released with an accompanying audio CD. The story explores the difference between night and day through the eyes of two monkeys. The rhyme and rhythm of the narrative will captivate young children and they will love the vibrant pictures of the book.



The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark by Jill Tomlinson and read by Bill Oddie (age 5+)

An old classic that is also to be re-released this summer with an accompanying audio CD read, in his own unforgettable style, by Bill Oddie. When I was young, I loved the story of "Plop" the barn owl who overcomes his fear of the dark through his encounters with various people including a young boy waiting for the fireworks to begin, a scout out camping, a girl who tells him about Father Christmas and a black cat who takes him exploring. This story has not lost any of its magic over the last 40 years.

FROM SWAN UPPING TO SOUTH AMERICAN FIESTAS

Russell Edwards highlights the fun to be had these long summer days and looks at activities and events, from the ever-popular musicals to the slightly more unusual one-off extravaganzas



Drama queens' heaven

Running from 15-29 August 2008, Kids Week is a fortnight of entertainment with free tickets for children to top London shows, exclusive activities and workshops.

Participating shows include Billy Elliot, Disney's The Lion King, The Sound of Music, Mamma Mia! Wicked, The 39 Steps, Stomp, Into the Hoods, Brief Encounter, and more. Children can also take part in a range of activities and workshops designed to excite and inspire as well as develop skills and interests. They can learn improvisation skills in a Professor Bumm's Story Machine workshop, Shimmy with Chicago or attend a range of post-show question and answer sessions.

The ticket deal - one child (aged between 5 and 16) goes free to any participating show when accompanied by a full paying adult, and another two children can go for half price.

Kids Week www.kidsweek.co.uk

Nature

Visit the annual Swan Upping over 5 days from 14 -18 July between Sunbury and Abingdon and see the Queen's Swan Master conduct the annual swan census:
www.thamesweb.co.uk and www.pinkbubbly.co.uk

Commune with nature at the Wildwood Trust in Kent to see from owls to otters, badgers to beavers and wild boar to wolves. Nature trails throughout the woodlands:
www.wildwoodtrust.org.

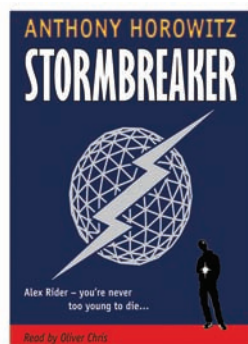
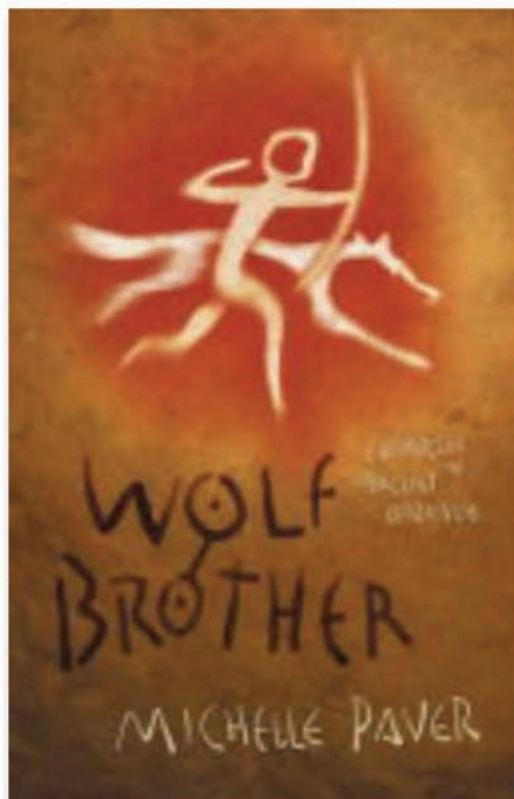
Did you know that there is an SSSI (a Site of Special Scientific Interest) near the centre of London? Find out about birds, bugs and nature conservation at the London Wetland Centre between Barnes and Hammersmith. Night-time Safaris and daily kids' nature activities throughout the summer, also themed BBQ evenings whilst you watch the bats. That's just London! . . . Check out locations throughout UK at www.wwt.org.uk.

Music

Festival experience: Camp Bestival, 18-20 July, at Lulworth Castle in Dorset offers a magical weekend of camping in tipis, yurts and podpads, live music, kids' garden, sports day, insect circus, dressing up, story telling round the camp fire, animal farm, solar powered cinema, medieval jousting, and on . . . Tickets and info at: www.campbestival.net.

Classical Music: Great concerts, mini-proms for kids and workshops around the UK: www.bachtrack.com/for-kids Music craze: High School Musical - Live on stage at the Hammersmith Apollo, great fun and the kids all know the songs: www.365.com for good value tickets

Combine a visit to East Anglia with music then have a look on www.cambridgesummertime.com for an eclectic programme for all ages. www.londonkidz.co.uk has numerous listings of music, drama and dance events, participative workshops in centres and schools north and south of the Thames.



Stormbreaker by Anthony Horowitz and read by Oliver Chris (age 8+)

The first in the Alex Rider series sees Alex, a fourteen year-old boy, recruited into MI6 after the suspicious death of his uncle. Following SAS training and equipped with some amazingly inventive gadgets, he sets off on his first mission; to discover the truth behind an eccentric billionaire's gift of the Stormbreaker computer to every school in the UK.

This audio book will keep both girls and boys enthralled and excited, even if they have already read the book and seen the film and, as the first in a series, it promises to keep them silent for many long journeys.

Get hold of these books at
www.waterstones.com
or www.amazon.co.uk

Wolf Brother: Chronicles of Ancient Darkness, Book 1 by Michelle Paver and read by Ian McKellan (age 10-13)

Ian McKellan adds a wonderful atmosphere to the already fantastical but believable world that Michelle Paver has created and loved by so many. The story follows Torak, a young boy living in a world of hunter-gatherers, tribes, mountains, forests, bears and un-earthly superstitions. A world of six-thousand years ago that is recognisable but a million miles away from the world of today. Following the death of his father from wounds inflicted by a giant possessed bear, Torak sets out on a quest to find the mythical mountain of the world spirit as instructed by father on his deathbed. Along the way he makes friends with a wolf cub with whom, for some reason due to his past that he cannot quite remember, he can communicate with. He also makes friends with a headstrong and feisty girl called Renn. Both the wolf cub and Renn play a large part in the rich, descriptive story in this audio book; a story that continues in a further three audio books, with another set for publication in September.



Come Rain or Shine

And for rainy days do have a look at www.mygames.co.uk for a wide variety of worksheets, skills programmes and educational and fun games: www.activityvillage.co.uk

Check out activities centred on home/garden with charts and games, nature detectives and nature watch. All downloadable at: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/summer

Or getting cabin fever, go out and experience 3D IMAX at Waterloo: www.bfi.org.uk including Kung Fu Panda, Wild Safari, Dinosaurs 3D. There are IMAX cinemas throughout the UK.

Mad Scientists and Sports fanatics

Spark imaginative learning with hands-on science experience. Summer programmes, workshops, special events and parties include rocket launches, dry ice, slime making, hovercraft rides and fuel cell explosions! Mad science goes on throughout the UK. Check out, for example, the London area: www.madscience.org/locations/greaterlondon

Visit also Explore-at-Bristol, one of the UK's most exciting hands-on science centres and planetariums: www.at-bristol.org.uk

Also see LoveSport at At-Bristol where you can try a range of sport, see sporting inventions and understand the sporting body and mind: www.at-bristol.org.uk/explore/LoveSport.htm

Or visit hallowed grounds: Lord's Cricket ground tours including the Long Room, MCC Museum, Real Tennis Court, Mound Stand and Indoor School. www.lords.org

Out and About

London: Awesome events are published on the Londontown website – from Tropical Rainforest at Syon Park to kids'cooking classes – too many to list here so look up: www.londontown.com and the Visit London website which gives ideas for being a "free range" outdoor Londoner, getting involved in the biggest free Latin American fiesta on 3 August and the latest dance classes for kids. Offers on tickets and restaurants also on: www.kids.visitlondon.com

Local: Wherever you live there are local websites giving ideas for summer action for children. For example on the South Coast look up www.summerfun4kids.co.uk.

National: Try a number of useful sites for national and regional activities and days out including: www.greatlittleadventures.co.uk

Theatre

The Unicorn Theatre for Children is very accessible on the South Bank, London, with a series of summer theatre events and family activities. www.unicorntheatre.com

The Egg Theatre in Bath is the Theatre Royal's award-winning theatre designed by children for children and families. The summer season includes Faeries, presented by the Royal Opera House. Faeries uses a combination of puppetry, dance and old-fashioned storytelling to propel audiences into a magical world of mystery, imps and fairies inspired by illustrator Arthur Rackham, England's most celebrated children's book artist. Check out workshops also for children from 18 months through to teenagers. www.theatreroyal.org.uk/the-egg

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ➤

Zoe Sinclair, founder of Parents Matter, which provides parenting events in the work place, responds to your queries

ANSWERING THOSE TRICKY QUESTIONS?

I seem to have a very inquisitive child who is constantly asking questions. I have been quite shocked recently at some of them as they can be extremely difficult to answer. I know I often stumble with my words and probably make no sense at all. Can you offer any advice?

The first thing to say is that however hard it might be for us to answer these difficult questions, it is a sign of a good relationship that your children are able to ask you them in the first place. Now, to go about answering them . . .

There is no one right way to answer questions that all families should follow. We should seize these opportunities of communication as a way to transmit our values to our children and to connect emotionally to them. Many of these difficult questions have a multitude of answers and as parents we need to help our children feel comfortable with uncertainty and with many points of view.

The first step to answering difficult questions is not to appear shocked or embarrassed about it! However hard it may be for you, it could well have been very hard for the child to ask them in the first place. You don't want them to be scared off and never ask you again. This would lead to them feeling disconnected from you and will then probably turn to their peers who are often as clueless as they are. The key is to answer appropriately. Tell the truth but perhaps not all the truth. Children do not need to

know everything – too much information can be damaging to a child. What you consider to be too much information is highly individual. It is useful to ask yourself:

- Will this information contribute to my children's sense of security and confidence?
- Will they be able to cope with the information well?

On the other hand, is it possible that the children will find out the information in another way and feel cheated?

Will the 'secret' create an emotional barrier between them and ourselves or other people?

It is appropriate to say that some information is private and it is equally appropriate to admit that you might not know the answer to the question. Sometimes you might need to think more deeply about the questions being asked and can tell your child that you need to go away and will come back to them later.

Honesty is still the best policy and it is up to you to decide what degrees this should be taken.

A GOOD ENOUGH DAD?

I am a father who doesn't live with my children due to a divorce. I am concerned that I am not a 'good enough' dad and wondered if there were any tips to ensure that I maintain a good relationship with my children.

A good enough dad is a dad that makes their kids feel loved – whatever the circumstances. All dads are fundamentally important to their children, even if they no longer live with them.

But what does a good enough dad look like?

A good enough dad like a good enough mum – helps provide for his child and spends time with them, take them out, visit their schools, look after them at home, talk and read with them. But above all he helps them feel safe, competent and loved.

Research shows that good enough fathering helps develop:

- better friendships
- fewer behavioural problems
- better results at school
- higher self-esteem and life-satisfaction
- lower chance of becoming criminals or abusing drugs
- more satisfying adult relationships

You want to be a good enough dad – a great place to start. Just because you don't see your children every day does not mean that you cannot have a great relationship with them and be a great dad.

You can keep in touch with them while they're not with you through phone calls, emails or letters, and when you're together, make the most of that time.

You'll want to do exciting and fun things with them when they're with you, but make sure you spend time just hanging out, doing stuff together and chatting as the need arises.

Just being there means you're passing on all sorts of things to your children and whether its by text, phone or e-mail you are staying informed and being there for your children when they need you, you can have a great, lifelong relationship with them.

For more answers to questions about being a dad visit www.dad.info

For separated dads, there's answers at www.dad.info/separation

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 ➤

THE WORLD I WANT

In this Clued Up section, young people discuss what worries them most in their daily lives and in the world around them. In this issue, Georgina Brown, aged 10, thinks about the kind of world that she wants.



I like to write stories, ride bikes and play rounders. My Mum is Armenian, my Dad is English and Grandma is Armenian too. We all like to play badminton together. We go on lots of walks with my dog. I have been thinking about the kind of world I want and drew this picture.

The world I want . . .

I wish everybody got along with each other and never said bad things behind their backs. So in my picture I have people getting married and people having their first kiss because they are loving each other. This is the world I want. I want to see lots of people doing that - which I can't see in the world I have. You can hear birds because no-one is quarrelling. There are hearts everywhere because love is spreading around the world.

Georgina Brown



BUDDING AUTHORS

Want to see your child's work in print?

Email their articles to us by 1 September

The winner will receive a £25 book voucher

Email: cluedup@edsup.co.uk

ALTERNATIVE LIVES ➤ AFRICA! AFRICA!

Families can give children a taste of “real” adventure while choosing an experience to expand their knowledge

Children love a good adventure.

From the knights taming the beasts and saving the princess while conquering all fears in our fairytales to camping in the garden, building dens, feasting at cook-outs, scouring through the SAS Survival Handbook, (a must-read not only for boys) – all prepare us for the wonders and risks of future life adventures.

So, what better way then to give them a taste of what “real” adventure is all about while choosing an experience that will expand their knowledge and one which they will remember forever. If learning is for life then a break away from the routine must be a good place to start. Many of those who have been to Africa argue that a once-in-a-lifetime trip to one of the many countries that the continent has to offer provides just that.

But why Africa? “Most of all,” says Ali Nash who has travelled there five times now with her family, “because Africa gets into your blood, the dust of Africa seeps through into your very bones.”

Safari?

“Safari”, Swahili for journey, is a major draw in choosing Africa as the setting for the holiday of a lifetime. For children, the bonus of learning about wildlife, almost within hands’ reach, is undeniable. In what other circumstances would you catch images of a lion pride lazing in the scrub, an elephant herd coming to the watering hole to quench their thirst in the hot, hot day, giraffes entwined in foliage as they nibble the sharp hostile needles of the Acacia tree and birds, so many different birds.

In what other circumstances would you catch images of an elephant herd coming to the watering hole to quench their thirst in the hot, hot day and giraffes entwined in foliage as they nibble the sharp hostile needles of the Acacia tree

The Nash family felt that they wanted to see Africa rough and ready. Taking their children the first time when they were 7 and 5 years old, their first holiday was just under a month long. Aly believes that if you travel with an open mind there is something for everyone, from first timers to hardened travelling families.

Learning includes spotting tracks and identifying animals from their dung, the art of survival in the bush, the studying of herd behaviour and migration patterns and even the making of paper from elephant poo...

The options are diverse with regards to where to stay, be it travelling from place to place and camping in tented camps or staying in game lodges and exploring from a central base. The many countries of Africa are now well equipped to host children on safaris.

The Safari experience remains Aly’s children’s (now teenagers) top trip for the pure thrill of adventure.

The Nash children will never forget the days spent on a walking safari, trekking through the bush escorted by two Samburu tribesmen leading camels carrying their gear, pitching up camp each night, sleeping under canvas in remote landscape, the only luxury being the warm water heated by the brazier and poured over their heads as an impromptu shower.

Sunrise and sundown drives, on the prowl for sightings of elephant, giraffe, hippos, rhinos, gazelle, hyenas, zebras, warthogs, baboons . . . and on . . . when animals are more likely to show their faces, shape the day. The Nash family used the in-between hours to read, take siestas, soak up the atmosphere and get into the rhythm of “Africa time”.

Fly-fishing for supper in the river, riding zebroids through the bush, canoeing down rivers searching out animals, and hot air balloon rides sweeping low over the awe-inspiring vastness of the savanna at dawn are all added to the memory bank that stays with children forever. There were, the family recalls, moments that were heart-stopping for the sheer excitement of witnessing something not many get to

share: from watching a leopard lazing up in a tree from the prime position of sitting directly below it in an open top jeep with the guide trying to convince them that it wouldn’t jump into the jeep as it had just eaten and was “too full up” to make a move on them, to taking to the air in a light aircraft and flying over Lake Bogoria between Kenya and Tanzania to view the pink haze of the famous 3 million lesser and 50,000 greater flamingoes.

In the case of the Nash family, Aly says that Charlie and Miffy absolutely loved every minute: “Charlie in particular was at an age where he wanted to see and do everything and, funnily enough, there never seemed to be problem with getting the children up each day for the 5am game drives. On the contrary, the children would be standing by the jeep, ready and waiting to go.” Night drives didn’t deter them either and if Miffy got tired she would just sleep in the back of the jeep.

Taking to the air in a light aircraft and flying over Lake Bogoria to view the pink haze of the famous 3 million lesser and 50,000 greater flamingoes was a heart-stopping moment

Being part of the experience is not just about viewing animals from the relative safety of the jeep. Learning includes spotting tracks and identifying animals from their dung, the art of survival in the bush, the studying of herd behaviour and migration patterns and even the making of paper from elephant poo . . .

The children each wrote travel journals noting all that they had learnt, something which Ali highlights as an amazing achievement as it is a rare occurrence for her son, Charlie, who normally will do anything to get out of writing.

Tanzania, one of the four most naturally diverse nations on earth, is now top of their list for their next trip to the continent, with its four iconic attractions; Mount Kilimanjaro, the Serengeti to watch the million-strong wildebeest migration, the Ngorongoro Crater and the white sands of Zanzibar.

Learning?

But, Africa is not just all about the safari. The learning experience for children is not just about seeing wildlife with their own eyes. Africa offers children an insight into different cultures, tribal customs and the inheritance of ancient places and people. Rather than shying away from images of poverty, the children get to see how others live and learn that perhaps you don’t need to proffer expensive gifts to show the hospitality and generosity of spirit, that is so prevalent in many places in Africa.



With the emphasis now being placed on responsible tourism and sustainability, African experiences can teach our children much more than we will ever know about what needs to be done to protect the animals they come to see and the savannas they pass across.

Children learn that you don't need to proffer expensive gifts to show the hospitality and generosity of spirit, that is so prevalent in many places in Africa

Here, you find what real knowledge and 'intelligence' is. Out in the bush in Kenya, Aly Nash was amazed at the pride in the country and, in particular, the natural world that the people she met had: "The generosity of time and the sharing of their knowledge with us was eye-opening. We were taught all about the country, the trees, the animals, the birds. In England, we are lucky if we can recognise what a horse chestnut tree actually looks like let alone know its name."

Tutoring?

Such a wealth of subject matter and experiences for children can and often is taken to another level. With work becoming increasingly international and our desire to get children out of the confines of the classroom to see the world beyond, many now look to combine offering their children life experiences whilst keeping them up to speed and involved in necessary school work.

Sometimes this comes at critical stages in children's education and families are looking more and more at the benefit of including tutors in their holiday plans.

Ben Long, writer and historian has been fortunate to tutor children on both short holidays all over the world and on longer stays where families either decide to take extended trips with their children, removing them from the school system, or through work needs, have to travel and want their family with them.

Experiencing South Africa on long-term stays with families and on safaris, Ben believes: "An extraordinary amount of work can be done in a very short amount of time." Lessons fit around the heat of the day or, in the case of safaris, the morning and evening game drives: "There is no benefit in telling a child they can't go searching for exciting animals because the Maths has to be done so the study is built into the day as and when works best."

In the cases when Ben has travelled with a family on one-off trips, he has found that the exposure to new cultures and climates is an education in itself for children and the tutoring serves to compliment rather than overshadow it.



"There is no benefit in telling a child they can't go searching for exciting animals because the Maths has to be done so the study is built into the day as and when works best"

There is no need to be in the classroom all day. For Ben, the physical geography of somewhere like Africa provides fantastic teaching potential: visiting the source of rivers, looking at the changing terrain around them, exploring the reserves, getting out and about or merely sitting under a tree reading together and enjoying the experience is a major component in what it is all about.

"A really important part of education before specialisation in subjects is time for art and reading but when you are outside painting pictures of a storm rolling in over the grasslands, topics move on to learning about storms, to discussing the phenomenon of thunder and lightening which then leads to looking at the speed of light and sound, all the while continuing the art class."

Working in a different place and in a different way on a one-to-one basis means the level of excitement but also a renewed interest in learning is very high. Teaching in relation to the local environment in somewhere like Africa is a huge bonus for children: "If it's tangible and it's there – go for it!"

While Ben works as a tutor for Enjoy Education, his experience as a writer and historian, along with fellow tutors, who often have other diverse careers, such as photography and film-making, means that they bring more to the classroom and are able to share their enthusiasm with their students. Kate Shand, Director of Enjoy Education, notes that the tutors are "exceptionally well-educated both academically and culturally. They are people you'd like your children to spend time with."

Health?

Apart from the usual upset tummy, Ali and her family had no health issues at all. As they were staying in an area prone to Malaria, they took Malaria tablets but didn't find any problems with this. There were "scary bugs" which Miffy was not to keen on but the Nash family strongly believed that this was part of the experience and something that the children just had to get used to. Ali thinks that to enjoy Africa you have to not let worries deter you. If you take the attitude of getting on with it, children are remarkably resilient and tough travellers: "This is the way to enjoy Africa."

However, some areas of South Africa, for example, offer an excellent starting point for first time travellers, in particular, in the Malaria-free areas which can take away some of the stress of such concerns. The idea of a trip to Africa with children may be a little daunting at first but with common sense, safety is not an issue and the whole family can live the adventure.

LINKS

Tanzania Odyssey:
www.tanzaniaodyssey.com

Recommended for Malaria-free holiday:
www.bushbaby.travel

Tailor-made holidays:
www.kirkerholiday.com

Fully trained tutors in the UK system:
Enjoy Education: www.enjoyeducation.co.uk

Everything you need to know before you go
Rough Guide – First Time Africa from:
www.roughguides.com

COMPETITION

Splashabout, THE children's safety swimwear specialists, have generously offered two prizes in a competition to help increase awareness of the excellent work done by Tommy's, the baby charity. To enter into the draw for either prize please email editor@edsup.co.uk with the answer to the question:

"Tommy's, the baby charity, has a target aim they want to achieve by 2030 – what is it?"

(Take a look at www.tommys.org)

Prize 1: A swim kit comprising Pool side mat, BabyWrap, Happy Nappy, Baby Beach Ball and UV suit and pair of matching Splash shoes for under 2 year olds; and

Prize 2: A Water Buddies Buoyancy jacket, matching Happy Nappy (toddler size), matching pair of Splash Shoes, UV suit and Beach Ball for over 2 year olds.

In your response, please state which prize draw you are entering and add the age and sex of the child who will be using Splashabout's products.



The winners will be contacted by email for delivery details. The draw will take place on 1st August 2008 by an independent educationalist. The editor's decision will be final.

EXPERIENCE

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CELEBRATION ➤

WATCH OUT FOR THE WIGGLY WOOS

Hannah Watkins talks to Kristina Stephenson about the success of her book, *Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Big Adventure*

“Charlie, stop fidgeting, take your feet off the seat and sit properly.”

“But I can’t, I can’t. I can’t put them down there. I can’t put my feet down there.”

“Why can’t you?”

“Because they’re waiting down there . . .”

“Waiting down there? Who’s waiting down there?”

“The wiggly woos. The wiggly woos are waiting down there to tickle my toes.”

And with that, what had started as a mundane car journey to the supermarket was brought to an abrupt end as the car screeched to a halt, turned round and headed straight home . . .

. . . And the tale of Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Big Adventure was born.

Sir Charlie Stinky Socks, by Kristina Stephenson, is a tale of a “boy like no other”, a mini Don Quixote dressed in his knight’s regalia, armed with his sword of honour and courage and accompanied by his faithful grey mare and pet



“It seems to have touched people and grabbed their imagination. I think a lot of it is because there has been so much input from my children. I worked on it with them and it was for them”

cat, Envelope. Charlie conquers fears whilst encountering terrible beasties, wily witches, and long green dragons, fortified by his pack of sandwiches and bottle of water he takes along for the adventure and it all ends, as all good stories should, in a big party.

But how did this whole adventure come about?

During a career as a theatre and set designer followed by a stint in children’s television, Kristina Stephenson arrived at a crossroads in her professional life whilst working on Teletubbies. When she became pregnant with her first child she wanted to do something where she could also be with her baby. Discussing with her husband what her ultimate job would be, Kristina knew she wanted to be a book illustrator. So, taking a gigantic leap of faith, and with no formal illustration training, she approached an agent with her work, was snapped up immediately and spent the next 9 years illustrating books.

Whilst illustrating other people’s books was a fantastic learning experience, not having the freedom to draw dragons, monsters and other creations of her imagination that she had grown up dreaming about, Kristina wanted to have a go at writing and illustrating her very own children’s book. The only problem was where to start with a storyline . . . until the episode in the car set her imagination into overdrive – and the rest came out of her head!

Children’s involvement

As Kristina was writing the story, she would tell the story to her two children at night, adding characters in as they went along. As the story evolves, the traditional, rip-roaring adventure, where fears are overcome and beasts are tamed, is turned on its head with an added element of surprise.



Kristina explains how she built the story up to a climax: the finding of a tall, tall tower in the middle of the deep, dark forest, with winding stairs going up and up to a little wooden door right at the top and behind that a . . . ? “I suddenly realised that I had absolutely no idea what the ending was.” So she turned to her daughter for help who responded: “A princess, of course!” as if she was stating the obvious.

Stories should be read aloud over and over again

Kristina puts a lot of the success of her first book down to this sort of involvement by her children and they were certainly one of the main reasons behind her ambition. Kristina explains that she wanted to produce a book, not specifically for boys but: “a book to appeal to boys and hold their attention.” Rather than aiming at the younger audience, she really believed that children aged between 5 and 7, the age at which most boys naturally want to be doing anything but reading, would enjoy such a tale.

The art of story-telling

So, what is so different about the book? “Writing a wordy picture book for this age group is quite unusual. In the UK, picture books are whipped away from children far too soon and they quickly become text heavy and illustrated in black and white.” Pictures are central to the story telling process: “Stories should be read aloud over and over again.”

Kristina's stories always start as "told" stories and the power of the spoken word was no better experienced than in a workshop held recently by one of Kristina's friends for children with severely impaired sight: "The children latched onto the story immediately. This is where words really mean something."

Children should be encouraged to tell their stories, relate their crazy dreams and share the irrational and fantastical workings of their imaginations.

Kristina reads with her children most evenings and finds it the perfect end to the day, believing that you can make time to read in spite of long days and exhaustion.

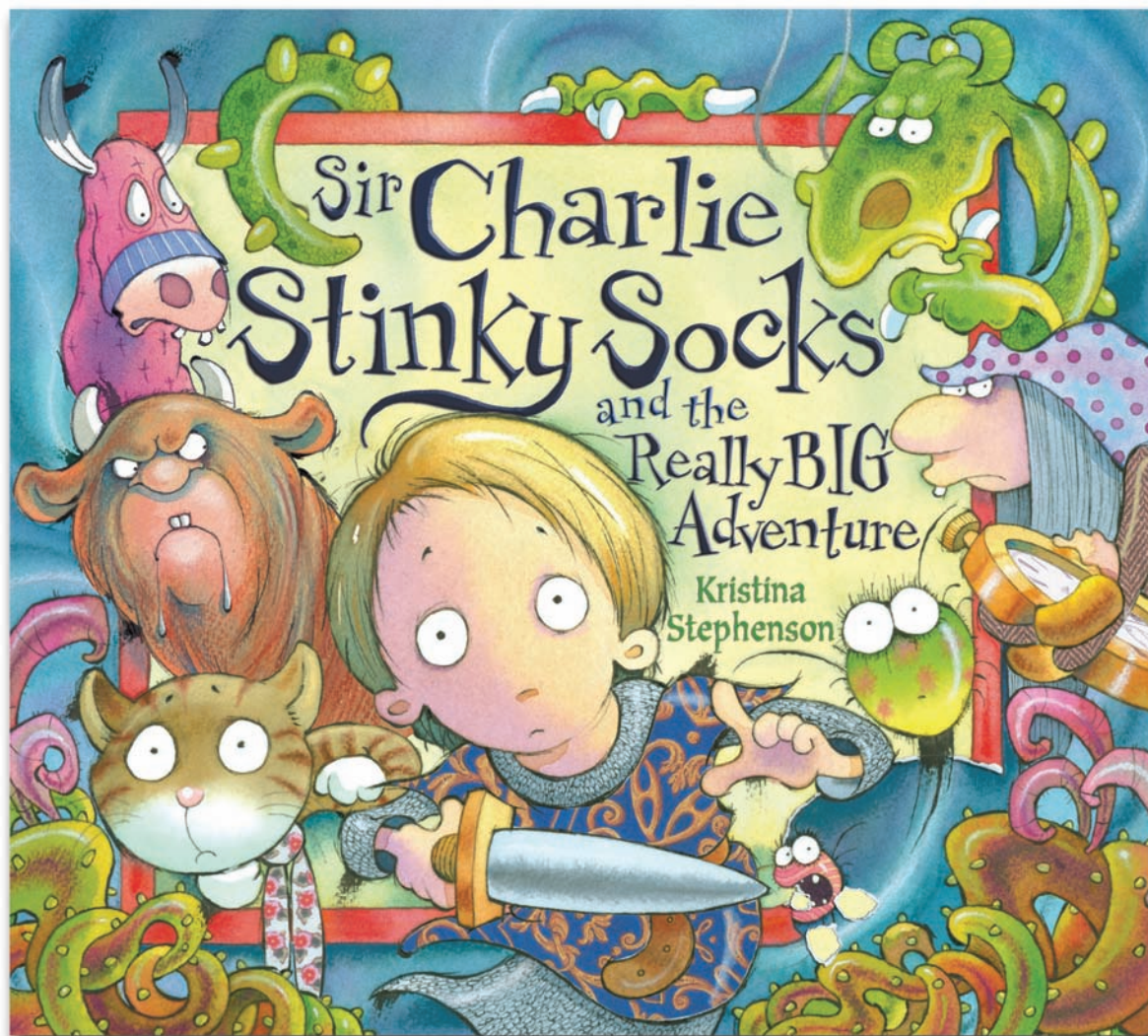
The exercise of telling stories, creating voices of the characters, dad reading too to hear the different tones of voice and intonation, making up stories as you go along, filling in gaps, playing games of consequences is all great fun – and not just at bedtime: "We try to have supper together every night and when Charlie was first learning to read we would pass around Charlie's book and all read a page round the table, creating our characters and voices. It really did wonders for his reading."



The creative process doesn't just happen; inspiration doesn't just strike once you've dropped the kids off at school. Ideas usually come to me as I'm cooking dinner or helping with homework

The ultimate dream job?

This all sounds like the ultimate dream job to those sitting in offices day after day but when friends say to Kristina how fortunate she is to have such "lovely job", she knows that they only see the half of it. The story took six months to write and it was really very hard work: "The creative process doesn't just happen; inspiration doesn't just strike once you've dropped the kids off at school. Ideas usually come to me as I'm cooking dinner or helping with homework. I have to think – "hold that thought" – give the children my full attention and then dash to my desk as soon as they are in bed."



The work can be long and lonely but Radio 4 becomes her lifeline: "The discipline is paramount so getting away from the house and taking the children to school each morning is extremely important." Before she leaves, all signs of children, home and domesticity have to be cleared away so that on her return, the house becomes the office and her thoughts can be focused. At the end of the day, she doesn't have the transition that a lot of people have in the time from leaving work and their work persona at the office and she often finds herself going to bed at 3am and having to be up again at 6 to get the children ready.

Free minds

A "free mind" is the key for Kristina: "Children don't often tell stories anymore. In an increasingly competitive environment, they are afraid to take a risk and tell a story for fear of criticism." So she encourages children to tell their stories, relate their crazy dreams and share the irrational and fantastical workings of their imaginations."

A story of success

Since its launch in October of last year, the book has done extremely well. It has been shortlisted for the Red House Children's Book Award 2008 (voted for entirely by children) and nominated for the 'Read it Again' Cambridgeshire Children's Picture Book Award, is regularly a favourite in Waterstones' top reads, and was also listed in the Guardian's top 50 books of the year.

Her sequel, Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Frightful Night, published this October, starts where the first book left off and turns fears of the dark on their head as Sir Charlie tackles those things that go bump in the night . . . Are they really all that bad?

Asked why the first book has been so successful, Kristina wonders: "I'm not sure why it has been so successful. It seems to have touched people and grabbed their imagination. I think a lot of it is because there has been so much input from my children. I worked on it with them and it was for them."

LINKS

Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Big Adventure, published October 2007, Egmont Press

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