

# Parenting Connection

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## Magical Meeting Leads to Valuable Resource

Art Wallenstein is Director of Corrections for Montgomery County, Maryland. He describes a meeting he had with some dedicated volunteers which resulted in a booklet which may be helpful to children who have a mother or father in jail. Art asked that information about this booklet be shared with everyone since the booklet is public domain.

*Two years ago we had one of those magical meetings where two very thoughtful and focused retired career local educators came in and stated they wanted to assist school counselors with an issue that was present, but not at all understood — the impact of incarceration of a parent or close family/friend on young school age children. They were clear they did not seek a research level professional paper, but an easily read and understood booklet for families and school counselors. They were totally dedicated community volunteers who intended to make this happen for Montgomery County Public Schools.*

*I was completely taken with their commitment and introduced them to various folks and funds were found for an initial booklet about prisons (given their funding source). We urged and pushed and they immediately refocused a second edition on jails. Over 6000 booklets have been distributed to schools, school counselors, human service/government organizations, not-for-profit service providers and other groups and individuals. Judi Goozh and Sue Jeweler have just kept at it and seek to place more copies in appropriate locations and with sensitive school principals, teachers and counselors to educate them about this aspect of county jails that is simply not well understood.*

*This was and remains a grass roots effort and I simply wanted to share it with professional colleagues. They have conducted several briefing sessions on this issue to accompany the publication and have zero intention of slowing down. If you have any comment that you might wish to share directly with Judi and Sue, I have included their email connection: [siji@comcast.net](mailto:siji@comcast.net).*

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The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association. Send articles and comments to:

Barbara Rasmussen  
Racine Correctional Institution  
2019 Wisconsin Street  
Sturtevant, WI 53177-0900  
[Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov)  
Phone: 262-886-3214 ext. 3530

Co-Editor: Jerry Bednarowski, CEA-Wisconsin  
Proofreader: Laura Reisinger,  
Literacy Volunteers - Chippewa Valley



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## **Mommies and Daddies in Jail**

Children, who are victims of their parent's crimes, are often afraid and confused by the changes in their own lives. There is an immediate need for a child-centered product that will provide these children with some of the answers they deserve in order to understand the events in which they find themselves.

The booklet, *Mommies and Daddies in Jail*, clearly and concisely addresses this issue. A scenario about a child who witnesses the arrest of a parent is followed by questions that are asked by the child and answered throughout the process from arrest to incarceration. The booklets are available in English and Spanish and are to be distributed as a free resource.

### **Why should you use this booklet?**

- According to a Department of Justice report from the year 2007, 2.3 percent of children in the United States (nearly 1.7 million children) have an incarcerated parent.
- At least 1 in 50 children had a parent incarcerated in local or county facilities.
- About 90% of incarcerated fathers, in both the state and federal systems, reported that their children were living with the mother. In contrast, a majority of incarcerated mothers named a grandmother or other relative as the primary caregiver for their children.
- 71% of inmates have a child at risk.
- Without effective intervention strategies, as many as 70% of children of incarcerated parents may become involved with the criminal justice system.

### **Questions and concepts addressed in the booklet include:**

- Where was Daddy?
- What would happen to me?
- Why do people go to jail?
- What does jail look like? Is it scary? Is it like on TV?
- Where does he sleep?
- Where does he eat?
- What does he do all day?
- Is he safe?
- What does he wear?
- What happens if he is hurt or sick?
- Do I go to school tomorrow? Is this a secret? What do I tell my friends?
- Will I see him as soon as I get to jail? Can I bring him something? Can we have lunch together? Can I hug him?
- When will he leave?
- What can I do?

### **It is suggested that the booklet, *Mommies and Daddies in Jail* be made available to:**

- Inmates with children
- Inmates who take parenting classes as a curriculum resource
- Families and professionals in the jail visitor waiting room
- Volunteers working with inmates
- Families on family visiting days
- Mental health professionals and school personnel working with the jail
- Pre-release and parole and probation personnel

Creative Family Projects identifies problems and provides solutions by synthesizing information from organizations, institutions, and corporations into booklets and training modules for the benefit of children



youth, and families. Concept development and text for *Mommies and Daddies in Jail* was by Judi Goozh and Sue Jeweler, Creative Family Projects, LLC. Photographs and assistance were provided by Montgomery County, Maryland Department of Correction and Rehabilitation.

For further information and to purchase booklets contact:

Creative Family Projects  
402 King Farm Blvd. #125 – 143  
Rockville, Maryland 20850  
[creativefamilyprojectsllc@gmail.com](mailto:creativefamilyprojectsllc@gmail.com)

## Parenting Sessions at CEA Events

One of the ways the CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group spreads the word about Parenting Programs in corrections is to present workshops at professional conferences.

Parenting Workshops have been proposed for three upcoming CEA events:

- **Region III & IV CEA Conference, April 23-24, 2012**  
**Keller Convention Center, Effingham, IL**
- **CEA-Wisconsin Training Day, May 7, 2012**  
**Concourse Hotel & Governor's Club, Madison, WI**
- **67th CEA Annual Conference & Training, July 29-August 1, 2012**  
**Crowne Plaza Hotel – Riverfront, St. Paul, MN**

The workshop proposed for the CEA-Wisconsin Training Day is:

### **Parenting Roundtable: Sharing Ideas and Resources**

*This workshop will bring together instructors of Parenting Classes, Parent Support Groups, Parent/Child Reading Projects, and Parents' Fairs to share ideas and resources. The newly created Reaching Out: Handbook for Incarcerated Parents and Reaching In: Handbook for Families of Incarcerated Parents will be introduced along with other initiatives of CEA Parenting Special Interest Group, but the bulk of the information and ideas will come from you — the parenting instructors attending this workshop.*

*Presenters: Jerry Bednarowski, member of the CEA-Wisconsin Executive Board and Chair of CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group and Barb Rasmussen, teacher at Racine Correctional Institution*

The workshop proposed for the Region III & IV CEA and 67<sup>th</sup> CEA Annual Conferences is:

### **Parenting Special Interest Group: A Resource for Parenting Instructors**

*Many correctional educators have developed classes, support groups, reading projects, and fairs for incarcerated parents. In most cases, their programs were developed independently and with little knowledge of each other. To address this problem CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group was formed. This workshop will describe the Parenting SIG's efforts create a professional network, publish parenting newsletters and handbooks, present workshops and seminars, and serve as a resource for teachers.*

*Presenters: Jerry Bednarowski, member of the CEA-Wisconsin Executive Board and Chair of CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group and Margaret Done, CEA-Wisconsin President and teacher at R. E. Ellsworth Correctional Center*

Conference information and a registration form for the CEA-Wisconsin Training Day is on the CEA-Wisconsin website: [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org). Conference information and registration forms for the Region III & IV CEA Conference and 67<sup>th</sup> CEA Annual Conference & Training are on the national CEA website: [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org).



# An Avenue to Help Fathers Reconnect

Fathers recently released from prisons or jails face many obstacles in reestablishing their relationships with their children. Family relationships may be tense and communication with the children may be awkward. Milwaukee's Social Development Commission (SDC) may provide an avenue for these fathers to reconnect with their children. Since 1963, the Social Development Commission has established itself as a leading advocate for low-income individuals and families in Milwaukee County by planning, coordinating, and providing human service programs.

SDC staff attend Welcome Home information sessions at the Probation and Parole office. They share information with those being released from prison about services provided by the Social Development Commission.

An example of SDC programs designed to build relationships between fathers and their sons and daughters are READ Night Outs. READ stands for "Reading, Eating, and Activities with my Dad." The READ Night Outs are sponsored by the Social Development Commission's Head Start Program.

The evenings highlight an "On My Shoulders" graduation ceremony along with activities engaging children and their fathers that include storybook and poem readings, sand art, hats and mask creations, face painting, jewelry making and gift books. Appetizing dinner menus are also featured.

"On My Shoulders" is the Tier III and final segment of a three part curriculum of SDC's Healthy Relationship & Marriage Enhancement Program which provides relationship education for single individuals as well as unmarried and married couples. The class sessions are designed to foster group discussions, co-activities and shared learning.

Healthy couple's partnership is the focus of Tier I. Men-only classes are part of Tier II. Parenting enhancement and cultivation for men and their children are the instruction modules for Tier III.

"It is just phenomenal and very heartwarming to see African American men actively interacting with their children," says Debora Taylor, Healthy Relationship & Marriage Enhancement Program manager Taylor adds that she is delighted to know of the supportive arrangements made to connect fathers with their children and the effort made to make the events successful.

"I am much better in my relationship as a result of taking these courses in the Healthy Relationship program," said one father who received his Tier III certificate that evening. He added that the classes "helped me and my significant other to better communicate with one another. I have also become a better listener to my children to understand and be sensitive to what they are going through. I highly recommend this program."

"This program is geared towards cultivating the mindset, particularly of our men towards being a more positive and contributing family member," says Richard Johnson, Healthy Relationship educator. "I love what I do and it was just great and rewarding to see our men on Friday night spending quality time with their kids and to see the joy on the children's faces having fun with their fathers," he adds.

Johnson is also thankful that the program is able to supply books and developmental reading material so that the fathers can spend time reading to and with their sons and daughters. "We help our dads learn how to teach and nurture their children at home which will make them better equipped students at school and further builds learning skill sets and confidence," he says.

Johnson notes that the program encourages the fathers to keep journals and gives them the courage to "come out of that security box even though their personal comfort zone may be confining and not working



for them. We show them the many possibilities that are available and the variety of choices that they have at their disposal.”

For additional information on the Healthy Relationship & Marriage Enhancement Program, please contact SDC at 906-2700 2700 or visit their website at [www.cr-sdc.org](http://www.cr-sdc.org) and click on the “Programs” page.

Other programs sponsored by Milwaukee’s Social Development Commission include:

## **Employment**

- Need Help with Transportation to Your Job?: Ways to Work
- Help Getting and Keeping a Job: W-2 Training Opportunities
- Skills for Getting and Keeping a Job: Boosting Employability & Soft Skills Training (BEST)

## **Asset Development**

- Free Tax Help and More: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA)
- Becoming Money-Wise: Financial Literacy
- Making Home Energy Efficient: Weatherization
- Housing Preservation: Weatherization, Rehab and Asset Preservation Partnership Program (WRAP)
- Fixing Up Neighborhoods One House at a Time: Neighborhood Improvement Project (NIP)

## **Family Strengthening**

- Building Successful Young People: Youth and Family Development Program
- Getting It Together: Community Services Options and Youth Restorative Justice
- Rebuilding Foundations: Life and Career Development
- Stronger Family Bonds: Creating Lasting Family Connections
- Want a Stronger Marriage or Relationship? Head Start Healthy Relationships & Marriage Enhancement Program
- Keeping the Homebound Independent: Senior Companions

## **Education & Training**

- Preparing Preschoolers for School and Life: Head Start
- Getting Ready for a GED/HSED: Basic Skills
- Special Needs Diploma: Competency Based Diploma
- Earn that Diploma: GED/HSED Testing
- Volunteer and Internship Opportunities: Success Through Rewarding Internships & Volunteer Experiences (STRIVE)

## **Support Services**

- Help with Your Utility Bill: Energy Assistance
- How to Make Your Home More Energy Efficient: Energy Conservation Demonstrations
- Feeding Children: Year-Round Food Program
- Feeding Kids During Summer: Summer Youth Food Program
- Prescriptions & Your Health: Prescription Advocacy & Referral Service (PARS)
- Health Education & Referral Center (HERC)
- Help for Families in Need: W-2 - Eligibility and Assessment
- Educate and Entertain on Cultural Diversity: Community Education
- Financial Case Management for Families - Project GAIN

**Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group Discussion Forum at [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)**



# Brain Blog: Nature Preschool

On her blog <http://braininsights.blogspot.com>, Deborah McNelis posts information on the importance of brain development in the early years and how easy it is to provide stimulating activities for children. With Deborah's permission, in issues of this newsletter, we are including Brain Blogs from her blog. For the complete information, go to Deborah's blogspot.

For more Information on brain development or easy activities you can do with your child to promote brain development visit [www.braininsightsonline.com](http://www.braininsightsonline.com).

## **This issue's Brain Blog:**

As I continuously promote, it is critical that children have the opportunity to learn, play and explore outdoors. As adults we need to do all we can to ensure that children have opportunities to develop their brains in healthy, natural and safe environments.

There are numerous benefits to brains of all ages as a result of spending time in nature as I have shared in "Your Brain Needs Nature" and this fun one that includes a video called, "Nature Deficit Disorder" by KQED Quest. It is especially important and beneficial for young developing brains to experience and learn outdoors.

For this reason I am thrilled to share the following article from Audubon magazine. It is a great pleasure to work with the extremely talented and dedicated people and spend time at the Schlitz Nature Audubon Nature Center. It has been a particularly great honor to collaborate on a project to create the *Naturally Developing Young Brains Packet* with Lorna Hilyard and Pattie Bailie, mentioned in this article.

The center is remarkable. The best part is, they serve as a model and help other programs implement nature into programming. In fact 10% of the proceeds from the sale of the nature brain packets go directly toward increasing nature preschool experiences for more children.



## **A Nature Preschool Enhances Early Childhood Brain Development**

**An exciting nature-based curriculum for preschoolers developed at the Schlitz Center in Wisconsin is spreading to classrooms across the country—and even to Sesame Street**

**By Susan Cosier**

On a mild February afternoon, a dozen snowsuit-clad children in bulky boots and colorful hats perch on logs surrounded by snow outside the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They pass raptor talons and feathered feet and gingerly touch an owl's wing that their teacher, Liesl Schultz, holds out. She asks whether the wing belongs to a male or a female, telling the kids to look carefully at the color of the feathers. Then she explains that mothers have duller hues to help them blend in with their environment and protect their chicks.



Schultz tells the group that great horned owls breed during Wisconsin's coldest winter months, and that she's heard there might be one nesting in the nearby stand of evergreens. After a few practice calls — hoo-h'OOO—hoo-hoo — they trudge to the top of a 60-foot observation tower just before dusk. The budding nature lovers call out in a cacophony of hoots and hollers, their shouts echoing through the sky. Alexander Fudderich, a particularly gifted hooter, takes his best shot, and is rewarded when a great horned owl hoots back. The children's eyes open wide in wonder.

Named for the big beer company that used to pasture its ale-carting horses on the property, the 185-acre center is home to Audubon's only nature preschool, complete with an afterschool program. In the early 1960s Dory Vallier, the brewery founder's granddaughter, proposed to the Schlitz Foundation that the property be converted to a nature center. The board turned her down. But she persisted, and in 1971 she finally won them over.

Former center director Buffy Cheek showed a similar tenacity, and the Schlitz Audubon board approved her proposal for a nature preschool three decades later. She recruited Patti Bailie as director, and the school opened its doors in 2003. Now 144 children who attend grow intellectually and spiritually by hiking and playing outdoors throughout the year. Bailie, a 20-year veteran of early childhood and environmental education, says, "There's such a connection between spending time in the natural world and the developing brain."

Recent research bears her out, though it's an understudied field. Noticing differences between objects, like seeds and burrs, helps wire the brain, nurturing initial math and pre-reading skills that develop from the ages of one through four. "They learn observation skills after just a few months," says Bailie. "Parents will tell me, 'I can't believe what my child sees now.'" Studies also show that just 20 minutes spent outdoors improves concentration in children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder as much as, if not more than, medication. That's in addition to the physical benefits of exercise and exposure to vitamin D (which helps build strong bones).

At least four other nature preschools nationwide have been modeled on Schlitz's program. But children don't have to attend one of these remarkable schools to benefit from nature education. Schlitz's educators teamed up with Braininsights, a company that creates materials incorporating brain development concepts into real-life experiences, to make a pocket-sized packet of laminated cards chock-full of fun outdoor activities that parents can do with their children. One of them shows how outlining a shadow in chalk and coloring it in leads to coordination between a child's brain and muscles. (The book is available at [braininsightsonline.com](http://braininsightsonline.com).)

Meanwhile, *Sesame Street*, the beloved 42-year-old TV program, consulted with Bailie after deciding to devote its last three seasons to nature and science. "Children have that sense of awe and wonder, and once you establish appreciation, then it's a lot easier for the child to want to take care of the world around them," says Rosemarie Truglio, Sesame Street Workshop's vice president for education and research. "Patti actually brought [us] these wonderful experiences of what they're doing at the nature center." The shows—some of which Schlitz students previewed before they aired—taught concepts like habitat and migration. Big Bird considered flying to a warmer climate for the winter, while Elmo and Abby helped Bert find the blue bar pigeon, the last one on his life list.

At Schlitz, preschoolers use all of their senses when mucking around in forests, ponds, and prairies. In winter they tap maple trees for sap, discovering how it moves up and down a tree and tasting the sweet liquid. When ice begins to form on Lake Michigan's shores, the waves and wind break it into pieces. Those chunks form an ice shelf laced with a labyrinth of tunnels. Waves force water through the frozen surface and create ice volcanoes, or "ice-canoes," on the lake. The result is a seasonal landscape that allows children to play on the water—close to shore—when the temperature plunges below freezing.



In the fall and spring they watch caterpillars turn into butterflies and catch and release tadpoles. To master complex ideas, they play games. For instance, to illustrate why leaves change colors in autumn, each child holds a colored felt leaf. Teachers grasp a green blanket and lift it into the air so that the kids can run underneath, showing that when the chlorophyll is gone, the leaves' true colors reveal themselves. "We use the language—'metamorphosis,' 'chlorophyll'—and they pick it right up because it's meaningful," says Bailie. "And they're completely capable of understanding what those words mean."

Even before the school opened there was a waiting list for the following year; for the next class, the list is 30 students long. "The nature preschool is really important because it's about planting the seeds to grow tomorrow's conservationists," says center director Nathan Smallwood, whose four-year-old son, Wolf, attends the preschool. When Smallwood first took the helm last year, his son was tearing up everything in sight. After about a week in the school, the two went on a walk on the grounds and Wolf ran ahead. Smallwood was shocked when his son turned around and said, "Papa, be careful not to step on the wildflowers."

"It stopped me in my tracks," he says. "I have the advantage of seeing the experiences of this as not just a director but as a parent."

## Tell Us About Your Program

One of the goals of the Parenting Special Interest Group is to provide a vehicle for communication among educators who are teaching or developing parenting programs in correctional facilities. You are invited to share your ideas by contributing an article for a future issue of this newsletter.

Here are some suggestions for articles:

- Share a creative lesson plan that you use in your Parenting Class
- Compile a list of books and videos you use in your Parenting Class
- Describe how your parent/child book project works
- Share advice on establishing a Fathers or Mothers Fair
- Describe a training workshop that you found useful
- Describe how you involve community organizations in your program
- Describe how you have made your institution more family-friendly

Email your articles to [Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Barbara.Rasmussen@Wisconsin.gov) or [JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com).

## Need Help?

Do you have any questions or need some advice on starting or improving your parenting classes, parent/child literacy program, or parent support group for offenders?

We have an email list of almost 200 parenting educators from 29 states who are eager to help. Just send an email to [jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com](mailto:jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com) with your question or request and I will forward it to our email list. Then wait a few days and the helping responses will be sent to you.

**For past issues of the Parenting Connection  
newsletter, go to [www.ceawisconsin.org](http://www.ceawisconsin.org)**





# Give Kids a Big Advantage: Instill a Love & Passion for Words

GetCareerWise.com publishes creative career exploration and life skills resources that help parents, teachers and mentors prepare kids for entering the employment world. It was founded by two former Human Resources marketing professionals. The following article was published by Co-Owner Susan Schneider on their site: [www.GetCareerWise.com](http://www.GetCareerWise.com). Feel free to pass these tips on to your students who want to help their children develop strong life and job preparation skills.

*Okay, I admit a strong bias here. I am a writer. I love to write. I love words. I love all the different forms of communication that require a passion for words. My career path has wound all around writing (movie script synopsis writer, advertising copywriter, marketing creative director, board game and app developer, author, publisher, blogger). I love words and people who know how to use them to inform, entertain, sell, clarify, instruct and express feelings.*

*I loved how Steve Jobs was recognized for his powerful way with words. He mesmerized people with his sales and marketing skills, which are all about using words to inspire action and create bonds. Yes, he created beautiful products, but they wouldn't have become so beloved had he not been able to share his passion with others so eloquently. He knew how to craft words and deliver them with style.*

*President Obama is praised for his way with words. He is a forceful speaker and very articulate. He understands the power of words as do most successful politicians and leaders.*

*People with superior writing and speaking skills command much more attention (and oftentimes bigger paychecks) than those without them. . . words are powerful tools.*

*If you want your child to stand out from the crowd due to his or her ability to communicate, instill in them the love of reading! Encourage them to read everything! Not bits and bytes of abbreviated text, but the real thing. Help them discover the different types of writing there are, from cookbooks to song lyrics to computer manuals to novels to speeches. It all has a purpose and was written by a talented wordsmith.*

*Start them thinking about the professionals who get paid for their way with words.*

- Screenwriters
- Book Authors
- Songwriters
- Speechwriters
- Technical Writers
- Advertising & Marketing Copywriters
- Linguists
- Textbook Writers
- Cruciverbalist (bonus points for knowing this one!)

*Have fun with word play together. Read to each other. Form your own little book club. Keep a notebook to jot down words and phrases that you both like or crafted yourselves. Try writing a song, a story, a poem, a screenplay or a speech.*

*Let your kids know that what they read and what they write is important to you. It's a chance for you, as a parent, to discover what motivates, concerns and interests them on a very personal level.*

*Read and write on!*



## Editor's Musings:

I am looking forward to another fathers' book-sharing class. One of my prospective students is eagerly looking forward to this class as well. He said he never knew his dad; no one ever read to him as a child, and he said that he wants his son's life to be different. This man works at it. He said that he and his son read to each other on the phone. When his son tells him about something that he is interested in, my student starts researching so he can speak intelligently to his 7-year-old son. And guess where he learned about doing this — in parenting and book-sharing classes at his previous institution.

I guess this is what our job is all about. Here is a man who had no relationship at all with his father, but he is working hard at making a difference in his child's life even though he is in prison. So although we may have budget woes, or time constraints, or whatever — think about that little boy who has a loving dad in his life. It makes it all worthwhile.

**Barb Rasmussen**

To join CEA go to: [www.ceanational.org](http://www.ceanational.org)

**Barb Rasmussen, Teacher  
Racine Correctional Institution  
2019 Wisconsin Street  
Sturtevant, WI 53177-0900**

