

# CSA Home Work Assignment for Parents

## Home Work Assignment #1

This is the first in a series of articles that is intended as advice to parents on things to do at home with your children to support their academic achievement at Charyl Stockwell Academy. Together we have over 60 years of experience as parents, teachers, principals, special education and gifted education administrators, program developers and educational leaders. In these articles we draw on that experience and on a wide range of educational and psychological research and literature that relates to our topics.

The advice that we give also matches our experience and the research/literature, with the mission, philosophies and methods we have chosen for Charyl Stockwell Academy. At CSA we believe that children contain inside themselves the seeds of goodness and intellectual curiosity and the inherent roadmap (their genetic structure) for growing into healthy happy adults. We believe that the role of adults is to protect the children from harm, to provide a safe place for them to grow, to provide them with reasonable and stimulating activities, and to model for them high expectations and appropriate character traits. By adding to that instruction in the basic academic skills we believe that our students will emerge ready to engage with life and prepared for continuous life long learning experiences.

At CSA we believe that all learning starts at the beginning with a solid foundation. Brain research teaches us that our brains learn by making connections between what is new and what is already known. That learning starts at the beginning with motor development, sensory development, language development and then the cognitive integration of these basic skills. The primary prerequisite to all of this fundamental development is the loving care of a parent.

**Our first homework assignment is: Love your children.** Make sure that every day you hug your child and tell them that you love them.

Children who are loved by their parents and whose parents tell them they are loved on a regular basis, grow up being comfortable in their skin. Children who are loved learn a most important early lesson and that is that they are lovable. When you know you are loveable you know you are okay, that you are worth something, that you are good and that you can succeed. Children who are loved have the number one most important prerequisite to loving others. When a child is loved they will learn to love. When a child is loved they have an easy time building relationships with their parents, their siblings, and then with others in the world. Relationships with others are the key to success and happiness in life and the key to learning.

We encourage you to read the fascinating biography of Dr. Harry Harlow written by Deborah Blum. *Love at Goon Park* chronicles the life of the psychological researcher who transformed our thinking about loving children. During the first half of the twentieth century the standard advice to parents was to maintain distance and discipline with children. Hugs were seen as spreading germs and expressions of affection as signs of weakness that would lead to "spoiled" children. Parents were encouraged to hit their children as a way to gain their respect and obedience. Dr. Harlow's work in the late fifties proved that just the opposite was true and that the parenting advice of the first half of the century was leading us to lives of separation, fear and depression. We believe that the epidemic of depression we see in adults today is the direct result of parenting practices that leave giving and showing and talking about love out of the daily experience of children.

Children need to know that they are loved. They need to know that you loved them before they were born, that you love them now and that you will love them always. They need to know that you don't love them when, or if, or because, or after, but that you love them without condition. Children who are loved like that will grow up without major mental disturbance and resilient to the pains and losses of everyday life.

The most difficult childhood emotional disturbance to treat and to educate around is called Attachment Disorder. This serious and often life long disturbance begins in infancy. When babies come into our world they are completely dependent. If their basic needs to be fed, kept warm, kept dry and to be touched and loved are not met in those first two important years, these babies grow into children who do not trust and who cannot connect to other humans. Therapy, based around convincing the child that they are loveable and that others do care enough to take care of them, can be successful in treating these children up through about age 12. But the treatment is difficult, expensive and frustrating. These detached children are the people who grow into our mass and serial murderers and into adults who have no conscience. They don't always become criminals but they live lives of desperation and loneliness.

Children who are loved realize that someone cares for them. They know their parents cared for them and will continue to protect them from harm. They know that having relationships with others is worthwhile.

So make it a habit in your family to hug your child every day. Make it a habit to tell your child every day that you love them. The words may be difficult at first (especially if your child is older) but you will get used to it. And you will not spoil your child and your child will not be embarrassed by it. Do it in the morning when they get up. Do it when you pick them up from school. Do it just out of the blue when it is not expected. Make it the number one homework assignment you do every day. Your child will wear it as armor against the troubles of the world.

Charyl insisted on it. Chuck's parents were caring loving parents but did not believe in open expressions of love, so Chuck made a special point of reversing that practice with Charyl. Charyl grew up knowing she was loved because both her parents told her on a

regular basis. We created a tradition called the family hug that we would use to celebrate or to protect each other from the fearsome things we faced ...together. Charyl insisted on a nightly conversation routine that were always the last words she heard before falling to sleep. They were. . .

"Good night momma"

"Good night Charyl"

"I love you momma"

"I love you Charyl"

"Good night daddy"

"Good night Charyl"

"I love you daddy"

"I love you Charyl"

When you have love you can feel calm in the worst of storms, you can survive the awesome losses of life, and you can endure the changes that will confront you.

When you have love you will feel comfortable and ready to learn every day at home and at school. When you have love you will know there is a parent at home that will help. That's why it is homework assignment one.

## Homework Assignment #2

Last week we talked about love. This week we will talk about respect.

At CSA the first thing we want our teachers to do is to create a positive learning climate in their classrooms. Love and respect are keys to creating that climate. We want our classrooms to be warm caring environments that are need fulfilling to students. Research shows us that this kind of environment is conducive to making and building relationships between the teacher and the children, and between the children. Research also tells us that individuals learn most effectively in relationship with others. Research also tells us that the brain is most likely to make the connections needed, and to remember those connections, when it operates without significant stress or threat.

As part of managing your child's home work you should first establish a positive learning climate at home. Last week the assignment was to hug your child and tell them you love them at least once per day. **Homework Assignment #2 is: Show your child you respect them by listening to them for at least 15 minutes each day.**

When you show your child you respect them by listening to them, they learn that they are intelligent and that their contribution is worthwhile. Love is the foundation for the heart and soul. Respect is the foundation for intelligence. You can never tell someone that you

love them too many times; they will always enjoy hearing those words. Respect on the other hand needs to be demonstrated to be believed. The best way to demonstrate your respect for your child is to listen to them. When you listen to your child, he or she will believe that you think they have important things to say. Over time by listening, you will teach your child that it is safe for them to share anything with you. Your respect will garner their trust.

The best way to know when you are listening to your child is that you will notice that your mouth is closed and you are not speaking. Many parents think they listen to their child but they are really listening only long enough to get an idea of what the child is saying and then to quickly state their adult opinions and ideas. Other parents think they are listening when they are really holding an interrogation about what the child has been up to. Children's responses to these parental behaviors, is to be quiet or answer with short answers like, "nothing", "we played", "we did our work". If you are getting quotes like these from your child, you need to work on listening.

Start with a simple invitation. "Hi, honey. I hope you had a good day at school today. If you'd like to tell me about it, I'd like to listen." After you say this stop talking and listen. See how long you can wait before you speak again. If you get to 15 minutes then you have completed your assignment for the day. You can do this in the car, make sure the radio is off, or at home while you are doing chores together, or while you are sitting together as a family at dinner, or when you are sitting together in front of the fireplace reading a book. It won't work when you are in front of the TV or computer.

If you get no response the first day try it again each day until your child says something. When your child starts talking, don't reply. Just listen. When they believe you are listening they will talk more. When they stop talking don't say anything. Instead think about what they said. After a moment or two, say something like, "Thanks for sharing that with me." Or "I enjoyed hearing about your day". Don't ask questions or make comments and often they will tell you more. Your children want to talk to you, and they will when they know you are listening. After they have been talking to you for a few days you can try some reflection. Think about what they said to you and then repeat it back to them. Say something like "Thanks for sharing that with me. What I heard you say was (repeat back what you heard). Did I get that right?" Be careful when you say this that you show no judgment and that you are communicating that you really want to know what they think. They will usually reply with more detail and clarification. Only after that happens for awhile, should you even consider asking any questions.

When you start asking questions they should be something like this, "Thanks for sharing that with me, I think I understand what you meant, but I still don't know what you think about ..... etc." Your first question should be one that is asking for clarification. These techniques will begin to convince your child that you will really listen, that you really care about what they have to say, and that in turn they think they are smart enough to contribute something worth listening to. This is a very important lesson for your child to learn. And if you, their parent who loves them, teaches them that they are truly smart enough to be listened to by an adult, they will believe that they are smart and have a good brain.

There are some added benefits you will gain by listening. You will find out a lot more about what your child does when you are not there and what they think about themselves, their friends and you. Eventually they will start forming opinions about their family, their school, their community, their country and their world. If you have been listening they will share those opinions with you. They will already know what you think about all these things, so don't be too fast to tell them your opinion. You want to focus on what they are thinking by continuing to listen to them. You may add a comment occasionally like "have you thought about this ....." But when you are listening you don't want to tell them what you think. If you tell your child you love them every day, and you establish the daily habit of respecting your child's thinking by listening to them, eventually you will get this invitation. "Mom, this is what happened today ....., and this is what I think about what happened....., but Mom, I'm confused about this. I'd really like to hear what you think." Then is when it will first be time for you to share your opinion.

At school we will benefit from your listening homework. Children learn a lot of what they know from watching and copying their parents. If you are listening to your children they will want to be good listeners themselves. If your children are being listened to every night, they will know what listening is, what it looks like, how it is done, and they will do it at school. There is nothing a teacher wants more than a child who knows how to listen. Few children come to school knowing how to listen. If you teach them at home, simply by doing it yourself, then we won't have to teach it at school and we can get right on to the academics.

And listening is a pre-requisite to reading. So is speaking. If your child comes to school knowing how to listen and having experience with speaking – because his parents have been listening – then she will be more ready to start reading. Writing and reading is the symbolic representation of speaking and listening. If you can't do the real thing, you'll have a hard time doing the symbolic thing.

In conclusion, we want to remind you that the homework assignments need to be completed by parents with their children, regardless of the age of the child who is enrolled here at the academy. If you have not been doing these things already, then start this week. The older your student is the more difficult it will be to get started, but it is not too late. Homework assignments are intended as family activities that if done daily, will assure your child's success at school. Be sure you do them every day whether your child is in kindergarten or in the last year of middle school.

## **Homework Assignment #3**

We hope you have been busy completing the first two Homework Assignments. If you have you should be spending 15 to 20 minutes each day doing homework with your child. Five minutes or so should be spent telling your child you love them and showing affection to them, and 15 minutes should be spent listening to your child. If you are doing

these two things you are building the foundation for your child's academic success. If you are not we invite you to ask yourself why you are not taking this important time to connect with your child.

Last week we talked about how CSA teachers work to establish a warm, supportive, and need fulfilling environment in their classroom. We called this a positive learning climate. That is what you are establishing by completing assignments 1 & 2. CSA teachers have another important task in their classroom that they must do before instruction can begin. That task is to establish adult control procedures for the operation of the classroom. Your **Homework Assignment # 3 is: Establish parental control procedures in your home.**

Dr. Lawrence Lezotte will be the speaker for our Smart Character Choices fall staff training. When Dr. Lezotte was a professor at MSU three decades ago he conducted the first research on effective schools. His work identified successful schools and then used a variety of measures to identify the critical common traits in those schools. He identified seven correlates of effective schools. His work on effective schools is the foundation of the school improvement campaign that has swept the country in the last two decades. Since then those correlates have been studied over and over and proven to be crucial to the creation of a successful school.

Dr. Lezotte's correlate number 1 is a safe and orderly environment. "In the effective school," he says "there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere which is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning." Our teachers' first task each year is to establish that safe orderly environment in their classrooms and it is easier for us to do that if you have established a safe parental control environment at home.

It is not said directly in Lezotte's correlate, but it is implied, that the safe orderly environment is under the control of adults. This is an important distinction that we want to make. The last fifty years have seen adult authority and responsibility eroded in the name of freedom, choice and personal expression. We think this is unfortunate.

We know from studying child development and reviewing brain research that the human child is very different than all other animals. In most species when the child emerges from the womb or hatches from the egg, the offspring is almost ready to be on their own. In some species the parent is long gone when the child hatches, in others there is a period of time after birth when the parents are required to provide support. In almost all species that period of needed parental support is less than a year, usually less than 6 months. The human child will die if left on its own before it is three or four years old and if we want the child to grow into a responsible adult, parental guidance is required well into the teen years and beyond. Recent brain studies have revealed that the human brain is not fully developed until well into the 20s. Girl's brain's reach full maturity between age 22 and 24 and boys brains between ages 24 and 27. What this means to us is that parental control and guidance should be provided to older children, thus reversing the trend in recent years of allowing children and adolescents to call the shots at ever increasingly younger ages.

The old fashioned way of establishing that adult control was for adults to make rules for youngster's behavior. Those rules were enforced through the use of rewards and punishments. Unfortunately this kind of strategy did not work very well. We found from practice and from years of research on behavior modification systems, that rewards and punishments control behavior but they do not change behavior. The only way to keep the behavior under control is to always be increasing the rewards and/or the punishments. This kind of constant rewarding and punishing leads to a serious deterioration of the relationship between the adult/parent and the child, leading to rebellion, escaping, acting out and dislike for the adult/parent. If you want to review the research on this topic please read Punished by Rewards by Alfie Kohn. This 400 page book is loaded with hundreds of references to research and practice that firmly establishes the problems with systems based on rewards and punishments.

The more successful way to manage both classrooms and homes while keeping the adult in charge, is to teach children procedures. Procedures are neutral step by step guides to how to do something. We use procedures all the time. One of the most basic procedures in our society is to keep to the right when moving. We do it in hallways, on sidewalks, in stores, on roads, and every where. In certain instances it is enforced as a rule or law, but in most cases we just do it. We do it because we can see that it is generally accepted by all people and that it is in our best interest. Useful procedures that we do all the time become routines. Routines are following procedures without thinking about them. Another name for routines is habits.

At school teachers get together with the principal and decide on some simple school wide rules. At CSA we have two rules:

Students are to solve problems without violence.

Students are to participate in class without disrupting the learning of others. These rules are enforced by talking to students, talking with students and parents, and eventually excluding students from class and then from school when they refuse to follow these two basic rules.

Teachers also meet with the principal to establish school wide procedures that will help the whole school live within those two rules. Teachers then meet in units and discuss and create unit procedures that support the school wide rules and procedures. Finally teachers meet with their team mate and decide on classroom procedures to help students follow the school rules and procedures.

All of these procedures are carefully written out so that all adults understand how they are to be taught. When students arrive at school in September the procedures are taught to the students. The procedures are explained to the students so the students know the usefulness of the procedure and how it will be in their best interest to follow the procedure. In the older grades students may be asked to help in creating some procedures. When our teachers teach an item they know that to master the new information students need to practice, so time is spent the first few weeks of school physically practicing the procedures. When the students start doing the procedure without thinking, when the

procedure has become a routine, the teacher knows she has been successful in teaching the procedure. Classrooms have procedures on entering the class, walking in the hall, putting away supplies, cleaning up after work, asking for help etc. These procedures allow the teacher to be in control without spending their day passing out rewards and punishments.

Does it work? Yes! Visit your child's classroom and ask the teacher about the procedures; observe how order emerges from the habitual routines the students have learned. If you still doubt the strategy go to the High/Scope web site, [www.highscope.org](http://www.highscope.org) and review over 20 years of research that supports the long term positive results for students from this approach. At the Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti almost thirty years ago an interesting research project was set in motion. At Perry, a method like we described was implemented. In that preschool teachers acted as facilitators. They provided structure by teaching classroom procedures but they did not run the classes like bosses. They let the procedures they had established run the class while they guided instruction. At another preschool nearby a different method was used. Here the teachers were visibly in charge. Students spent much of their day listening to the teacher and following their direct instruction. Rewards and punishments were used to control behavior. In both schools the students were from highly disadvantaged backgrounds. The experiment went on for three years and then the students were tracked well into adulthood. On every measure, academic performance, school success and graduation, advanced education and degrees, the students in the procedure centered classroom did better. They even did better in such things as avoidance of criminal, drug and mental health problems and they were more successful in marriage as well.

So what we want you to do is to select and teach to your children, some adult control procedures at home. In the next few weeks we will describe five basic parental control procedures that we believe should be used in every family. We won't give you the actual procedures, we'll let you make those up yourself, but we will describe the areas to cover. They are areas that will help you be a better parent and when you teach these procedures at home it will make our job of establishing adult control procedures at school much easier. The five areas we have selected are also important because of their direct impact on academic performance. Until we describe these we would like you to think about what procedures you already have in place in your home. Talk to your partner about them and make sure you agree on how you teach them and how you want your children to follow them. If you have those discussions in the next weeks you will be able to see if yours match ours.

## **Homework Assignment #4**

Last week we asked you to start thinking about adult control procedures that you use in your home. We want you to discuss those with your parenting partner so that you have agreement on what procedures you will teach your children and how those procedures will be implemented. Next week we will start three weeks of discussion on the 5 essential

procedures we think are required in every family to support academic success at school. But before we do that we want to give some more guidance on the structure of procedures and the structure of your interaction with your child.

At CSA we want our teachers to be in charge, but we don't want them to be bosses. We want them to be managers and service providers. We want them to manage the classroom and to provide the service of academic instruction. We think it would be helpful for you as parents to work within that same paradigm. You are the managers of a smooth running home and you are providing the service of parenting. Our teachers use procedures to make both of their main classroom functions more effective and you can use procedures at home to do the same.

At CSA we use a psychology called Choice Theory. We recommend that you read the book *Choice Theory – A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* by Dr. William Glasser to learn more about this theory. This book describes the basic tenants of the theory and shows how it works in the real world. We also recommend another book by Dr. Glasser, *Getting Together and Staying Together*. This is a small, easy to read, book that describes Choice Theory and shows how it can be used to make a good selection in a life mate and to improve marriages. These two books teach us about internal control psychology. Internal control psychology is becoming the dominant psychology of the 21st century. If you want to read other versions of it you can read the work of Dr. Albert Ellis or review any literature related to cognitive behavioral psychology. You can also look at the management theories of Dr. Edwards Deming and Stephen Covey that are built around this new psychology.

Internal control psychology grew out of the work of the developmental psychologists and educators of the early twentieth century such as Montessori and Piaget, and the clinical work of Dr. Harry Harlow, who we referenced earlier. It is also heavily influenced by the work of one of Dr. Harlow's students, Dr. Abraham Maslow. Maslow developed a theory of behavioral motivation called the Hierarchy of Needs. What Maslow proposed was that we behave not because of rewards and punishments that happen to us after we do something, but instead we behave because of internal drives, or as Glasser calls them, needs. We are born with these needs and we work every day to satisfy them. Glasser identifies the basic human needs as survival, fun, freedom, power and love & belonging. Maslow and Ellis and the others describe similar needs or drives.

Consequences that happen to us as we behave shape our behavior, but they do not change it or cause it. Our internal drives cause our behavior, and we as individuals make internal choices, to behave in certain ways, based on our accumulated experience. It is this internal control of drives and choices that lead to the name, internal control psychology.

We like Choice Theory because it reaches a unique conclusion. That conclusion is that the only way we can truly meet our human needs is in successful relationships with other humans. We think the theory, and that important conclusion, really describes the core beliefs of democracy.

So getting back to our homework – in our first two assignments we asked you to work on love and respect. Those two things are the most powerful tools you have to shape the behavior of your children. Your children will behave appropriately when they get their basic human needs met. They will get their basic needs met primarily from the love and respect they get from you and others. Their survival needs will be met by your orderly management of your family. That's where procedures come in. And that brings us back to **Homework Assignment #4 – Give your children choices and let consequences work.**

Behavior is the product of internal choices, so the most important skill leading to success, is wise decision making. And we all know that "practice makes perfect". Children need choices so they can learn how to make good decisions. When you shape your procedures make sure that wherever possible you give your children choices to make. Letting children make choices also tells them that you trust and respect them. It gives them a sense of power and freedom that works to satisfy a couple of their basic needs. It also drives home the lesson that they are responsible for their behavior. If you control their behavior with rules and punishment, they will learn that you are responsible for their behavior. When you aren't there, like when your children are at school, they will make their own decisions. Often those will be different from the ones you have rewarded or punished. When children make poor decisions at school, and we hold them accountable, they are often surprised. When we call you and report to you on their choices – you are often surprised. If you have practiced decision making with your children at home, then you will know what to expect when your child is behaving on his own at school.

We have described for our teachers three kinds of consequences that exist in the world. There are natural consequences, imposed consequences and societal consequences. Before we describe them we want to make it clear that we don't believe that consequences cause or change behavior. They are experiences that we have that inform our decisions about the choices we make. But each individual makes the choices, and those choices may be different from time to time, or from person to person, with the same consequence. We used to recommend the work of Jim Fay and his famous book Parenting with Love and Logic. We still think this book is a good read and may be helpful to some parents as they struggle to gain parental control in their homes. We differ somewhat with Fay on tone and emphasis. In our opinion Fay spends too much time on the consequences – the Logic, and not enough on the Love – the process of building a loving, respectful and trusting relationship with your child. If your focus becomes manipulating the consequences, you will simply be replacing reward and punishment systems with consequence systems. So allow consequences to work but do not rely on them to change behavior.

Natural consequences are events we can do nothing about. They just happen. We can learn to avoid them. For example if we stick a screw driver in an electric outlet it is likely we will get a shock, if we walk outside in the rain we will get wet, if we treat people poorly we will not be liked by others. We can change our behavior to avoid the consequence, but the consequence will not change our behavior. The best example of this principle is gaining weight. If we do not exercise, and/or we eat lots of high calorie food, the natural consequence is that we will gain weight. Gaining weight, the consequence,

does not automatically change our behavior. Gaining weight does not cause us to exercise more and eat fewer calories. If it did, we would all be thin! It is not the consequence that makes the difference; it is what we think about the consequence, and what we choose to do in response to the consequence.

Imposed Consequences are things we cause to happen to other people. We could also call imposed consequences rewards and punishments. As a parent you may need to use some of these to get the control you need. However, if you do, always remember that imposed consequences only change behavior for as long as you can impose them. If you pay your son \$50 to get an A in school, don't count on him getting an A when you get laid off and can't afford the reward. If you punish your daughter by taking away her phone privileges for gossiping on the phone at night, don't count on her not doing the same thing at school the next day. Imposed Consequences also tend to hurt the relationship between the parent and the child. Since that relationship is the basis of lasting and real behavioral change, hurting your relationship with your child will not lead to the change you want.

We think societal consequences are the most useful. If you run a red light on M-59 and Old 23 at 3 o'clock in the morning, a policeman may see you and give you a ticket. That would be an Imposed Societal Consequence. The society has agreed on certain procedures and has agreed on certain consequences that all citizens will be exposed to if they don't follow the procedures. If you run a red light at the same intersection at 3 o'clock in the afternoon you will probably get a ticket and end up in an accident. Most drivers follow the procedures and stop on red and go on green. If you don't it is likely your Natural Societal Consequence will be getting in an accident.

At school we write procedures that help the school and classrooms move along smoothly. When students don't follow a procedure the first consequence is that the teacher will work harder to teach the procedure to the students. Part of that teaching is explaining the reason for the procedure. We try to show the students how the procedures help them get their needs met. We help them see how it is in their best interest to follow the procedure. Through that discussion the teacher may find ways to modify the procedure so it works better. If a student still does not follow the procedure the teacher will work with the individual student to be sure they have learned the procedure and/or to analyze why the student is not complying. Eventually if the student refuses to follow the procedure the teacher will seek help from outside the class. The first effort is to solve the problem by talking about it. The teacher might ask for help from the social worker, the parent or a school administrator. What those adults will do is determine if there is any good reason the child cannot follow the procedure, determine if the child knows there is a consequence to not following the procedure, and finally to apply a consequence. The societal consequence for not following procedures at school is removal from the classroom, then removal from the school, first on a short term basis, then on a long term basis and then permanently. All through the process the first effort and the last effort is to educate the child, but eventually the consequences required to keep the classroom safe and orderly must be applied.

If you teach procedures at home, your child will know the process when they come to school. If you have allowed choices at home, students will know how to make good decisions at school. If you have allowed consequences to work at home, students will know they are accountable for their behavior at school. If you have built a positive relationship with your child at home, you will be able to help us convince that child that following procedures at school is in their own best interest.

## **Establish parental control procedures in your home.(continued from Homework Assignment #3)**

### **Eating and Sleeping**

The next two weeks we will review our recommendation for 5 essential parental control procedures we believe should be in place in every family. Four of these are borrowed from our good friend Bob Sornson. Bob lives with his wife Nancy and their family in Brighton. Bob is the Director of Special Education in Northville where he has pioneered an effort to prevent learning failure, which has led to a greatly reduced number of students being identified in need of special education help in that district. He is a close colleague of Jim Fay and has written several books. His books are available at Amazon and on the Jim Fay web site.

Bob reports that invariably students who are having difficulty paying attention and behaving appropriately in school, come from families where one or more of these essential parental control procedures is not in place at home. Simply by enlisting parents help to teach these basic procedures at home, student's problems in school can often be overcome. We encourage parents to adopt procedures in each of these areas to prevent problems in school from occurring in the first place.

Earlier we described how human parents are called upon to provide special long term support to their offspring. Failure to provide this support leads to serious health, learning and emotional problems in the child. Providing shelter and clothing is required of parents by our society in general, and failure to do so will lead to legal problems for the parent. The next two survival needs of children, food and sleep, are often not monitored, but are just as important. We believe every parent should be involved by controlling and monitoring when and how much their children sleep; and when, what, and how much their children eat.

Obesity is the number one health problem in children today. The food that is advertised for children's consumption is often filled with large amounts of sugar, fat and empty carbohydrates. Fast food and other kid friendly food products are often highly processed, which means they have little fresh contents and lots of unhealthy oils. The foods that the papers, movies, and television invite our children to eat are seriously insufficient in what kids need, and the super-sized quantities the advertising promises, leads to children's

weight problems. As parents we know that all humans need diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and cereals, and low in fats and sugars. We also know that the fresher food is the richer it is in the essential vitamins and minerals we need.

Getting children on a good diet is good for their health but it is also good for their thinking skills. Children who eat a good diet have bodies that work better and that includes brains that work better. Consumption of large quantities of sugar and foods composed of empty carbohydrates leads to quick energy and then fatigue. This roller coaster ride caused by the overproduction of insulin leads to long term health problems, and the beginning of serious behavior and attention problems. We believe it may also contribute to the newest popular mental health diagnosis in children called bi-polar disorder. This diagnosis refers to behavior symptoms that show an up and down of feelings from excitement to depression and back to excitement. This unregulated behavior that many think is related to brain chemistry, may start with poor eating habits. Remember, the chemicals in the brain are made up from the materials we put in our mouths. We can change our brain chemistry with both eating and exercise. We all seek balanced lives and emotions and that is what will lead to success in school. That balance begins with a healthy balanced diet.

Students who do not eat well at home do not have the energy to learn at school. Students, who become obese, move less and so lose the experience of physical exploration of their environment, a critical early learning requirement. Students who become obese are not as well accepted by their peers, leading to reduced positive self image and positive social interaction.

We believe that parents know best about the diets their children should have and should take charge in providing appropriate food and in teaching their child about the kinds and quantities of food that should be consumed. Children should certainly be given food choices, but the overall food plan should be designed and monitored by the parent. Parents are responsible for what their children eat and are responsible for teaching the child what eating habits are in the child's best interest. If this is done in a loving and respectful manner the child will learn to make good choices on their own, but parental supervision will still be required. This kind of caring supervision also gives the child the message that their parent cares about what goes in their mouths. It teaches children that some things you put in your mouth will hurt you and other things will help you. This message will be very important later when you as the parent insist on guidelines for your child, adolescent and young adult related to consuming such things as drugs, alcohol and cigarettes.

Students who do not get enough sleep at night come to school and need to sleep at school. They are less able to pay attention and less willing to participate in active learning of both a physical and intellectual kind. But there is an important new finding that makes getting a good night's sleep even more important to all young learners. When we learn something new a connection is made in our brains between two or more brain cells. That is actually what physically happens – a connection is made between a cell that already "knows" something with a cell that contains the new and related learning. These connections are

little wiry things called dendrites that connect the brain cells called neurons. We used to believe that those dendrites grew at the time the new learning takes place. Recent imagery studies have demonstrated that actually the sequence is a little different.

Here is a little example of how it works. Johnny comes to school one day in the Navigator classroom. Last week he learned that  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Today his teacher introduces new information showing him how  $2 + 2 = 4$ . His brain recognizes that this new information is similar to the information he learned last week about  $1 + 1$  and decides to make the connection between the already known information and this new information. His brain decides to grow a dendrite connecting the new information neuron to the old information neuron and so the brain marks a place on the neurons in preparation for that growth connection. It is that connection that will complete the learning, give it meaning, and stick it in Johnny's memory. But Johnny's brain is very busy doing other things. It is running his heart and lungs and telling Johnny if he doesn't go to the bathroom soon he will wet his pants. His brain is thinking about what mischief he could get into in the bathroom and wondering if that new girl will play with him at recess. And then the classroom signal for changing activity goes off and Johnny moves on to some more leaning.

Will Johnny know that  $2 + 2 = 4$  when he comes back to school the next day? The answer to that question in a large part is determined by whether Johnny gets a good night's sleep. When Johnny gets ready for bed that night his brain sighs a little sigh of relief. Johnny has been going all day long with no stop and his brain is ready for a break. After Johnny's Mom and Dad tuck him in bed he drops off to sleep. His heart beat and breathing slow down to an easy pace. His eyes are closed and he sees nothing new, and his sensitivity to sound and touch decreases. He goes into the coma like state called deep sleep. And then his brain has time to do its important work. Where the brain made marks on neurons during the day, it starts and completes the task of growing dendrites. When Johnny wakes that next day he is rested and ready to go fast for another 12 hours. And his brain has some new connections. If Johnny does not get the 10 to 12 hours of sleep he needs each night, the dendrites are not grown. The connections are not made. And Johnny wonders what his teacher is talking about the next day when she asks him what  $2 + 2$  equals.

We recommend that children from Kindergarten through Voyager get 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night and Middle School children through High School get 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. We recommend that children be provided with quiet dark rooms where they will not be interrupted during the sleep time. We recommend that a pre-bedtime procedure be developed that gradually slows the child down and prepares them for sleep. This procedure can include such things as completing personal hygiene routines, playing a quiet game, reading or being read to by a parent. Quiet conversation with a parent or sibling is good and listening to quiet music or sounds prepares the child for sleep. Television should not be a part of this quiet down procedure.

You should have procedures at home that put you in charge of your child's eating and sleeping each day. These procedures can be easily built around schedules. You and your

child should learn when it is time to eat and to sleep. These schedules will shape his/her day and create a comfortable routine that will follow your child for years to come. It is this comfortable sameness of each day that will give your child a feeling of security and safety, and they will be happy that someone bigger and smarter – their parents – are in charge. When they come to school they will already have something called temporal awareness. This is the awareness of how time works. This is the conceptual understanding that there is a beginning and an end, a morning and an afternoon, a time to eat and a time to sleep. This awareness is an important prerequisite to the organization that is important to all learning.

Establishing times to eat and sleep also requires that you the parent and your child have at least one hour of concentrated time together each evening. Spending at least 30 minutes each day eating together as a family gives your children a great opportunity to increase their knowledge of the English language and to practice the two important school success skills of listening and speaking. Spending another 30 minutes with your child as part of the going to bed procedure assures another time when you and your child can talk about the day.

If you don't have good procedures and reasonable home schedules that put you in charge of your child's eating and sleeping, we believe that this is an important place to start working at home (homework) on the things that will help your child learn at school. We believe that the recommendations we have reviewed above apply to all children through high school. If you have older children it is not too late to implement these procedures. It will be more difficult but we believe you can and should start now. These procedures will help put you the parent in charge at home and will create special times of engagement between you and your child. This engagement is what your child needs and something you will cherish for the rest of your life.

## **Establish parental control procedures in your home.(continued from Homework Assignment #3)**

The last few weeks we have been talking about parental control procedures. We believe that parents know best what is good for their children and that parents have a responsibility to control the crucial things that happen to their children as they grow up. Last week we talked about parents being in control of what, when and how much their children eat, and monitoring when their children sleep and how much rest their children get on a regular basis.

If you did not have parental control procedures before, and started to put them in place recently, you have probably encountered arguments from your children. **The third parental control procedure we recommend is, do not argue with your children.** Children who are not used to adults taking charge and making decisions in the children's best interest, will argue. They like being in control, but they are really looking for the safety of sound parental decisions. As parents take more and more control, children will test the limits and reality of that control by arguing. If you are doing our homework

assignments related to love, respect and listening, there will be plenty of opportunities for your child to have their input on family matters. But we believe what children need are parents who take care of them. Those are parents who are not ashamed or afraid of assuming adult authority in important matters. Arguing will be a transition behavior for children getting used to parental control. By being clear that you will not argue, you give the message to your child that you are in charge and that you will do what is best for the family.

There is a funny thing about arguing. You have to have two people to do it. To stop arguing with your children, simply, stop arguing with your children. Here is an example.

Son (comes in from playing outside): "Mom, I'm SO hungry, I needa snack!"

Mom: "Welcome home, I'm making dinner now. You can eat with the family at 5:30."

Son: "But Mom, I can't wait until 5:30 to eat – I need something now"

Mom: "Our family eats at 5:30 and we don't snack before dinner. You can go clean up, do your homework, read, or come help me make dinner."

Son: "Mike's Mom lets him eat before dinner."

Mom "The family will be eating at 5:30."

Son: "I want something to eat now!"

Mom: "Dinner will be on the table at 5:30. Go get washed up and then come back and help me make dinner."

Mom is friendly and doesn't get upset with her son, but she always comes back to the procedure. She states what she is going to do and does not argue with her son about the merits of her decision and the family procedure. She takes charge and lets her son know that she is in charge. Later she can spend some time talking with her son about the reasons for the no snack before dinner procedure, but to do so now would fuel the argument that her son wants. Mom also gives her son some choices to get him started on something more productive that is in his and the family's best interest.

Two adults in a marriage sometimes argue. When two equals disagree, often arguments erupt. While arguing between adults is acceptable, what we all know is that it does no good. Arguing does not solve anything and it always leads to bad feelings between the adults who are arguing. The only way arguing helps is when it leads to the end of the relationship - then arguing stops. Irreconcilable differences end relationships. That is not an option between parents and children so parents have the obligation to take charge and avoid arguments. But even with adults we know that if we argue we hurt our relationship. On the other hand we know that if we quietly discuss our differences, trying to understand the other person's point of view, we can almost always reach a solution that is good for both of us, and the process improves our relationship. When we argue we get angry and that emotion keeps us from understanding the other person. As adults we learn that the best thing to do is to stop arguing, go to separate locations, cool down, and come back to discuss the topic later. If we storm out of an argument and go watch the ball game or read a book that helps us settle down. However that solution doesn't lead us to thinking about the problem and ways to solve it. When we do something like that we say to the other person with our actions, "I'm not going to listen to you anymore, I'm going to go do

what I want to do and I'm not even going to think about you anymore" If we excuse ourselves and go to a quiet place to think, we can accomplish more. We settle down our emotions, we give ourselves time to think about a solution, and we give the message to the other person that we are serious about solving the problem.

We can teach our children this important adult skill by teaching them a quiet time procedure. You have all heard about "Time Out". "Time Out" is an operant conditioning practice that has become very popular in the last thirty years. The phrase is short for a method called "time out from reinforcement". It is actually a form of punishment. Since being with others is rewarding or reinforcing, when a child is doing something the adult does not want, the child is directed to a place where they cannot be with others. Some practitioners think it is best that the child be isolated in a location where they can see and hear the people who they are being isolated from, so they "know what they are missing". As soon as they comply with the adults' desires, they can return to the group. In some cases the time out is true isolation. Time out rooms or boxes were created in schools and classrooms in the 70s, until children's advocates protested. The "Time Out" practice is still widespread in schools and homes today.

We suggest an alternative that has some of the characteristics of "Time Out", but uses a different rationale. **We recommend that you teach your children a Quiet Time procedure.** Tell your children that it is important that they use thinking to solve problems and that thinking can best be done when they are quiet. Teach them that when they feel themselves getting upset or angry, or when they feel like arguing, it will be helpful for them to sit down and be quiet for a few minutes. Teach them that this quiet time is a good time to think about the problem. Tell them that you will help them with this procedure by telling them when they need to have a Quiet Time. If your child has a difficult time learning this procedure, you may need to identify a specific place for their quiet time, and for some children you may have to take them there and sit with them until they learn to complete the procedure on their own. The goal is to teach the child to take a quiet time on their own to gain control of their emotions, to think about the problem and to come back to others with a plan to solve the problem. This is a life skill that your child will use for the rest of her life. It also is a way to stop arguing and to maintain adult control without using punishments and rewards. Often after a little quiet time children can talk about a problem and move on with the activity they want to do.

We want to add another thing about establishing and maintaining parental control. It should be clear that we believe parents should be in charge in the family. Unfortunately many things about our culture teach parents that they should indulge their children's wishes and desires, and that they should not make the important choices to protect their children to make sure they will grow into strong adults. Sometimes Choice Theory is misunderstood to mean that children should be given ultimate choices in everything. That is completely contrary to what we believe and recommend. We do believe that parents should love and respect their children in every way and that whenever possible they should give their children choices, but parents should always maintain the responsible control of the family.

The language you use with your children is important to consider as you establish and maintain parental control. There is a word that we believe is used too often by parents. If you use it we ask you to examine what it means for you. The word is "Okay?" When you say "Okay" that means I agree and I will go along. When you say "Okay?" you ask, "Do you agree with me? Will you do what I want you to do?" When you use "Okay?" the question with your children you are asking them if they want to comply with your adult authority. We don't believe that question should ever be asked of children. Children need and want you to take care of them. Children need and want you to be in charge. We suggest that a more appropriate and effective question that you might use as a substitute with your child is "Do you understand?" This question allows for further clarification without compromise of parental control. Use language that will avoid situations where you argue with your children, and teach your children to take some quiet time when they need to settle down and work on solving a problem.

At CSA we use the Quiet Time method in all of our classrooms as one of the first interventions when children argue or get out of control. Quiet Time is also the first thing that a child encounters when they are sent to the office for help with their behavior. If you have taught this method at home, it will make our job easier. An even better situation at school is having students whose parents will not argue with them and who already understand and respect adult authority. These children come to school ready to learn because they believe that adults have important things to teach them.

## **Establish parental control procedures in your home.(continued from Homework Assignment #3)**

Work is the activity of life. When we meet someone new we want to know who they are. What we want to know is what their name is, what their family is like – are they married, do they have children – where they live, where they grew up, and what their birth family is like – do they have siblings, are their parents alive etc. Those pieces of information make up the "who" of a person. Next we want to know what they do. We want to know how they occupy themselves everyday. We want to know what work they are engaged in. That is the "what" of someone new.

We learn how to work from our parents and our families. Unfortunately in our affluent suburban cultures and our poverty ridden unemployed urban cultures, we are often not teaching our children how to work and the central importance of work to personal identity. Work is how we demonstrate our worth and it is how we make a contribution. Work is how we show our responsibility. It demonstrates how we take care of ourselves and those around us we care about. Work adds important meaning to our lives. Children need to learn how to work.

**Our fifth and final recommendation for establishing parental control procedures is establish chores for all family members.** Every family member should have work that they do in the family. Chores should be things that children do every day to take care of themselves first and then to do something to take care of the family. Self care starts with

dressing; eating and self cleaning and moves on to room clean up, laundry and shopping. These basic functions should not be done for a child. Parents should help a child do these things for just as long as it takes for the parent to teach the child to do them for themselves. The sooner a child can take care of the basic daily habits of self care, including maintenance of their clothes and sleeping area, the sooner they become responsible independent members of the family. Most of these basic self care chores should be mastered by the time the child comes to school. Time with parents learning the basics of self care, including laundry and food preparation, are much more valuable than time spent in preschool memorizing letters and numbers.

As soon as a child has mastered basic self care tasks, usually by age 5, the child should get a job to do for the whole family. This can start with something simple like bringing in the mail or paper, but should gradually lead to more important contributions like setting the table, washing the dishes, mowing the lawn, washing the car, preparing breakfast or lunch, helping prepare dinner, providing supervision to younger siblings, taking care of pets, dusting and vacuuming, doing laundry, and the list can go on indefinitely. There are many tasks that must be completed to make a household run efficiently and happily. Too often those tasks are done by parents and hired help, without the contribution of children. Child labor around the house is essential to developing the central activity of life – working.

When children have chores they learn some important lessons. They learn that their parents believe them to be capable, responsible and worthy of being trusted with things that are important to the family. They learn that they are a part of a working team called a family and that they belong in that family. They learn that they can take care of themselves and can contribute by helping others. They learn responsibility and self respect. They learn how to work.

Children who have chores at home have no problem learning that school is composed primarily of the work of learning. They get it right away. They don't come to school expecting to be entertained or waited upon. They come to school wanting to get the job done. They come to school ready to work. They come to school ready to learn. Children who have chores at home know how to get their school work started, how to keep doing it until it is completed and how to evaluate whether the work was done well, with accuracy and quality.

When assigning chores at home parents need to use the same criteria and methods our teachers use at school to teach new material. First the parent must determine what the child already knows how to do. The chore should be assigned so that it is something the child knows how to do already but that challenges the child to learn something new. First the parent should do the chore themselves with the child watching and then helping. Once the child knows the basic tasks that make up the chore, the parent should let the child complete the chore themselves with the parent help. Finally, when the parent is assured that the child can complete the chore with accuracy and quality, the parent should remove themselves to let the child to complete the chore on their own. In this final phase

the parent should always maintain a monitoring eye to make sure the chore is completed in the expected manner.

Children should not be paid for their work around the house. Parents are paid for their work outside the home, but house work is unpaid work that is completed to take care of ones self and to contribute to the family. It is a responsibility. When it is paid it is just a job. Allowances are a different matter but should not be tied to the completion of required chores. Parents should regularly express appreciation for the work contribution of the child. Thanking the child for the completion of their chores and appreciating their contribution gives the child a feeling of satisfaction and warmth from the parent and it also teaches them an important social skill. When someone does something for us, like making a good tasting and pleasant appearing meal, we thank them and compliment them for a job well done. We should teach our children this social manner by demonstrating it with them.

So let's review. In the last few assignments we have asked that you establish an important principle in your home. That principle is that families are made up of parents and children. It is the responsibility of parents to protect children from harm, to provide them with their basic physical needs, and to guide their emotional and educational growth and development. To do this, parents must take control of the family by making critical decisions that are in the interest of their children and the family. Parents should do this out of love and respect for their children because that is what children need and because we all want children to learn to love and respect others. It is the children's responsibility to listen to their parents and to learn from their experience and leadership.

This cooperative arrangement is best achieved when parents minimize the use of punishments and rewards and instead rely on teaching their children responsible procedures that put the parent in control, but win the children's commitment by demonstrating daily that following the procedures is in everyone's best interest. Creating a family where the needs of all members are met and the leadership and guidance of parents is required, will prepare children for responsible contributions to other social structures. School is the social structure we are most concerned with and we know that children who come to school from family situations like the one described are the most likely to succeed in academic work.

We recommend that parents consult with each other and agree on as many family procedures as they feel are needed to effectively run their family. Some families will have more than others and some procedures are needed for some families that are not needed for others. The procedures that your family develops will reflect your particular family situation, your values, and your religious and cultural beliefs and traditions. Whatever procedures you develop as a family we believe that the following are important for all families and that they should be created in a way that puts parents in control of these elements. These are:

**Parents should control what and when children eat.**

**Parents should control when and how much children sleep.**

**Parents should not argue with children.**

**Parents should teach their children how to be quiet and think about their behavior.**

**Parents should establish daily chores for all family members.**

This assignment will conclude our homework recommendations for this fall. After the holidays we will resume with some general recommendations for your support of academic learning at home and at school. Finally in the spring we will be issuing specific unit level homework assignments for you to be completing. Until then please continue to work on establishing the basic framework and climate for successful work at home.

## **FROM THE PRINCIPAL**

Dear CSA Parents,

Now that the New Year has begun, Mr. Stockwell and I have returned to writing our “Homework Assignments”. (see inside for Homework Assignment #5). We are writing these homework assignments to provide parenting advice to assist you in following the philosophies and methods of CSA at home. In doing so we hope to help you gain a better understanding of how and why we do things at school. We also hope that these assignments will encourage you to do things at home that will help your child be successful at school.

Before I proceed further with our thoughts about previous homework assignments, and upcoming assignments, please know that in writing these assignments, Mr. Stockwell and I are not implying that we are the “perfect parents”, nor do we think that we did everything absolutely right in raising our daughter, Charyl. We did our very best, and our intentions were always to do what seemed to be in the best interests of our daughter. I believe this is what all loving parents try to do. The reason why we decided to offer our advice on parenting is not because we view ourselves as “superior parents”, but rather because of our shared expertise that we have developed through our life long careers in education, our ongoing close study of research in the area of child growth & development and education, and our own parenting experience in raising our daughter, Charyl. We also provided 14 years of foster care for Robert, a young man with Down Syndrome who is now living semi-independently in a nearby community. We certainly have learned a lot over the last 30 years as educators working closely with students, parents, and families, and we believe we have a significant level of experience and expertise to offer CSA parents that is in support of our shared mission to provide a safe place for children to grow and learn from childhood to adolescence.

The homework assignments we wrote in Oct, Nov, and Dec described things you can do to create a climate for successful homework. During the winter months we will describe things you can do at home that will be more directly related to the educational process. In the spring we will provide more specific guidelines on academic work to do at home that will support instruction on a unit by unit basis.

We truly believe that the first two Homework Assignments are the most important things you can do to help your children be successful in life:

**Love your children. Make sure that every day you hug your child and tell them that you love them.**

**Show your child you respect them by listening to them for at least 15 minutes each day.**

Over the next three weeks our homework assignments will discuss what we believe are the most important things you can do to improve your child's academic achievement in school. Remember success in life is often much different than success in school, but success in both are what most parents want for their children.

We believe that almost every problem that a child experiences related to learning and adjustment at school is directly related to parenting and/or instruction. This means that we can be successful with almost every child if we work together as a team; home and school, parents and teachers, to solve those problems. We believe every student can succeed if the adults in their lives work together, in a focused and purposeful manner, as a united team.

Last week I received an email from one of our CSA parents with her comments and feedback about our homework assignments. We appreciated her feedback, and welcome input from our parents as we journey together in providing a quality education to each and every child that attends CSA!

In partnership with you,

Shelley Stockwell

PS If you missed the first editions of Homework Assignments please stop in the office or visit the [www.CSAschool.com](http://www.CSAschool.com) web site for the early editions.

## **Homework Assignment #5**

We hope you have been working on building that climate for learning in your family we talked about at the end of last year. We also hope that you have been working on developing parental control procedures to help organize your family activities. We have one more parental control procedure that we would like you to consider. We think it is so

important that we have kept it until last, and we have made it a Homework Assignment itself. It is probably the most difficult Homework Assignment to complete, but it will lead to huge benefits in your child's improved academic performance. Here it is: **Homework Assignment #5 – Turn off the TV!**

Television is just a little over 50 years old. In addition, over those fifty years, we have come to know video games, computers, cell phones and a host of other technical devices. While these devices are enormously useful in improving the productivity of adults and making entertainment of many kinds readily available in your home any time of the day or night; we believe they are interfering with the healthy development of children and disrupting the learning process that leads to the acquisition of academic skills.

We believe that parents need to control the amount of television and technical communication exposure that their children have until the child can use these tools effectively. We recommend that exposure to electronic media be almost non-existent from birth until age three or four, the time at which the child is walking and talking with ease; that minimal exposure, in the parents' presence, be allowed from age 3 to 5; that minimal, independent, but parent-chosen exposure, be allowed until the child is reading and doing arithmetic with ease; and that from age 10 on, exposure to all electronic media be monitored by the parents and limited to half or less of the time students are in school each week.

We have three main concerns about television and other electronic media.

1. We are concerned that the overexposure to electronic media is actually changing the neurological development of children's brains, leading to learning and attention problems.
2. We are concerned that so much time is spent watching TV and interacting with electronic devices, that the physical, emotional and social development of children is being stunted.
3. We are concerned that the electronic media in all its forms overwhelms the child with moral and social messages that are confusing, contradictory, and often damaging, to the extent that the moral development and leadership provided by parents is compromised.

Let's review these concerns in a little more detail.

### **Neurological Development**

As we pointed out earlier, in the human species brain development is far from completed when a baby is born into the world. A great deal of that development is completed in the first three years and almost all is completed by age 8, but continued brain development and important changes in the brain go on well into the early 20s. The most recent brain research is revealing that the brain is strongly influenced by what happens to it. This concept is called plasticity. The brain is like plastic – it is not all formed and determined at birth. It can be molded or formed. It changes, and grows, and develops, based on the experiences it encounters. This is why we have emphasized the importance of proper diet and regular rest. It also is why we stress the importance of critical emotional and

language experiences for children and parents every day. These experiences shape the development of the brain. The television experience is very different than human interaction. It is one way, it is passive, it is excitable, and it is fast. We are concerned that lots of exposure to television early in life, is a problem.

And research is starting to confirm our worries. Alarming reports about the amount of television watched each day by children, and the number of children – even infants – who have television in their bedrooms, are now being followed by research that shows some of the results of this exposure. There is now a documented correlation between the number of hours a child watches TV and the likelihood that the child will develop an attention deficit.

Since the late 1960s, about the time television became a common fixture in all US homes, we have been struggling with a new set of learning related handicaps. Before then we did not have Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In the last twenty years we have had a large and alarming increase in this spectrum disorder in children. This is a type of disorder that is based on a syndrome, or a collection of symptoms, that are manifested in children in different ways and different intensity. On one end of that spectrum is Autism and Aspergers and on the other end are Attention Deficits and Learning Disabilities. The symptoms on this continuum are all related to language development, attention, and social interaction. These three areas are all impacted by television exposure. We cannot prove it now, but we believe that research will show in the next decade that at least some of these problems are related to over exposure at young ages to electronic communication.

### **Time on the Right Tasks**

Our biggest concern about television and video games is that they take up too much time that needs to be spent on other important developmental tasks. From birth to age 8 or 10 the brain development we talked about earlier is dependent on the development of motor skills, sensory pathways, exposure to real spoken language, and exposure to social and emotional experiences. When children are spending 3 hours a day watching television, this is the average in the US; they have little time left over to do other things that are very important to development. We will be giving more Homework Assignments in the next few months that take time to complete. Time that will not be available if you don't turn off the television.

Children need real interaction with real people and real things. Reading and writing is the process of using symbolic marks on a page to represent real language and real experiences. When children come to school without those real experiences they will be at a disadvantage. When we are trying to teach the skill of reading it will be hard to get the attention of children who get most of their information from electronic media. Children need exposure to books, and magazines and people who read to and with them, if they are to acquire this very basic skill.

### **Moral Development**

At CSA we are concerned about what children will be able to do and what they will know when they leave our school. We are also very concerned about what kind of people they will be. We believe that you as parents are also concerned about the moral and character development of your children. There are so many different and confusing messages that are sent to children on television and other electronic media that your parental influence will be challenged. If we just concern ourselves with advertising on children's television we can see that messages about what children should eat drink and play with bombard our children all of the time. Going beyond that to examine the content of the shows gives us even more worry. Sex, violence, inappropriate social interaction, and many, many other messages are delivered over and over again at high intensity to our children every day. And there is no age or readiness filter that can assure parents that what their child is seeing is appropriate for that child's emotional, social and moral level of development. The only answer to this important dilemma is to limit TV watching, monitor TV watching, and watch TV with your child.

So what are our recommendations? They are to recognize the enormous power that electronic media has over your children. Realize that children will need to learn how to use this media responsibly. We recommend a developmental approach that provides strong restrictions on exposure at early ages, with gradually more exposure under the direction of the parents. Eventually, as in all areas of responsibility, you will need to give your child choices, and in the end you will have to trust them to use the electronic media in moderation and to their benefit.

**Here are some basic guidelines:**

**Ages birth to 4** – During this period watching television should be severely restricted. Until the child is walking and talking with ease, no television is best. After those milestones have been achieved, watching television with the parents can be allowed. We suggest viewing at this age be mainly of content of real things. Programs that show real people doing things, like singing or acting out stories, or reciting nursery rhymes are helpful. Television viewing at this age should not be daily and no more than one hour at a time.

**Age 4 to 8** – During this period children can be allowed to watch television shows that their parents have chosen. It is still best if the child watches the programs with the parent. In the 4-8 age range television watching should be limited to no more than one hour per day. Television should be very restricted until the child is reading and doing basic addition with ease, in other words - first grade work. After those milestones are reached, this means the child is also in school and able to pay attention and follow directions, it would be reasonable to allow more exposure.

(We recommend you buy an additional electronic device called a digital video recorder. TIVO is the best known brand name for these machines, but there are many choices, some directly related to specific cable or satellite TV outlets. Using these devices you can easily record television programs and preview them before letting your children watch them. When watching with children you can skip over advertising that is often not appropriate for the age of the programming you have chosen for your child. For older

children these devices can help you teach children how to get information and appropriate entertainment from television, while watching it at times that is not disruptive of other activities, and while cutting out exposure to hours of needless advertising.)

**Age 8 to 11** – During this period of development you should be teaching your child to make good choices in their TV watching. Limits on how much time per day can be spent watching television should be set and program content that is unacceptable should be clearly identified. Children should then be allowed to make their own choices under parental supervision. At this age, staying at an hour or less of TV watching a day is best. If all of the other Homework Assignments that are coming in the next few weeks are completed each day, then more TV watching can be allowed. What you will find is that when time for the other assignments are allotted, an hour a day of TV is hard to get in.

**Age 12 to Adult** – During this period of development you are pretty much going to have to rely on the work you have done earlier with your child. You can and should set limits on time spent watching TV and you should review the content that is being watched, but by this age the child is going to need to be ready to make good decisions on their own. We recommend you use as a guideline half of the amount of time the child spends in school as the outside limit of the hours they can spend engaged with electronic communication devices – including video games. That is roughly 15 to 20 hours per week. This is far below the national average, so it will not happen unless you have established important alternative activities that keep the attention of your children and that have become habits and routines of their day. The most difficult problems at this age will be video games and internet browsing. Both of these experiences hold important dangers to the health, safety and moral development of your children.

The ages and recommendations we mention above are not hard and firm. You and your family will have to decide what is best for you. We offer them as what we consider reasonable guidelines. But they are not just our recommendations. You can easily do an internet search to find the recommendations of pediatricians, psychologists and parent/family advocates. You will find our recommendations are well within the norm of professional recommendations.

We think that creating an important balance of real physical, social and emotional experiences with the electronic experiences of the media, is important for social adjustment and happiness in life. We know that the basic skills of reading and math will not be acquired and maintained without their daily use. The more time students of all ages spend reading and writing and applying the basic concepts of math, the better they will do in school and the more successful they will be in life. So turn off the TV and give them a chance.

## **Homework Assignment # 6**

Now that you have turned off the TV, we are going to suggest some things for you to do with those extra hours. Elementary school is about learning how to read. We know that the most important skills in life are feeling good about yourself and getting along and

working with others. Individuals who know how to do those things, even if they don't have academic skills, have been successful in life. That's why we put loving and listening as the most important Homework Assignments. But being successful in school and in almost every job today, a person needs to be a good reader. Math and writing are important too, but not nearly as important as reading.

So what can you do to help your child learn to read and become a highly skilled reader. Here it is – **Homework Assignment # 8 Read to your child every day.**

We recommend that from the time you bring your baby home from the hospital until they finish middle school that you read to and/or with your child for 30 minutes to an hour every day. By reading to your child every day you show them how to read, and by simply doing that small thing each day, in most every case, your child will learn easily to read with little instructional difficulty.

Here is how it works.

When you bring your child home from the hospital, start reading to them in short intervals for 5 to 10 minutes at a time. Do this several times a day. Select books that are filled with rhyme, rhythm, repetition and music. Poems and lullabies that repeat over and over are excellent choices. Nursery rhymes, and other children's verses, were designed to acquaint the young child with the sound and texture of our language. They help young children become accustomed to how sounds fit together to make words. This is called phonemic awareness, a skill that is required of all readers.

Even when your child is an infant you can give them books to play with, and chew one, and look at. Pick colorful ones made from cloth or plastic or hard thick cardboard. Let them get used to how books fit together. And from time to time read those books; that may just have pictures or big colorful letters and numbers, to your children.

As your child learns to sit up and starts to talk, get them big colorful picture books. Some books are just pictures and these are good to teach your child how we move through the book from front to back, right side up, looking left to right. Most will have simple words on each page and you can read those to your children as you point to the word and the picture letting them turn the pages. Between the ages of 1 and 3 gradually work your child up to sitting and listening to you read for up to 15 minutes or more during the day, and spend another 15 to 30 minutes reading to them at night before they go to sleep. Mix in singing and nursery rhymes and they will learn these from memory. Auditory memory of sounds and words is another important prerequisite to reading.

From 3 to 5 years of age make sure that you let your child see you reading. Read the paper, magazines, the computer screen, books, recipes, signs, the work you bring home from the office, around where your child is playing; and from time to time draw your child's attention to what you are reading and why you are reading. All children want to be like their parents. If you are an active reader they will want to be one too. Always continue this modeling for your child as they get older.

During this 3-5 age period be sure to introduce more and more books of more difficulty to your child. Get them to sit in your lap or beside you when you read to them, and from time to time run your finger under the words that you are reading. Read the comics from the paper to your children at this age, pointing from box to box to help them learn the left to right progression of reading. As they approach five you may stop and let them fill in or guess a word or try to tell the comic story from the pictures. Continue with rhyming and repetitive stories and start to point out to them that the words that sound alike also look alike on the page.

Get your child pencils, pens, brushes and paint, markers, chalk and other things for them to play with. Get them lots of books and objects with the alphabet displayed in various ways. Encourage them when they try to play at writing. Ask them what they wrote and they will often read it back to you. Let them watch you write or word process, and read back to them what you write. Write them little notes and read them to them. Write their name out for them in many different ways and ask them to copy it. Ask them to find the letters from their name on blocks or other toys.

Don't pressure them to read but read to them every day. Before too long they will want to read and ask for help. Give them help and most of all keep reading to them every day.

As your child starts to read in Kindergarten through Navigator, ask them to read with you. Ask your Navigator teacher to let your child bring home books from school that they are reading at school, so they can read to you at home. When your child is between the ages of 5 and 8, work up to 30 minutes of reading together with your child, at one time each day. Most of this time should still be spent with you reading to the child. Start with the child reading to you for up to five minutes and then you read the rest of the time to them. Gradually increase the time your child reads to you to no more than 15 minutes of this thirty minute time. Keep the pressure off. Let them read what and when they can, and when they miss a word, give it to them as quickly as possible. During your reading together time you don't want to work on phonics drills or decoding, you want to work on having fun, getting the ideas, understanding the purpose of reading. That's why you need to do most of the reading until the child demands to have more time. Spend time talking together about what you read. Find out what they like to read about and what they like or don't like about the stories. Start with picture books and gradually work up to books that have more words than pictures. Do this reading activity every day, and if thirty minutes isn't enough, read more.

Get your children many books of different levels and let them keep them in their room. Help them find a place where they can use the books whenever they want to, but you can easily find them when you want to read together. Select some books that are special ones you choose to read to your child, and that you take back to your room each day. Start at this age to buy your children magazine subscriptions and do that every year on their birthday or Christmas. Read the child's magazine with them when it comes and encourage them to complete the activities in the magazine. From Kindergarten on, give your child money to buy at least one book each time the school schedules a book fair. Go

to the book fair at night and marvel at the books. Take your child to book stores in the community and sit in the children's section with them and enjoy the books together. As soon as they are reading, take them to the library in your community and get them a library card. Take them to the library on a regular basis every couple weeks.

When your child enters the Navigator Unit he should be reading fluently and be able to complete reading books on her own. Keep reading to them every day for 30 minutes to an hour. At this age you can start switching the reading you do to your children to chapter books, longer books that it takes several days to a week or longer to get through. Later this spring we will be publishing a list of books that every child should be exposed to. Pick books from this list. Let your child pick books at the library or bookstore that they would like to hear. Use your book selections for reading to your child to help you teach lessons that you want your child to learn. Read from the Holy Book of your family's religion. There are some good anthologies of stories for children that present ideas related to morals or character, and others that demonstrate good manners and social interactions. These are good books to choose to read to your children.

At the Navigator level and on through middle school, we would like to see children read a book a week. Start to assign part of the time you spend reading with your child each day to have your child read to you from the book they are working on, or to talk with you about the content of that book. As your child moves on to middle school more time can be spent on tracking what your child is reading and talking to them about their reading. This is a good time to start reading the same book individually, and then discussing the book together at family times like a dinner or the daily reading time. Don't give up reading together with your child. By this time you will have established a valuable routine for your child. This routine is reading an hour or more each day. If your child feels like they are too big to be read to then simply make sure they read an hour or more a day and that they talk to you about what they are reading. The reading list we will publish can be one guide of the books your child should read before they leave CSA.

We want children to read all they can but books on tape are another way to make children aware of good literature. Books on tape should not take the place of daily reading but they can enhance the reading process. Many children use time in the car, and they have a lot of that coming to CSA each day, to do things like watch videos or play electronic games. Last week we discussed some of our concerns about those practices. Books on tape played in the car are a good substitute. Recorded books allow the child

If you follow the simple daily routine that is outlined above, it is very likely that your child will have no difficulty with reading. As your child acquires the basic skills of reading, your efforts to read with them and to engage them in daily reading should increase. Most children will learn to read before they are 10 years olds. The difference between good, efficient, highly skilled readers, and poor readers who read slow and don't remember what they read, is time spent reading. The more your child reads each day, the better reader they will become. Your role as a parent is not to teach reading – we will do that at school. Your role is to model good reading behavior, to read aloud to your child so he learns what the language sounds like, to read in the presence of your child so she

understands what reading is for and can see how it works. Your job is to keep reading to your child and to keep your child reading, so he or she will get the practice they need in this important skill.

## **Homework Assignment # 7**

Earlier this month we promised three things you can do at home that are the most useful to improve your child's academic success. The first was: "Turn off the TV". The second was: "Read with your child every day" The third is "**Hold high and appropriate expectations for your child's behavior at school and his academic achievement**"

In the 1950s and 1960s, in university labs all over the US, behavioral scientists were running mice, rats, guinea pigs, pigeons, and even flat worms through a variety of mazes and other tasks, trying to show how rewards and punishments effect learning. They learned that rewards and punishments change behavior as long as the rewards and punishments are consistently and continuously applied.

During this intensive research on operant conditioning methods, the researchers had a repeated problem with a confounding variable. A confounding variable is a variable that is not designed into the research but appears to be causing at least some of the outcomes. What the researchers noticed was that the animals handled by certain of the lab techs did noticeably better on the tests than the animals handled by other lab techs. They hypothesized that these the lab techs were doing something to affect how well their animals performed.

After testing many variables, the scientists decided to check how the lab techs *thought* about their animals. They formed two groups of lab techs and gave them each animals to run tests on. The test animals were identical in every way and were randomly selected from a larger group and assigned to each lab tech. But when the researchers gave the lab techs from the experimental group their animals, they told them that their animals were specially bred from animals that had done very well in the past. The experimental group of lab techs was told that their animals were smarter than the others. Remarkably, the animals who the lab techs *thought* were smarter performed much better on all the tests.

This basic research has been replicated repeatedly in many settings, with different kinds of animals. The results were always the same. ***When the lab techs thought their animals were smarter, their animals did better.***

In 1965 a Harvard Psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, decided to try the experiment on humans. He teamed up with an elementary school principal, Leonore Jacobson, in San Francisco. Together they administered an intelligence test to all the children in the school. Then they *randomly* selected 20% of the students and, without regard to the actual test scores, told the teachers that these *special* students did so well on the test that it was clear they would "bloom" or make a quick academic "spurt" in the next school year.

At the end of the school year the researchers retested all of the students. Those in the "special" group, those who the teachers thought were smarter, did much better on the second test than all the other students. The youngest students showed the biggest "spurt" with the special group improving by an average of 27 points and the other students improving by an average of 12 points. That is a full standard deviation increase on the IQ score, a score that is not supposed to change.

This result was labeled at the time as the Pygmalion effect, or the self fulfilling prophecy, and the researcher published a book that became famous called Pygmalion in the Classroom. The research has been replicated many times with the same results and Dr. Rosenthal spent the rest of his career applying these findings to staff development and personnel supervision issues.

An expectation is a belief about what someone can do. When you hold an expectation that your child will do well in school, you give that child many subtle but important messages. Because you believe your child will succeed, you are saying to the child, "I know you are smart, I know school will be easy for you, I know you are a good person, I know you will do well in school." When you truly believe and expect these things of your child, they will happen. So hold high expectations for your child's performance in school, and celebrate the results when they happen as what you expected of such a fine child.

An expectation is different, however, from a demand. Unfortunately some parents, and many politicians (who think they can solve school learning problems by passing mandates), get expectations and demands mixed up. A demand says you must complete certain achievements by a certain date or else. "Or else you'll get punished, or I will be upset and disappointed, or I'll make you do lots of school work at home etc." When a parent sets a demand for a child, they are actually saying to that child, "I'm not sure you can make it without my setting the demand and promising a reward or punishment. I don't really believe you are smart, so I want to make sure you get the skills you need. I'm going to make sure you learn!" Remember, you really can't change the behavior of others. Your children will be successes or failures on their own, by the choices they make. You can love them and respect them and support them, but you cannot go to school for them. By holding high expectations you show them what you want, and you tell them very clearly that you believe they are smart, and good, and can do the job. When you make demands, you tell them you have doubts about them and are afraid they need you to do it for them.

Demands also cause pressure which creates stress - that enemy of higher level thinking. Pressure to perform in school is one of the biggest reasons why boys, who mature late, have trouble reading. When they fall behind early, they fear more failure; and then as they fail, they identify themselves as bad readers and school failures. We see it happen often.

Pressure takes the fun out of learning and going to school. Pressure also causes avoidance. High demands will cause your children to avoid you and to avoid school work. "The demands are too high, and my parent already doubts I can do it, so why don't I just avoid the whole problem. Why don't I get in trouble, or be good at athletics, or learn to talk my way through it, or be cute, or shy." These are all avoidance statements kids use to deal with pressure and to excuse not doing well in school.

So hold high expectations, but remember that an expectation is a belief that you have about your child, not an outcome you are demanding gets produced.

It is very difficult for a parent today to figure out what should be expected of children. The mass media driven culture gives us so many different messages about what is "normal". Times have changed so much since we were kids, and even quite a bit since you were kids. New demands are being placed on students by the new testing laws and by parental fears that unless the student gets a great education they will not be able to compete in college or the job world. This is a huge burden for children to carry. As parents you need to seek guidance on what is appropriate to expect from your children.

We recommend several books for your review and to keep around for reference as your children grow up and move through school. These books will give you a good idea of what to expect of children at each age level and grade level in school. The first series of books is called the Gesell Institute Child Development Series by Louise Bates Ames. This series of easy to read paperback books – one for each age through age nine and a single volume for age 10 to 14 – is based on a half century of research by the Gesell Institute. Dr. Arnold Gesell, PhD MD, used systematic observations of children to identify the norm of development in children. The Gesell screening tool for school readiness has been used for years by many school districts to assess new Kindergarten students. For a good description of what to expect during the school years ages 4-14, we highly recommend the easy to read book by Chip Wood called Yard Sticks. Mr. Wood draws on over 25 years of school experience and much of the research mentioned above, to bring you good summaries of what to expect at school. Finally we recommend The Educated Child by former US Secretary of Education William Bennett. This book is a parents' guide to what to look for in your child and in your school from preschool through eighth grade. Mr. Bennett is the well known conservative TV commentator and author, and while we do not endorse all of his opinions expressed in this book, we believe it is a good guide for parental expectations.

It is hard to believe but the research is clear. Expectations are like magic. What you expect is what you will get. So believe in your children's goodness and ability, by holding high expectation for their behavior and academic achievement, and you will add an important boost to their success.

## **Homework Assignment # 7**

Earlier this month we promised three things you can do at home that are the most useful to improve your child's academic success. The first was: "Turn off the TV". The second was: "Read with your child every day" The third is "**Hold high and appropriate expectations for your child's behavior at school and his academic achievement**"

In the 1950s and 1960s, in university labs all over the US, behavioral scientists were running mice, rats, guinea pigs, pigeons, and even flat worms through a variety of mazes and other tasks, trying to show how rewards and punishments effect learning. They learned that rewards and punishments change behavior as long as the rewards and punishments are consistently and continuously applied.

During this intensive research on operant conditioning methods, the researchers had a repeated problem with a confounding variable. A confounding variable is a variable that is not designed into the research but appears to be causing at least some of the outcomes. What the researchers noticed was that the animals handled by certain of the lab techs did noticeably better on the tests than the animals handled by other lab techs. They hypothesized that these the lab techs were doing something to affect how well their animals performed.

After testing many variables, the scientists decided to check how the lab techs *thought* about their animals. They formed two groups of lab techs and gave them each animals to run tests on. The test animals were identical in every way and were randomly selected from a larger group and assigned to each lab tech. But when the researchers gave the lab techs from the experimental group their animals, they told them that their animals were specially bred from animals that had done very well in the past. The experimental group of lab techs was told that their animals were smarter than the others. Remarkably, the animals who the lab techs *thought* were smarter performed much better on all the tests.

This basic research has been replicated repeatedly in many settings, with different kinds of animals. The results were always the same. ***When the lab techs thought their animals were smarter, their animals did better.***

In 1965 a Harvard Psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, decided to try the experiment on humans. He teamed up with an elementary school principal, Leonore Jacobson, in San Francisco. Together they administered an intelligence test to all the children in the school. Then they *randomly* selected 20% of the students and, without regard to the actual test scores, told the teachers that these *special* students did so well on the test that it was clear they would "bloom" or make a quick academic "spurt" in the next school year.

At the end of the school year the researchers retested all of the students. Those in the "special" group, those who the teachers thought were smarter, did much better on the second test than all the other students. The youngest students showed the biggest "spurt" with the special group improving by an average of 27 points and the other students improving by an average of 12 points. That is a full standard deviation increase on the IQ score, a score that is not supposed to change.

This result was labeled at the time as the Pygmalion effect, or the self fulfilling prophecy, and the researches published a book that became famous called Pygmalion in the Classroom. The research has been replicated many times with the same results and Dr. Rosenthal spent the rest of his career applying these findings to staff development and personnel supervision issues.

An expectation is a belief about what someone can do. When you hold an expectation that your child will do well in school, you give that child many subtle but important messages. Because you believe your child will succeed, you are saying to the child, "I know you are smart, I know school will be easy for you, I know you are a good person, I know you will do well in school." When you truly believe and expect these things of your child, they will happen. So hold high expectations for your child's performance in school, and celebrate the results when they happen as what you expected of such a fine child.

An expectation is different, however, from a demand. Unfortunately some parents, and many politicians (who think they can solve school learning problems by passing mandates), get expectations and demands mixed up. A demand says you must complete certain achievements by a certain date or else. "Or else you'll get punished, or I will be upset and disappointed, or I'll make you do lots of school work at home etc." When a parent sets a demand for a child, they are actually saying to that child, "I'm not sure you can make it without my setting the demand and promising a reward or punishment. I don't really believe you are smart, so I want to make sure you get the skills you need. I'm going to make sure you learn!" Remember, you really can't change the behavior of others. Your children will be successes or failures on their own, by the choices they make. You can love them and respect them and support them, but you cannot go to school for them. By holding high expectations you show them what you want, and you tell them very clearly that you believe they are smart, and good, and can do the job. When you make demands, you tell them you have doubts about them and are afraid they need you to do it for them.

Demands also cause pressure which creates stress - that enemy of higher level thinking. Pressure to perform in school is one of the biggest reasons why boys, who mature late, have trouble reading. When they fall behind early, they fear more failure; and then as they fail, they identify themselves as bad readers and school failures. We see it happen often.

Pressure takes the fun out of learning and going to school. Pressure also causes avoidance. High demands will cause your children to avoid you and to avoid school work. "The demands are too high, and my parent already doubts I can do it, so why don't I just avoid the whole problem. Why don't I get in trouble, or be good at athletics, or learn to talk my way through it, or be cute, or shy." These are all avoidance statements kids use to deal with pressure and to excuse not doing well in school.

So hold high expectations, but remember that an expectation is a belief that you have about your child, not an outcome you are demanding gets produced.

It is very difficult for a parent today to figure out what should be expected of children. The mass media driven culture gives us so many different messages about what is "normal". Times have changed so much since we were kids, and even quite a bit since you were kids. New demands are being placed on students by the new testing laws and by parental fears that unless the student gets a great education they will not be able to compete in college or the job world. This is a huge burden for children to carry. As parents you need to seek guidance on what is appropriate to expect from your children.

We recommend several books for your review and to keep around for reference as your children grow up and move through school. These books will give you a good idea of what to expect of children at each age level and grade level in school. The first series of books is called the Gesell Institute Child Development Series by Louise Bates Ames. This series of easy to read paperback books – one for each age through age nine and a single volume for age 10 to 14 – is based on a half century of research by the Gesell Institute. Dr. Arnold Gesell, PhD MD, used systematic observations of children to identify the norm of development in children. The Gesell screening tool for school readiness has been used for years by many school districts to assess new Kindergarten students. For a good description of what to expect during the school years ages 4-14, we highly recommend the easy to read book by Chip Wood called Yard Sticks. Mr. Wood draws on over 25 years of school experience and much of the research mentioned above, to bring you good summaries of what to expect at school. Finally we recommend The Educated Child by former US Secretary of Education William Bennett. This book is a parents' guide to what to look for in your child and in your school from preschool through eighth grade. Mr. Bennett is the well known conservative TV commentator and author, and while we do not endorse all of his opinions expressed in this book, we believe it is a good guide for parental expectations.

It is hard to believe but the research is clear. Expectations are like magic. What you expect is what you will get. So believe in your children's goodness and ability, by holding high expectation for their behavior and academic achievement, and you will add an important boost to their success.

## **Homework Assignment # 8**

If you read about how to stay healthy and avoid major illnesses, the prescription is invariably the same - eat a healthy diet, don't smoke, and get 45 minutes of exercise every day. Daily exercise does amazing things for people suffering from emotional stress, depression and anxiety. Daily exercise is an important part of a healthy balanced adult life, so we should help our children establish that habit early in life. But in addition to preparing children for a healthy adult life, daily movement and exercise will prepare your child for academic success in school.

Homework Assignment # 8 is: **Get your child moving every day.**

In earlier assignments we have discussed how children's brains develop. When they are born into the world they come with an excellent well functioning brain that is a miracle of life. But that brain is not fully developed. It needs lots of work to make important connections. Those connections are made by thousands of trials and errors, and then repeated successes by the individual child. While the child is able to hear and see at birth, the effective use of those senses is dependent on the development of motor skills and the experiences of sound and sight.

During the first 5 years of life the child's main job is the development of the basic motor skills associated with rolling over, crawling, standing, walking and running. After those skills are established they need to be practiced regularly so they become smooth and effortless. At CSA we evaluate all of our students on basic motor skills when they enter school, and you would be surprised at how many students are behind in these basic skills.

During those first 5 years children are learning to use their eyes and ears as well. The ears do not require motor skill, but children need to learn how to focus on the important sounds by discriminating between sounds that are far and near, and sounds that are human voices as opposed to mechanical noises in the environment. And they need to learn how our language sounds, and then learn how to create those sounds themselves. To be accomplished at hearing, listening and speaking, they need to be able to move around and experience sound from many angles and situations. When children are born they do have sight, but it will take a couple of years for them to acquire the ocular motor skills required to focus near and far, and to switch between the two with ease. They also learn how to use both eyes together by aiming them at the same object and moving them in unison from target to target (if they don't learn this they see double all the time or part of the time), and to integrate the images they get from the periphery of their sight with those they get from their central vision. These are complicated motor skills that come in place through trial and error, and through a lot of movement.

One of the most important reasons why you need to turn off the TV and protect young children from viewing it during the first 5 years, is that movement and motor activity are what children need the most for their optimized development. They need lots of practice to learn many complicated motor skills, and the time spent watching TV is time spent *not moving*.

Parents have become very good at protecting their children from the physical harm and risks in the environment, but in some ways this protection is getting in the way of the movement children need. Car seat and infant carriers are a good example. Children certainly need the protection they get from comprehensive restraint devices used in cars. But when they leave the car, they should leave the restraint. Parents often leave infants in these carriers when they leave the car because the infant is easier to manage in the carrier in other settings. Carrying a child in your arms and allowing them to crawl and sit on their own are experiences that too many children are missing in the name of safety. Children need the freedom to move and explore under parental supervision. Turn off the

TV and watch and play with your child as they explore all the wonderful things you have in your home - like doors that open and close, stairs that go up and down, rooms that connect but are completely different. Playgrounds are another big problem. In our efforts to prevent injury, we have eliminated the random nature of outdoor play that was typical in our generation. Many children today lack the experience of climbing trees, playing in open fields and neighborhood yards, and running or roller skating along sidewalks to chase siblings and neighborhood friends.

From 5 to 10 years of age, children are learning to control and coordinate their bodies. At these ages they also begin to understand the concept of working together and getting along by engaging in active games. We prefer games of their own making because they allow children the opportunity of random exploration that is the self guiding mechanism that leads children to understand themselves as individuals in a community of people.

During this 5 to 10 years of age period, children are also learning the dynamics of time and space. They need lots of opportunities to move through real time and space in order to learn the important skills of motor planning. This can only be achieved through experience with movement over time, where the child learns from past experiences that teach them to predict future outcomes. We call this skill *motor planning*-which makes it sound so simple: planning how to get up out of my seat and go to the coat hooks without running into the table or another student; putting my coat on and getting in line to go outside. These are simple motor planning tasks that some students still cannot complete by the end of first grade. These are also the rudimentary skills of planning and predicting that lead to science and engineering and business planning, and success in life - and this all begins with learning how to move with ease.

The main physiological characteristic that separates humans from other animals is that we stand on our back legs. This difference has led us to see the world differently, and has blessed us with a different kind of brain. The human brain has a large section - the frontal lobe - where the functions of forethought and logic reside, that is not present in other mammals. In order for us to accomplish this wonderful feat of standing erect, we had to master the skill of *balance*. Watch your children make huge changes and gains once they have learned to stand up. Language takes off and vision improves. When children master balance, thinking begins. Balance is the organizer of neurological development. The more activities your child engages with that involve balance, the quicker and the better their brains will become organized. During the critical period between ages 4 and 8 years old, children are learning to be self aware of their bodies, and to understand how they exist or look in time and space. They learn the difference between their top and bottom, their front and back, and finally their left and right. They learn the words that describe this physical organization of the world. Eventually they establish a dominance of one side or the other. All of this new learning is reflected in the organization of the various parts of the brain, and the integration of the various functions of the brain. All of this organization and integration is coordinated by the motor skill of balance. And isn't that also the word we use for happiness in life - *balance*. The proper organization and integration of all things that are important to us resides in our ability to bring *balance* into our lives. The things that we learn and desire have their basis in early

and ongoing physical balance. Your children will achieve this critical balance, physical coordination and organization, by active movement every day.

We recommend that children from birth to school age have ample opportunities to move as much as possible every day. Restricting movement or allowing children to sit for hours watching television is not useful. The child's interaction with manipulative toys and wheel toys during this period is very useful. Opportunities both indoor and outdoor are helpful. Parallel play along side other children is useful, but interactive play with other children is unlikely to happen before the age of four.

From 5 to 10 years of age, the elementary years, we encourage parents to make sure their children get at least one hour of active play every day in addition to their school day. Our preference is that this be outdoor random play of the child's choosing. Exposure to fresh air and sunlight is important to healthy growth. It would be best if children can play outside, near home, with siblings or other children who are within a three year age span of the child. We think children in a three year age span work and play well together, which is why we organize our learning families at school in that same age span. Even better is the presence of groups of older and younger children in separate groups, so younger children can watch and sometimes engage with older role models. We are describing the old fashioned neighborhood make up of multiple families who know each other well, and all watch out for the children. If you have this arrangement in your home setting, feel blessed and try to preserve it; if you don't, try your best to replicate it. At this age we do not oppose - but we do not encourage - structured recreation or group sports. We believe that children get the most from active, outdoor, random play of their own choosing. Children of this age rarely have the coordination, physical skill, or physical strength to be successful in sports, and their lack of development causes risks of physical or emotional injury. The large differences between children in the pace of development can also lead to competitive interaction between students who are not equally matched - simply because of normal development. If you wish to expose your child to structured activities, we suggest you select individual activities that develop the whole body, with an emphasis on balance. Good activities would be running, dance (especially ballet), swimming, bike riding and non-competitive martial arts.

From 10 to 14 years of age, the middle school years, it is time to consider organized sports. By this time physical development issues are still present, but they are beginning to even out. The potential for the successful development of sporting skills is much more possible. If your interest is in preparing your child for high school sports (and beyond), we think that the middle school years is the earliest this stress should be placed on children. The sports of high school and above loom large in the minds of parents because our society places such a high premium on this spectator, television-based entertainment. The reality of this activity is that only a small minority of students ever compete in these activities in high school and beyond. The rest of the students just learn to watch. After high school even a smaller minority of individuals participate in baseball, football, basketball, volley ball or soccer in any kind of organized fashion. We think for some children these organized sporting opportunities provide special experiences that build knowledge of team work and develop the skills of persistence and hard work. These

experiences can apply to many things in life. On the other hand, we think it is just as valuable to focus your child's attention on developing sporting and other physical activities that will develop life long habits. These habits will help them stay fit and balanced their whole life. Examine what adults do to stay healthy, and introduce these activities to your child in middle school. Encourage them to participate in some kind of physical activity on a daily basis all the way through high school. Here is a list of suggestions: running, walking/hiking, bike riding, downhill/cross country skiing, tennis, racquet ball, golf, weight training, canoeing, sailing, swimming etc. Outdoor work and household tasks also provide good opportunities for physical activity.

Children in the pre-teen and teen years will quickly arrive at the time when they start to drive. At this time they become more likely to be using computers and watching TV or movies. If by the end of middle school you have not taught them the need and the joy of daily outdoor physical activity, it is very likely that they will become observers in our spectator culture. Help them now to establish these important habits.

A very good source and easy to understand book on the importance of physical activity to the academic and intellectual development of children is the book Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All in Your Head, by Carla Hannaford. If you want some easy to use physical activities you can introduce at home that will help develop the brain, we suggest Brain Gym (Teachers' Edition), by Paul and Gail Dennison.

## **Homework Assignment # 9**

This week and next we will discuss Character Education. CSA was the fortunate recipient of a four year federal grant to develop, implement, and research a new Character Education program. Our mission of providing a safe place for children to grow and learn is built around understanding that we must always be aware of the whole child – not just his brain. We believe that includes recognition that there is a moral dimension to the development of each child. We are not interested in teaching religion, but we acknowledge that there are universal human values that are included in all religions. We believe that we must be close partners with parents in this effort, supporting your efforts to teach moral and religious beliefs to your child, while maintaining a tolerance for all beliefs common in our society.

At school our teaching in this area stresses the importance of Character and doing what we can to develop Character in our students. We have chosen five character traits that we teach and that we believe match the other values inherent in our school structure and methods. Those character traits are: responsibility, respect, getting along, optimism, and work ethic. We teach these traits in direct lessons and by embedding them in our American History curriculum. We believe that these traits are uniquely American in that they match up well with our democratic form of government.

We also integrate these character traits in all that we do by matching our system of discipline and classroom management to these values. We believe that the internal control psychology we teach and use, matches these character traits, and the American

democratic tradition of individual freedom and the related responsibility of citizenship. Our choice to teach procedures, instead of policing a long set of rules, is an effort to communicate that each child has the individual responsibility to get along with teachers and other students. We have optimism about this task, because we believe that each child really wants to be successful and will find happiness in successful relationships with others. We all work hard at this important task and ask you to join us in teaching character to your children.

We teach procedures that govern how children and teachers organize time and space in the classroom, hallways, office, playground and pick up area. We also teach something we call *social protocols*. The first two dictionary definitions for the word protocol are: "The forms of ceremony and etiquette observed by diplomats and heads of state", and "A code of conduct." A *social protocol* is an interpersonal procedure that governs the way individuals treat each other in day to day social contact. Another good word for this concept is manners.

### **Our Homework Assignment # eight is: Teach your child manners.**

We cover social protocols, or manners, under character education because these simple day to day social interactions, are the ways that we show respect for each other, and they are the fundamental building blocks of civil society or getting along.

Since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century manners have been downplayed and forgotten in our society. They were thought to be old fashioned or too formal. As extended family changed and grandparent and aunts and uncles were no longer included in regular family gatherings or living situations, opportunities for young people to learn the rules of manners have decreased. In many families even the nuclear family no longer exists. Previously regular church attendance, or meetings of associations or clubs; were opportunities for young people to be initiated into proper social behavior. All this social activity and manners learning opportunities, has now been replaced with 35 hours of TV watching every week. The manners we observe on TV leave a lot to be desired, but they are often what we see students demonstrate daily at school. If you search the internet using social protocols or manners as search words, you will find there are many programs now that you can pay to attend, or to enroll your children. Some manners training programs are for young people trying to get into better schools, others are for those seeking employment, and still others are offered to businesses to help employees learn how to act in the work environment. Manners no longer taught in the home are now being taught in fee for service commercial programs because manners are important to success. And they are also important to avoid disaster.

Many of you are familiar with the story of Father Flanagan, the catholic priest that started a home in Nebraska for orphaned and troubled boys. The Girls and Boys Town programs have now spread to 19 locations in 14 states. These residential programs provide care and treatment for young people with very troubled histories. Many come to Boys Town after failures in other mental health programs and others are sent by the courts after

committing major offences. As Boys Town worked with these very troubled and some times criminal children, they found that the children lacked any knowledge of basic social skills. The treatment provided at Boys Town is based around family life. A husband and wife lead each home setting for 10 to 15 boys or girls. Treatment begins with teaching basic social skills to these troubled young people. And the program is remarkably successful. Where intense psychotherapy or incarceration has failed, the simple attention from loving parents to teaching the fundamental skills of getting along, works!

Manners have to be taught and learned – they do not develop normally. The best place to learn them is at home, and the best time to learn them is early in life. If you go to the Girls and Boys Town web site <http://www.girlsandboystown.org/> you can find two excellent books as references for teaching the basic social manners. Basic Social Skills for Youth outlines the eight most important social skills that lead to success in school, friendships, work and life in general. For a more exhaustive look at teaching social skills you can select Teaching Social Skills to Youth. This book describes 180 basic social skills and the exact steps that go into using the skills. These two books should give you a good guide to the social skills, or manners, that are important for your children to use. You and your spouse can decide which ones are most important in your family and start teaching them one at a time. There are also good anthologies of children's stories that you can find in good book stores under the topic manners. Reading these stories, that illustrate good manners and their benefits, to your children once or twice a week during your daily reading time, can help to illustrate to children how important social skills can be.

Using manners or social protocols at school, help your children get along with their teachers and their classmates. They reduce social tensions and disruptions, and make it easier for us to get on with our main task or teaching reading and the other subjects. If your children come to school without these skills, we will take the time to teach them here at school. Support our efforts by teaching your children manners and expecting them to use them at school and wherever they go.

## **Homework Assignment #10**

We'd like to talk some more about character education this week and then summarize the recommendations we have given so far.

We recommend two books for you to consult on the topic of character education. As we said last week, the role of the public school is not to teach religion. However we do teach *values* as one of our roles in the education of children. The character traits we teach are universal and are aligned with traditional American values. We support you in teaching

religion to your children, and in many cases the values you teach are the same ones that we teach at school. However there are some essential beliefs of religions that we cannot infuse into your child's education. The public school's role as an extension of government is to be tolerant of all beliefs, and to find the commonality of beliefs that hold us together.

You may have heard of Sir John Templeton. John Templeton grew up in a small town in Tennessee. He rose to the top of the financial world, making himself a very rich man by investing in the stock market. He also made many other people wealthy by managing the well know Templeton Investment Funds. In 1992 he sold his funds and started on his second career – the exploration of the fundamental ideas of religion. He hired researchers and statisticians to comb through all the written documents on the world's major religions, and created a comprehensive list of all of the beliefs represented in all religions. Then his researchers conducted an exhaustive cross referencing task. The results of his work is detailed in a small book that you may want to read: [Worldwide Laws of Life: 200 Eternal Spiritual Principles](#). We recommend this book because it is an example of the universal nature of moral beliefs.

At school we teach character through discussion about our six chosen character traits; we discuss with children the definition of each trait, citing many examples of the traits as they have been exhibited by real people. We have also developed a series of American History lessons that illustrate the character traits in historical events. But the most lasting way we teach character is by making sure that the ways *we treat students*, and the way *we deal with problems*, align with the character traits we want children to understand and emulate.

At home the best thing you can do to teach character is to live it. **Our Homework Assignment # 10 is: Show your children the character you want to see in them by living it every day.**

Dr. Harlow's research - mentioned in a previous homework assignment - proved that we have a genetic drive to seek the love of our parents. Because our new born need protection, nurture and guidance, our children have an inborn drive to love their parents and to seek attachment to them. Children grow up wanting more than anything else to be like their parents. Although it is very sad to contemplate, Dr. Harlow's research proved that even children of abusive parents want to love and be like their parents. That is why child abuse as a disorder is often passed on from generation to generation. Watch your small children and you will see them imitating you. When your children enter school they will brag about their family and parents, and show great pride with their friends and teacher when you visit them in school. As they reach adolescence, their initial choices about what they want in marriage - or work - will mirror what they have observed in their parents. In late adolescence and early adult life, many children will rebel against the beliefs of their parents in order to test out other roles and to create their own independent identity. Yet by the late twenties, most children come back to the values they lived with as they grew up.

You are the biggest influence on the values your child will choose to live by in their adult life. And what you do is much more important than what you say. We are reminded of this important truth in the well know poem Children Learn What They Live, by Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.

## **Children Learn What They Live**

**By Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.**

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.  
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.  
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.  
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.  
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.  
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.  
If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.  
If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.  
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.  
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.  
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.  
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.  
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.  
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.  
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.  
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.  
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.  
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.  
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

You can find this poem and advice from the author, a lecturer on family life and her associate, a psychotherapist, in a small book full of good reading called Children Learn What They Live, Parenting to Inspire Values.

**Now let's review the recommendations for Home Work that we have made so far:**

**Homework Assignment #1** - Love your children. Make sure that every day you hug your child and tell them that you love them.

**Homework Assignment #2** - Show your child you respect them by listening to them for at least 15 minutes each day.

**Homework Assignment #3** - Establish parental control procedures in your home:

Parents should control what and when children eat.

Parents should control when and how much children sleep.

Parents should not argue with children.

Parents should teach their children how to be quiet and think about their behavior.

Parents should establish daily chores for all family members.

**Homework Assignment #4** – Give your children choices and let consequences work.

**Homework Assignment #5** – Turn off the TV!

**Homework Assignment #6** - Read to your child every day.

**Homework Assignment #7** - Hold high and appropriate expectations for your child's behavior at school and his academic achievement

**Homework Assignment #8** - Get your child moving every day.

**Homework Assignment #9** - Teach your child manners.

**Homework Assignment #10** - Show your children the character you want to see in them by living it every day.

***If you follow these assignments your child's day has time for these things:***

Sleeping	8 to 10 hours
Eating at the table three scheduled times a day	1 to 2 hours
Traveling to and from CSA (make good use of this time)	1 to 2 hours
Time in school	7 hours
Outdoor play	1 to 2 hours
Self care and family chores	1 hour
Reading with parents and by self	1 hour
Watching TV	1 hour
Getting ready for bed & talking to parents	1 hour
Total	22 to 27 hours

Now we have to work in some time to do school work at home. We believe that 15 minutes to 30 minutes a day spent working with parents - or under their direction - on school related work is about right for students in K through Navigator, and 30 minutes to an hour each night is appropriate for Voyager and Middle School. As the child gets older and the projects become more challenging, more time may be needed. As a parent you will need to determine that with your child by knowing what your child needs, how he is progressing in school, and what he needs to do to complete the work that is required.

Starting next week we will discuss how you can make decisions with your child about how much work, and what kind of school work at home, is right for your child.

## **Homework Assignment # 11**

In previous *Homework Assignments* we have described a number of things that you can do at home to prepare your children for academic achievement at school. We have helped you look at many different facets of preparation, including providing an orderly parent controlled home environment, providing the nutrition, sleep and other physical development opportunities your child needs, as well as suggesting ways that you can enhance your child's internal control and character development. We have focused on these items first because we believe that our job at school will be relatively easy if your child comes to school ready for instruction with a positive attitude toward adults, order, and learning. We believe that if you provide those supports, your child will be successful at school. We also believe that your involvement and direct support of our efforts at school will give your child an added advantage.

For the rest of the year we will be focusing on the things you can do at home to directly support academic school work. In order for you to be of assistance, you must be familiar with what we are doing at school. CSA has some specific philosophies and methods that make up our unique approach to educating your child, so it is useful for you to become familiar with our approach. **Homework Assignment # 11 is – Get to know your school.**

Here are some ways that you can do that. A good place to start is reading the [www.CSAschool.com](http://www.CSAschool.com) web site. Our website includes a lot of information about what we are trying to accomplish at CSA. In addition, there are two other websites that will give you more information about the special mission of public charter schools in Michigan. Central Michigan University is the state authority that authorizes our school. Their website at <http://cmucso.org/> provides a lot of information about their role, and about the schools they authorize. The Michigan Association of Public School Academies' (MAPSA) web site also has useful information about public charter schools in Michigan [www.charterschools.org/](http://www.charterschools.org/).

The Homework Assignments that we have been publishing this year are also good reading for understanding our approach. In these assignments we have recommended a number of books that will help you better understand our school's educational philosophy. The *CSA Parent Handbook*, which you can pick up in the office or find on our website, also has information that all parents should become familiar with to support their child in school. Making a point to read the *Tuesday Times* each week will also keep you well informed as improvements are made to the school. All of these items are important for both moms and dads to read so that both parents will be helpful in working with the child. If grandparents or other adults take an active role in parenting in your family, these are good materials for them to review as well.

Your most important contact with the school is your *child's teacher*. Please make it a point to get to know her. You can start by reading her bio on the web site, or by attending the open house and culminating events that the classroom teacher schedules. It is even better to give your child's teacher a call to arrange a visit to the classroom, followed by a meeting with the classroom teachers about the rules, procedures, and activities that are practiced in your child's classroom. Do this as early in the year as possible, and don't consider it a conference about your child so much as a chance to begin what will become an important relationship with your child's teacher. At CSA every teacher has a phone in their classroom. We provide that because we believe one of the most important responsibilities of our teachers is communication with you. We want to make that communication convenient for the teacher. But we don't want calls interrupting instruction, so we have provided voice mail for each teacher. When you have a question or concern, it is best to call and get it addressed as soon as possible. All of our teachers have laptop computers that they can carry between home and work, and we provide email for all staff. Your teacher's email address is made up of their first initial and last name @CSAschool.com. If you use email, we believe this is one of the best ways to maintain regular communications with your child's teacher. Your child's classroom teacher also publishes a periodic newsletter about happenings in the class that you should read and save. Both classroom newsletters and the *Tuesday Times* are available by email at your request.

Twice a year your child's teacher will contact you to schedule a *parent teacher conference*. We believe that 100% of our parents should make these twice annual, individual conferences. Make a special effort so that both parents can participate in this important face to face discussion about what is happening at school, and what you can do at home. Six times per year your child's teacher prepares and sends you a *progress report*. Please read those reports - and if you have questions - call your child's teacher to ask them, or schedule a conference to discuss them. Included in the progress reports are the results of assessments we give regularly or periodically. Learn about those assessments and use them to follow your child's academic process. If you do not understand the assessments - or the results, discuss that with your teacher until you feel confident that you fully understand the testing data.

If you spend the time to become familiar with the mission, philosophy, methods and practices of your child's school and classroom, the many things that you can do to support your child's education will become clear to you - without your having to ask. If you visit the school and class on a regular basis, at least three or four times per year, you will have a better understanding of the work your child needs to complete. If you maintain regular communication with your child's teacher, you can ask questions about the things you can do at home to insure that your child is completing her work, and making the required progress at school.

## **Homework Assignment # 12**

Last week we talked about getting to know your school and your child's teacher, and how to establish regular communication with school. Another important way to support your child's work at school is by volunteering. **Homework Assignment #12 is: Volunteer at your child's school.**

Because public charter schools are open to all students in Michigan who wish to enroll, we cannot provide transportation to and from school. At first we thought this would be a severe disadvantage, and in a few cases the length and difficulty of the daily drive is too much for some families. Over the years however, we have learned that the voluntary act of bringing your child to school each day, creates an automatic partnership between school and family that is not available at other schools. Driving your child to school every day shows your child your commitment and support of the school, and it also brings you in close daily communication with the school. If you need to know something about school, or have a concern to discuss, it only takes a few minutes to park and come inside.

Our main motivation in asking you to volunteer is not to access your free help, or to have the school benefit from funds raised by the parent group. Our main reason for asking that parents volunteer, is that in volunteering you become partners with us in the process of educating your child. Research on effective schools has identified parent involvement as a critical correlate to success at school. So starting with the drive to school each day, become a volunteer at CSA.

Driving to school and volunteering often falls to one of the parents in a family, often the mother. It is important, that at least some times, the drive to school - and other volunteering activities - be done by the other parent, usually the father. Your child needs to see that you are both committed and involved. By volunteering you are making some important statements that will not be lost on your child. These are:

*"I care about what is going on at school."*

*"I am interested in the details of how my child is learning at school."*

*"What is happening at school with my child is something I know about."*

When your child is aware of these three statements, we are a lot more likely to be able to work together with you to solve problems that arise at school. Your active participation as a volunteer in school will give you a better idea of how you can help at home to support our work at school.

There are many ways to volunteer. Classroom work is a good place for some parents. Our classrooms are always open for parents to come in to *observe*. We ask that you simply stop in the office, identify yourself, get a visitor ID, and go to the classroom. It is always nice for the teacher to know ahead of time that you are coming, but it is not required. However, to *volunteer* in a class is a different matter. When you are volunteering it means you are helping with the procedures, activities, and instruction in the classroom. To do this effectively, you need to be under the direction of the teacher. Make an appointment before you come, to meet with the teacher and visit the classroom

as an observer first. In your meeting with the teacher she will help you learn the classroom procedures and suggest ways for you to be involved. When you come in to work as a volunteer, always check with the teacher first to see what she needs you to do that day, and always follow the classroom rules and procedures. When you have questions, ask the teacher for direction; if you have concerns or larger questions, please save those discussions for times when the class is not in session. There are many things you can help out with, from helping students with their coats and boots, to running an instructional workshop. Your work will be appreciated most, if it is in the context of the teacher's plans for the day. Parents generally want to volunteer in their child's class and we appreciate that. Young children especially like to have their parents in their class. But remember too, that one of the important lessons to be learned at school is independence. Too much involvement in your child's class can be detrimental to the social growth you want your child to experience at school. If you choose to volunteer in your own child's classroom, be there no more than two to three half days per week as your guide.

There are many other things for you to do at school that are not in your child's classroom. Our ELVS program needs parents to do independent reading with children; our TST program can teach you ways to help children who need some extra assistance; and our library needs parent assistants every day. If you want to volunteer on a daily or regular basis, please consider one of these activities. You can combine them with helping out at lunch or recess in your child's classroom, so you will get a chance to see them during part of the day. Clerical tasks are numerous throughout the school; helping teachers make copies, prepare student books or other assignments, and mounting work for display are a few examples. Assisting in the office with the *Tuesday Times*, or with sick children, or asking the secretaries for ways to be of help, will also lead you to useful tasks. Teachers always need help for special events; culminating events, school trips, camp, and after school events need parent helpers and chaperones.

If you are an organization person or leader, serving as a representative on the CSA Parent Council is a great activity. The parent council has a number of standing committees that complete many projects that help the school. Some of these projects are fund raising activities that can be time consuming, but also fun - and a good way to meet other parents. And the money that is raised is not just given to the school, but is donated to the school in the form of special projects - like the library or playground where parents can contribute their time to complete the actual projects. Both moms and dads are encouraged to be involved in this way.

As a volunteer you will learn what happens at school, and how you can help your child at home. You will come to feel a part of the larger school family, and your child will feel more comfortable and "at home" at school. You will send an important message to your child about how important you think school is for your child. And most important - you will establish a working partnership with the staff and teachers and administration of the school that will lead to your child's learning success.

## **Homework Assignments – Reading #1**

March is reading month. For the next few weeks we are going to be writing about reading and about what things you can do at home to make sure that your child becomes a good reader.

Reading is the core curriculum of elementary school. We believe that getting along with yourself, getting along with others, and working with others to solve problems, are the most important lessons children must learn in elementary school. We structure everything we do to try to infuse those lessons into the fabric of CSA. With those three skills almost everyone will be successful in life. Even people who don't acquire basic academic skills, but have those three skills, have risen to roles of leadership and wealth. But people who have those three basic social skills, and are good readers, almost never fail. Reading is the most important academic skill we teach, and it is our goal that all children acquire reading skills.

Unfortunately a large number of children in our country do not acquire functional reading skills. Looking at a variety of studies it is clear that 30% to 40% of students in US schools do not learn to read. The US Education Department's national academic test has shown repeatedly that this same proportion of students routinely fail the reading section of the test. When populations of unemployed or individuals with criminal records are measured, the reading failure jumps to double these percentages. With all the focus and effort you have heard about from the new No Child Left Behind law, reading failure in the US is still not uncommon. In the last thirty years schools have added special education services at huge expense to school budgets. The results of that effort has been extremely disappointing with over 15% of students now being identified as handicapped, and over half of those identified as Learning Disabled, or basically, unable to learn to read.

Considering the data mentioned above, the goal we have set for ourselves at CSA is quite ambitious. It is our goal, that by the end of Voyagers, 95% of our students will be reading at grade level using the Developmental Reading Assessment as our measure. We believe that almost all students can learn to read. We think there are a few students who have organic or genetically based cognitive impairments that will limit their abilities, but we believe that group amounts to 5% or less of the school population. We believe that other students will take longer to learn to read than is generally expected. Some students do learn to read when they are four or five, but most students learn to read between the ages of 6 and 9. We believe that by matching our instruction to each student's growth and development, and by being persistent, almost all of our student will eventually learn to read. We will be compiling that information at the end of each year, but from looking at the October 2004 Performance Series test we can show that in 6<sup>th</sup> grade 70%, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade 63%, and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade 92% of our students are above the national median score in reading.

Why do so many students in the US struggle with reading, and what approach are we using at CSA to overcome that problem? And most important, what can you do to help your child read?

Patricia Lindamood, Nanci Bell and Phyllis Lindamood have been conducting research on reading failure for several decades. Out of their research they have developed an individualized remedial approach to teach people who have failed in learning to read. Their approach is intense, short term and very successful - also very expensive. They offer this service in the Lindamood-Bell Learning Centers spread across the US. You can learn more about their methods at <http://www.lindamoodbell.com/> . In 1997 these three researchers conducted a retrospective review of the history of reading instruction in the US. They looked at the controversies about phonics and whole language and studied how reading has been taught over the last 150 years. What they found is that our instruction has varied a great deal – changing about every 30 years. Many different methods have been tried, but remarkably, no matter which method was used, the same amount of reading failure was noted. It seems that no matter which reading instruction method is used, about 60% of students learn to read fairly easily, and no matter which method is used, 40% of students struggle to learn to read.

So if it is not the reading method, what will make the difference? According to Lindamood, Bell and Lindamood there are three basic pre-requisites that potential readers must have in place before they can start to learn to read. They found that each of the reading instruction methods focused on important components of the reading process, and that all those aspects must be included in a good instructional program, but that what was of vital importance was the student's sensory-cognitive readiness to read.

At CSA we have expanded on the information above. We have identified 10 pre-requisites to reading. These pre-requisites are actually helpful for all academic learning. These pre-requisites are motor skills, sensory skills, cognitive skills, and general awareness of the reading process. We have found that invariably when students lack one or more of these skills they have difficulty learning to read. When a student comes to us already failing, we look to these pre-requisites and the students almost always have a deficit in one or more of these skills. Using the developmental approach that is central to our philosophy and methods, we address the development of these foundational skills first before we try to build the house of reading.

Over the next few weeks we will discuss the three critical sensory-cognitive skills that Lindamood and Bell discovered and the others we have added. We will show you ways to pay attention to those skills and assist your child in developing those skills. We will also describe the methods we use in each unit to introduce and strengthen your child's reading and to track your child's progress in reading. In the mean time keep focusing your time and attention on **Homework Assignment # 6 - Read to your child every day.** Reading to and with your child every day, listening to your child read every day, and making sure your older child is always working on a book that they are reading to themselves, are the most important things you can do to get your children started reading and to push them to become life long skilled readers.

Homework Assignments - Reading #2

Last week we discussed the findings of a recent study by Lindamood and Bell. In their retrospective study of reading instruction in the US they found that over the last 100 years a number of different methods have been used to teach reading. Their study also showed that no matter which method was used, about 60% of students learned to read fairly easily, and about 40% of students struggled or failed to learn to read. They conclude in the study that it is not the method of instruction that is important, but rather the sensory cognitive readiness of the student that is important.

They go on to identify three factors that they have found missing in the students who struggle or fail to learn to read. The good news is that we can address these factors in children, and improve our chances of teaching all children to read. Today we will review those three factors and suggest ways that you can help make sure your child acquires them on the way to learning to read.

The first factor is something called *phonemic awareness*. Phonemic Awareness is not phonics instruction. Phonics instruction is about teaching students the specific sounds that are generally associated with specific letters. All reading teachers believe phonics skills are important, but there is a lot of disagreement about when, and how intensely, to teach phonics. We are not going to address that debate because it has not been resolved for over 50 years. There is a consensus however, among reading teachers, and in the research, about phonemic awareness. Here is the definition of the International Reading Association:

*Phonemic awareness refers to an insight about oral language and the ability to segment and manipulate the sounds of speech.*

Phonemic awareness has nothing to do with written letters or words, but rather has everything to do with understanding how language sounds and fits together, and how the sounds in words fit together. At CSA we measure phonemic awareness at the beginning of Kindergarten, and every term after that until the student has acquired this important awareness. Since it is a vital prerequisite to reading, we test all students at the beginning of Navigators, and students whose skills are weak in this area (10%-20% of students), we place in a special phonemic awareness group led by our speech and language teacher. Most students in this special group acquire this fundamental awareness in ten to twenty weeks. Once this awareness is acquired, students from the group usually make large gains in reading.

At home there are a number of things you can do to encourage phonemic awareness. The easiest method is talking to and listening to your child. The more experience your child has with listening and speaking, the more awareness they will have of how sounds work in words. From as early as possible, reading to your child is very helpful. Nursery rhymes were designed to help children acquire phonemic awareness. Reading rhymes and songs over and over to young children, and encouraging them to memorize and repeat or sing them, helps build the awareness. Games that include songs that encourage rhyme and movement and motor activities, like clapping on the beats, are also helpful. The Wee Sing series is a great audio and video series that helps teach these traditional

songs and rhymes. Finally, reading books that have a repeating story line, and then encouraging your child to repeat the story line with you as you read that part, is useful. The *Gingerbread Man* is a good example of this kind of book, and there are many more. Ask your Kindergarten or Navigator teacher how your child scores on phonemic awareness, and if they need extra help your teacher can give you more activities for homework.

The second factor identified is something we call **visualization**, and Lindamood and Bell call **concept imagery**. When students learn the process of reading, sometimes called decoding, then we focus our attention on measuring something called comprehension. Students can be going through the paces of reading the words, yet not understand or comprehend what they read. The research leads us to believe that this comprehension is based on the child's ability to visualize – or form pictures in their mind's eye. Further, some children can visualize when listening to a story, but when they read they don't make the connection between the words in the story and the pictures of the story that it should be producing in their brain. When children do not comprehend what they read, when they don't make pictures to help them understand and remember the information they are reading, they rapidly lose interest in reading. This is why some children "learn to read" early, but then lose interest in reading. They learn the mechanics of reading, but they don't comprehend what they read – movies in their mind just don't happen.

To help your child develop visualization skills, the best thing you can do is turn off the TV. Television is lazy comprehension. The TV makes the images for the child and the child does not have to learn to use their own brain to make pictures. An important study presented a folk tale to three groups of Kindergarten students. One group watched a video of the story, one had the story read to them accompanied with big pictures shown to the whole class, and the third group was simply read a story aloud. On tests of comprehension the third group did the best. They had listened to the story and made their own pictures in their brain, and that process led to more comprehension. After you turn the TV off, read to your child. After you read, ask your child to tell you about the story you read. Before you read, ask your child to listen to the story and make their own movie in their head about the story. Ask them to tell you about their movie after you read. When your child is reading to you, ask the same kind of questions.

Help your child visualize without reading. Ask them about things they did earlier in the day. If they cannot remember details, ask them to close their eyes and make a picture of themselves in the place where they were, and then ask them to remember how things looked. When they can remember pictures of the past, ask them to try to change how it would look if someone else was there, or they were in a different place. Play the game twenty questions. Making up fantasy stories is also a good way to build visualization. After your children tell you a fantasy story they have made up, write it down and read it back to them. Young children's literature is also a good way to build these skills. Think of the story Little Red Riding Hood. It is a fantastic story and a little scary. Its purpose is to help the child to make unusual pictures in their mind. A fox dressed up like grandma is a unique image to challenge your child's image concept development. If they make the images themselves as you read, they get the connection between imagery and

written words. That won't happen watching a cartoon of the same story. Another good way to build visualization skills in older readers is listening to books on tape, and then discussing them. This is something you can do in the car each day coming and going from school. Get books that are of interest to your child at a level just above where they are reading. Your teacher can help you with these selections. Spend a little time at the end of each chapter talking about the book to make sure your child is following along and comprehending the story.

As we have said before, the more you talk and listen to your child, the more you read to them, the more you engage them in using their own brain to visualize - the more they will be ready to use this important cognitive process when they start reading. If they are good visualizers before they start reading, then the pictures will happen easily when they begin reading, and the activity of reading will be something that they view as fun and worthwhile.

The third factor is, **understanding the reading process**. Many students who struggle with reading do not understand the purpose of reading. Stop reading for a minute and think about the purpose of reading. What exactly is reading for – what is it about? If you said sounding out the words, or decoding written text, or getting through the book, you have mentioned the answers struggling readers give when they are asked what reading is. If you said reading is about learning what the writer is trying to tell us, or reading is about getting new information, or reading is about seeing new stories unfold – then you understand the purpose of reading. Reading is about learning new things from writers in other times and other places. Reading is about stories that create elaborate movies in our minds. Reading is about fun and excitement. But for too many students, reading is about trying to figure out what those words on the paper are - and it is not much fun. To many students, doing real stuff like math or recess is a lot more fun. They are stuck on decoding and miss the real purpose of reading.

To help your child with this important factor, don't push reading on your child. Talk to your child, listen to your child, read to your child, but wait for your child to ask before you start making demands for them to learn to read. Avoid the temptation to focus on sounding out words before your child gets the idea of why reading is fun. When your child starts reading, tell them words they do not know when they are reading – don't let them struggle to figure out the word. This will help them keep the pictures coming. For young readers it is most important that they first get comprehension - that they first understand why they should want to read. Later we can work on the mechanics. The mechanics of reading will come along easily once the child knows their purpose, and is motivated to make the pictures – to comprehend.

A real good way to teach the purpose of reading to children is to write notes with them. If your husband is coming home late, sit with your child and ask them to dictate a message to Dad. Ask them to tell Dad what they did while he was gone. Leave the note for him and make sure he responds in the morning. If he can't speak to the child, another response is to write a note back. Make sure you read the return note to your child and then discuss it. Writing notes like this to each other on a regular basis helps the child

understand the purpose of reading – finding out things from other people from different times and places.

Reading will emerge in your child as you immerse them in the process. Reading will emerge in your child when the pre-requisite skills to reading come into place. Next week we will discuss more of the ten prerequisites to reading that we focus on here at CSA. Learning to read is not like magic. For most children it takes some time of intense instruction. But your child will learn to read more easily when they have the skills they need to address the process without struggling.

### **Homework Assignments – Reading #3**

Last week we reviewed the three prerequisites to reading cited in the research of *Lindamood and Bell*. This week we will continue describing other prerequisites that we believe from our practice, and from various other research, to be important for children to acquire before they start the process of learning how to read. Our experience is that children who do not have these prerequisites always struggle to learn to read, and children who have failed in learning to read are missing one or more of these important skills. As a parent you can do things that will help your children acquire these prerequisites through routine activities at home.

As we discussed last week, the purpose of reading is to transfer ideas from one person to another. Written words and sentences are symbolic representations of spoken word. For this reason, one of the fundamental prerequisites to reading is being very familiar with *listening to and speaking the English language*. The best way to gain this familiarity is to spend as much time as possible listening to and speaking the language. This is another reason that spending time talking to your children and listening to them each day is so important.

We break knowledge of language into two prerequisites: the first is being able *to listen to and understand the English language*. In order to accomplish this first prerequisite, children must have adequate hearing. All children should have their hearing checked before they enroll in school. The health department will conduct these first tests, and then they come to school and test children every other year. Many children experience ear infections when they are infants and toddlers. If your child has had chronic ear infections, or has had tubes placed in their ears, you need to pay special attention to how well they hear. Lack of adequate hearing reduces phonemic awareness and makes it difficult for your child to hear spoken language. Listening is hearing - with the addition of attention. An important component of this first prerequisite is that the child *understands* what he is listening to. When your child is watching TV, or listening to recordings or the radio, you may not be sure whether or not they are paying attention. The best way to be assured that the ability to listen to spoken language is being developed, and that your child understands what he has heard, is to have conversations with your child every day. Try to spend time speaking clearly to your child and listen to how they respond.

The second prerequisite in this area is being able *to speak the English language with meaning*. Again - your best tool to measure and to strengthen this skill is conversation. Reading to your children, and then discussing what you read is also very helpful.

We are not opposed to children learning to read when they are very young, but we do believe that becoming skilled at using the English language in real life situations is the first step - since reading is a symbolic, abstract representation of speaking and listening. Your child will learn to

read more easily if you *hold off* placing a focus on reading - and replace it with a focus on listening and talking. Combine that with plenty of reading to your child, followed by a discussion of the content of your reading with your child, and very soon your child will be ready to effortlessly begin reading.

Two other prerequisites that are developed at the same time as children develop language skills are the *formal awareness of time and space*. We call these two prerequisites *temporal (time) awareness* and *spatial awareness*. Basic temporal awareness breaks down into three fundamental understandings – night and day; morning, noon and night (also breakfast, lunch and dinner), and beginning, middle and end. This basic awareness leads to a broader awareness that includes knowledge of days of the week, months, years, age, followed by the details of time. This awareness is best taught through daily routines. This is another good reason to have parental control procedures that establish regular times for eating, sleeping, and doing chores. These skills seem to be more related to math, because math is the study of our orientation to time and space, but they are also crucial to learning how to read. Knowing about time is required to gain phonemic awareness as the child needs to understand how sound goes together in time. The child also needs this awareness to understand how sentences and stories go together - and are ordered by beginning middle and end. This seems very simple, but many children have not acquired these skills when they arrive at Kindergarten.

Knowledge of space, or spatial awareness, is also important. Spatial awareness breaks down to three fundamental understandings – top and bottom, front and back, and left and right; and then moves out to more detailed understandings of how space is organized. This fundamental awareness is needed so that children can discriminate between the different letters. Test your child to see if he understands these concepts on his own body. If children do not understand these concepts, they will have trouble with what we call reversals – or being confused by b and d, or p and q, or generally having difficulty learning the letters. Lack of these understandings will lead to writing letters backwards or upside down, or to substituting letters that look similar but are different.

The best way to develop spatial and temporal skills in children is for them to have as much opportunity as possible to be active in real time and space. This is why we recommend turning off the TV and having at least one hour of random outdoor play every day. Many childhood games, such as *Simon Says*, for example, promote the development of these skills. This type of ‘follow the leader’ and time/space exploration games (like *hide and seek*), as well as random games made up by children, are much more useful in developing these skills in children up to age seven or eight, than are organized sports such as soccer or T-ball. Do a search on Amazon under children's games and you will find a wide range of resources on games you can play with and teach your children that will help them develop these skills. And as you play games, talk to your children about the games, encourage their conversations with other children, ask them to recall their games and tell you about them. In this way you will connect real experiences to language, and build the visualization skills we discussed earlier.

Finally there is a list of words call the *Boehm Words*. You can find a list of the Boehm words in the parent section of the CSA website. This is a list of time and space words - words like *up, down, in, out, over, under, before, after*. As you talk with and play with your children, make sure they know and understand these words. Research tells us that children who know these words in the real world learn to read more quickly. They are also the important words of direction that all instruction is made up of: "Please line up by the door." "Put your name at the top of the page." "Jane, you can go first." "Hang your coat up over there". etc. These seem like simple things, but many children come to school without this basic language. They have been

watching and listening to TV, but they have not been doing real things, in real time and space, and then talking about it. If they know the Boehm words, they will do better at school

Next week we will finish up with the last three of the ten prerequisites to reading - and academic work in general.

#### Homework Assignments – Reading #4

We continue today describing the 10 prerequisites to reading. So far we have covered.

- Understanding the purpose of reading
- Connecting visual images to spoken and read words
- Phonemic awareness
- Being able to listen to and understand spoken English
- Being able to speak English with fluency and meaning
- Temporal awareness – sense of time
- Spatial awareness – sense of space

The next two are visual cognitive and visual motor skills. When we teach children to read we focus on the visual-symbolic-auditory code. Because reading is a visual symbolic representation of speech, which is an auditory experience, reading involves the skill combination of visual and auditory connections to printed symbols – the letters and words. This is a complicated task of remembering sounds associated with letters and words - associations that often change in different words. It includes using the context of the story to guess at words, to give us clues to new words, that haven't been seen before by the reader. It involves getting the whole picture of the words and story, by maintaining a fluid pace of reading. It is these many skills and tools that we teach students in the first two grades of school.

But when we think about how we actually read as adults, we find that unless we are trying to figure out a new word, we don't do many of the things listed above as we read. What we do is this. We point our eyes at the written word starting in the upper left hand corner of the page. We move our eyes as quickly as we can across the first line of print and then scan back across the page to the second line of print and move across that one as quickly as possible. The speed with which we move across the page depends on how many of the words we recognize. We don't sound out or decode the words, we remember them. We remember how words look, and as soon as we recognize them, we move on to the next word, trying to figure out what the message the writer wants to convey. If we come across a word like myelogenous, we stop and sound it out, because we do not recognize that word from memory. When we stop to sound out and decode this word, we actually stop reading.

The first skill we mentioned above was pointing our eyes. There are several important ocular motor skills that are required to read. The first is being able to point our eyes accurately to a target on the page. When we do that we have to converge our eyes together and move them simultaneously as if they were one. If we can not do this we will

see double words, or if we do this poorly, the words will appear to move around on the page. We next need to be able to move our eyes in small jumps across the line of print, a task called saccadic eye movement. This requires us to be able to see just enough in our periphery vision to see where we are going, but to keep moving our eyes automatically. If we are not skillful at saccadic eye movement, making these small jumps, we will see a blur on the page like we would see if we scan a video camera across a scene too quickly, and we will regularly lose our place. Finally we need to be able to rapidly scan our eyes back across the line of print and accurately point our eyes at the beginning of the next line, without a stop in the fluency we are trying to achieve that will lead us to understanding the writer's message.

Doesn't that sound like a lot of work?! If we had to stop and think about it, we would have a hard time reading. These skills need to be automatic. It is important that these fundamental ocular motor skills be in place before the student attempts to read. This is why at CSA we test all Kindergarten students for ocular motor skill and continue to test all students for these skills until they are mastered by each student. We also use a machine called a Visagraph to measure the eye movements of children who are having difficulty reading, to diagnose whether ocular motor skill is the problem. These ocular motor skills develop normally in children, but their development is dependent on lots of random movement. Children need lots of opportunity to point their eyes and move them to different targets. They get those opportunities through random active play. Turn off the TV and get your child moving every day!

If children do not have ocular motor skill when they reach Kindergarten or Navigator, we will prescribe motor development work and specific eye exercises to improve these skills. In most cases, with regular exercises, these skills can be brought to an acceptable level in one to three terms of school. In some cases the problem is not developmental but is the result of damage or disease, and then we must refer the case out to medical professionals or vision therapists who can treat the problem more effectively. Normal ocular motor skills can be improved, and it is common for athletes to use special exercises to improve these skills and in turn their athletic ability. There are several commercial programs like **eye Q**, <http://www.infmind.com> that can be used at home to help improve and enhance ocular motor skills. While we do not specifically endorse this program we have reviewed it on line and think it could be useful.

There is an equally important visual cognitive skill that is required for skilful reading. As we described above, when skilled readers read, they do not sound out each word. In fact they do very little de-coding. Instead they remember the look of words and as soon as they recognize a word they move on to the next. Rapidly recognizing, remembering and visualizing the meaning of words, leads to putting them together to get comprehension – the writer's message. To do this we need the prerequisite skill of visual memory. We need to be able to see something – a word for example – with our eyes, and rapidly remember what it is. This happens in the back of the brain in a location called the occipital cortex. Visual memory starts in young children by remembering the look of faces – usually their mom and dad and other caretakers. This progresses to memory of objects and places and then on to words and letters. You can help your child by playing

the many visual memory games that have been developed for children. Peek-a-boo is the earliest and most common game, but more complicated ones can be found in any toy department. There are many picture matching games that are played with groups of tiles or cards placed face down and turned over by each player until they find matches. Add these visual memory games to the activities you do with your children at home. Use this sequence. First play games with real objects that are hidden or place behind a screen, then move on to pictures of objects and people, from there use memory of abstract things like colors and shapes and finally use words. Remembering the look of words is also why we ask parents to help students learn the 1500 sight words introduced in navigators. The more quickly children acquire these words, the faster they will read. We have compiled these words from a variety of word lists. They make up over 80% of the words you will find in all written communication. They also contain the word families and repeated word chunks that make up many common words and begin to teach students the phonics rules that are used to learn new words.

Our final prerequisite is understanding how printed text and books and other written materials are organized. Students not only need to be able to point their eyes at the upper left hand corner of the page, they also need to know that is where they should start. Children need to know how written materials work. That they go from the front of the book or magazine to the back. That the story starts at the top of the page and ends at the bottom. That print works its way from left to right and moves line by line down the page. Knowing these basic conventions give children a head start when they begin reading at school. If the child does not know them we have to start by showing the student how books work. The best way to acquire this basic understanding is by being read to at home by family members and by watching family members read. This is why we recommend 30 minutes a day of reading to and with your children from as early a time in your child's life that you can.

Next week we will describe Neuro Reading - a program we use at CSA to help struggling readers.

#### Homework Assignments - Reading # 5

At CSA we expect that students will spend one to two years in Kindergarten, depending on when they enroll and their readiness for school at the time they enroll. We expect that students will spend two years in Navigator. Some students will move through the Navigator expectations in less than a year and others may need an extra marking period or two to be ready for Voyagers.

When a student enters Voyagers we want them to be reading at or above a Developmental Reading Assessment level of 28. If they are below that level we will conduct a comprehensive evaluation on that child and develop an individual plan for that child so we can track his progress more closely and take measures to help him catch up to expectations. One of those measures is a method called Neuro Reading. You can learn

more about this method at <http://www.neuro.read.net/>, or in the book Reading Clinic: Brain Research Applied to Reading by David Furr.

We met David at a conference on Learning and the Brain in Cambridge, MA. Several years ago. Researchers and educational practitioners associated with Harvard and other renowned New England universities gather in the spring and the fall each year to discuss how recent brain research can be utilized in schools. Dr. Furr has presented at this conference and at several of the participating universities. He is a retired special education teacher who holds doctoral degrees in Education and Neuro-Science. He has developed a system to apply recent brain research in a simple, easy to use method, that helps children who have failed in learning the reading process.

The method has several simple components that match our thinking and methods at CSA. When we returned from the conference we started to experiment with the method and found that it produced startling results. Students who had failed to learn reading despite many efforts and interventions, started reading; students who were behind caught up, and many students jumped more than a year in DRA scores in just a few months.

The method suggests a number of activities that improve student performance but relies on four basic principles.

1. **Convince the child that they will be able to learn to read.** – Many children who are struggling with reading are focusing on the wrong thing – decoding, and believe they will never figure it out. Their anxiety rises every time they try to read. One of the most important things the method does is to convince the student that that they will be successful.

2. **Use materials at the child's reading level.** – We use our leveled library to make sure that our instruction is at the child's reading level. Neuro Reading simplifies that process using a very simple controlled vocabulary set of books. The books allow students to move at very small controlled increments as soon as they achieve any success.

3. **Use a brain research finding called priming.** - The dictionary says "**Priming** in psychology is activating particular connections or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task. These associations are often unconscious." The association we want to activate in reading is the fluency of reading for meaning. In Neuro-Reading the instructor first reads small passages to the child and then the child reads the same passage immediately following the adult. This models the reading process and then allows the child to repeat the that process without mistakes, creating the fluency that is required to read. For some children this experience has never occurred. They have never read something without stopping to sound out each word or trying to guess at words. They have never gotten the "feeling" of reading. Using this technique primes the child's mental pump for the reading fluency activity we want to create.

4. **Using a visual pointer to keep track of their place while reading.** - We mentioned earlier the difficult ocular motor skills that are pre-requisites to reading. When children are required to read before they achieve these skills they do not learn how to use their eyes while reading. Even though the ocular motor skills are acquired as they grow, they still use old habits for pointing their eyes when it comes to print. Using a finger to follow along under each word as it is read by the instructor, and then again as

the child reads; helps the child point their eyes properly and assures the teacher the child is associating the right read word with each printed word.

At CSA we pull children out of class as individuals or in groups of up to 4 students to deliver this program. Trained instructors from the Teacher Support Team implement the program. Students are out of class from 20 to 30 minutes each day engaged in this activity until they reach a DRA score appropriate for their age.

This is also a program that can quite easily be implemented at home. The most successful use is 30 minutes a day, every day, seven days a week. If your child is in Neuro-reading at school you can ask your teacher for ways that you can assist at home and they will refer you to a school specialist in this method. If you want to use the method at home – it is a good summer activity for Navigator and Voyager students who may be having some difficulty with reading – the website listed above provides low cost ways to purchase the books and instruction required to implement the program at home. Terri Pettit, our Special Education Supervisor is qualified to provide training and assistance to any parents who want to use this method at home.

