



FOR WASHINGTON CHILDREN



Summer 2014

Strong Families Begin At Home

Child & Teen Services Newsletter

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Connect: Write!

Step into your time machine and travel back to before Facebook, texts and even (gasp) email. How did people communicate with each other?

My 5 year-old niece is going on a three-week trip with her parents and I just made my first request of her. I asked her to send me at least one postcard. Luckily, she's young enough that she doesn't know what a HUGE, CRAZY thing I'm asking. In fact, her dad felt it was a good way to keep her inspired on their travels...each stop would be an opportunity to choose a card and think about what to tell Auntie.

Well, we'll see if I actually get a postcard. But what made me think of it was: a week before I talked with my niece, I DID get a card from someone. My friend's son is traveling and he sent me a postcard from France. It arrived weeks after I already had heard about his

adventures, but this made it no less charming to receive.

As summer is often a time of travel, postcards offer a great seasonal way to help your children connect with friends and family in a thoughtful way.

Instead of an immediate post, they will have the experience of taking time to write a note with intent. This also encourages literacy!

Once summer is over, writing doesn't have to become a lost art form in your family. An entire letter might be too overwhelming, but postcards can be sent from your own city, not just far away places. And if all this is too low tech for your family, you could design and print out your own postcards from your computer!



CREATE: Yarn Activities

Yarn activities are cheap ways to keep kids busy. Here are a few ideas:

Yarn balloon: dip regular thickness yarn into glue+water mixture (just to dilute a bit). Wrap all around a balloon to cover. Let dry completely. Pop balloon and you are left with a lacy yarn shell.

Braided craft yarn: my Grammy taught my sister and I how to braid using thick craft yarn. The thicker the better; Grammy would buy the extra thick acrylic yarn that was also used for hair ribbons. We would tie the ends around a chair arm or leg and practice. When we got good enough, we would braid Grammy's hair. I have to say, I was a master braider by the time I was a teen. I was about 7 years old when I learned. Great fine motor skill developer too!

Cat's Cradle: solo or multiple person activity. There are a number of yarn "routines" that a person can do on their own, with just a simple loop of yarn. Some of you may remember with a shiver of nostalgia: Jacob's ladder, cat's whiskers, witch's broom, pick a banana... Other routines involve one person taking the

yarn formation off the other's hands and twisting it into another formation. Many people can do this, passing from hand to hand. Back in the 1970s we had to rely on static pictures to show us the steps. These days you can simply do a YouTube search and find many video instructions you can use to teach your kids. Then again, maybe your kids can re-teach you! This is also a terrific way to develop fine motor skills, and the routines with more than one person can also be ways to work on cooperation. Children 8 years old and up can learn string game routines.



Pompoms: terrific for the middle school years. You'll need a solid frame in a torus shape (like a donut); thick cardboard works best. Thin or thick yarn is fine; the thinner the yarn the fluffier the pompom. Follow these great instructions at <http://mindfulmomma.com/2012/12/how-to-make-a-yarn-pom-pom.html>. If your child wants to make a few of them, they can be strung up to make a mobile!

PLAY: The Pass Through Game

Fine motor skill development starts in infancy and continues to develop into the early teen years. Sometimes older teens may continue to develop more precision if they are involved in a hobby using fine motor skills (i.e. sewing, jewelry making, ceramics)



Very young children develop fine motor skills through everyday play; picking things up, putting them down, twisting, turning

pulling, pushing. Simple bead stringing on pipe cleaners and crayon coloring contribute to skill development for preschoolers, as do learning to zip and button.

To help school age children continue to develop fine motor skills, games and activities help keep them interested long enough to achieve mastery. Small bead stringing, friendship bracelets, lanyards, throwing and catching a ball (hand-eye coordination is part of fine motor development), jacks, origami, and playing a musical instrument are examples.

(Cont. next page)

The Pass Through Game, continued

I found a fun blog called Spaghetti Box Kids, and they have a terrific fine motor skill game that I will call the Pass Through Game. It involves passing household items to yourself, through a roll of masking tape and a small, plastic ring from milk container. Objects you pass through can be as varied as a fork, marble and Q-tip! For instructions and material suggestions, check out <http://spaghettiboxkids.com/blog/fine-motor-skills-games/>



RELAX: Natural Terrain Environments

A recent paper published by University of Colorado Boulder looked at the role of natural terrain schoolyards in children's stress reduction. "Natural terrain" schoolyards feature natural habitats and trees rather than just playground equipment. The study found that not just playing but also working on class assignments or gardening in natural terrain settings provided stress reduction benefits for participating children.



Researchers found that these environments "built competence and cooperative social relationships" and promoted mental focusing.

The study examined two elementary schools and four high school settings. A range of sites were observed (for example, suburban and urban, alternative and after school, special needs students, public and private schools, etc.)

Some highlights:

Over a 3-year period, 96% of the students in first through fourth grade chose to play in the woods when they had the option of woods, playground or athletic field.

Playing in the woods, children created organized games like fort building.

Teacher observation reports students returning from recess with longer attention spans.

One researcher is quoted, "In more than 700 hours of observations at the Denver school's green outdoor space, zero uncivil behaviors were observed, but there were many incidences of arguments and rudeness indoors..."

Although this study was specifically about green, natural terrain spaces at schools, you may want to do a bit of "research" with your own children when given a choice between playground equipment or just running around the beach and park. Even if they choose playground equipment first, note where they get bored in a shorter time.

To read the study:

[Green schoolyards as havens from stress and resources for resilience in childhood and adolescence.](#) Louise Chawla, Kelly Keenab, Illène Pevecc, , Emily Stanleyd, Health & Place Volume 28, July 2014, Pages 1–13

MOVE: Catch My Tail!

Summer birthday parties are great times to introduce kids to new, active games. By the time a child is 5 or 6 years old, you may want to do a bit of activity planning for the party. Younger kids are content to just run around, but with the older children, having a few structured games can help keep kids moving and interested. Of course, this is true anytime kids get together and play.



One simple game that will keep kids running without realizing they are exercising is “Catch My Tail”. To play: each child tucks a sock (or bandana) into their back pocket (or waistband). The goal is to be the last child left with a “tail”. When you shout, “Go!” everyone runs around trying to grab the others’ tails but keeping others from grabbing their tail. This means lots of sprinting, turning, and hopefully laughing!

And...you can play it as a family too; it’s not just for birthday parties! Picnics, BBQs, days at the beach, or just an after dinner activity...keep moving outside this summer!

Parent Trust Reads: Book Review

Ramona Forever
By Beverly Cleary
Performed by Stockard Channing
Ages: 7-10



For the book review this quarter I’ve finally broken the audiobook barrier. After years of turning my nose up at audiobooks, I decided to confront my prejudice and listen to one. I had just read an article challenging me to rethink my opinions on audiobooks and I have come to the conclusion that if we are to judge based on the following criteria, audiobooks are just as good (or bad) as reading: intellectual enrichment, emotional impact, comprehension and retention of material. There may be individual variations; one person may be more visual, another more auditory. There may also be variations when it comes to types of material, like difficult material- with actual reading you can re-read for comprehension. But my conclusion is that neither way is always better than the other and both can be entertaining and valuable.

For an audiobook, however, your narrator is crucial. I was lucky that the audiobook I listened to was narrated by one of my favorite

actors, Stockard Channing. And she was fantastic! She was able to get across the different characters’ personalities, the humor, and the excitement about what happens next!

The story itself was thoroughly enjoyable; Ramona is now 8 years old. Children will easily identify with her feelings of hope, embarrassment, worry, and delight, and her experiences with the “unfairness” of all things adult. I actually laughed out loud a number of times and also felt frustrated with those adults who Just.Don’t.Understand.

Ramona must deal with lots of changes in this story: Mom is pregnant, Aunt Beatrice is dating, Dad is job hunting, sister Beezus is a teenager, and her beloved cat dies. These challenges are conveyed with a delicate balance of humor and compassion. Beverly Cleary does it again!

For more book reviews, visit:
parenttrust.org/parent-trust-reads

For article on audiobooks: Is Listening to Audio Books Really the Same as Reading?
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/olgakhazan/2011/09/12/is-listening-to-audio-books-really-the-same-as-reading/>

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