



Children's Center

Bridgewater State College

October 2009

Routines: Start Mornings Off on the Right Foot

by Karen Stephens, director of Illinois State University Child Care Center

For most parents, morning *take-offs* can be chaotic. Whether you're getting the kids off to child care or school, scooting everyone out the door on time often seems more like a race than a relaxed, regular routine. But getting everyone on their way is only part of the challenge. Making sure everyone has what they need — on the day they need it — is the real brainteaser. The details to remember multiply exponentially as children get older and become involved in more activities. And, need I say, the more kids you have, the bigger the hurdle.

There will always be some mornings that will make you want to pull your hair out. That's just the nature of a lively family on the go. But with some organization and pre-planning, the mad-dash can be replaced with smoother sailing.

Following are steps to think about. Try out the ones that fit your family best. They can pave the way to morning relief for everyone.

- Reflect on your morning routine goals. What needs to be done? How can it be accomplished? As a family, sit down and talk about how your morning should flow and what needs to be accomplished. Setting clear expectations and helping children see what needs to be achieved helps them cooperate more easily.

- Be a good role model. Consistently follow the routine. If something doesn't work, go back to the drawing board to make adjustments. Whatever you do, be organized, efficient and relaxed yourself. Children will gracefully learn to become responsible and reliable by following your lead.

- Practice good time management. Consolidate chores that distract you during morning routines. For instance, if you commute in a carpool or on the train, catch up on letters, bills, newsletters, or grocery lists then.

- Start mornings off well rested. Make sure everyone gets a good night's sleep regularly, not just on week-ends. Preschoolers need about 11 hours of sleep nightly. School-age children need 9 hours. Parents, you need 8 hours. It will give you the stamina, energy and good mood you need to get through the day.

- Organize and prepare the night before. Many of us are groggy in the morning, so naturally we move slower. Prepare whatever you can the night before. Include the kids in

making decisions and involve them in preparations. For instance, together lay out everyone's clothes for the next day, make lunches, sign permission forms and put in backpacks, and set the table for morning breakfast. Most parents give children baths at night, but if a quick morning shower gets your child moving faster, try that.

- Get up before the kids (unless your family has been blessed with a 5 a.m. riser!). When you get yourself ready first, your mind will be alert and your hands free to help the kids. If the children wake while you're getting ready, keep them safely occupied with a short video or computer game, drawing paper and markers, puzzles, reading, or playing with the family pet.

- Create a family ritual that signals morning wake-up. It can be as traditional or as creative as you like. Personally, I'm a fan of the simple kiss on

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Dates to Remember

October 13 - Monday

Children's Center closed for
Columbus Day
(no college classes)

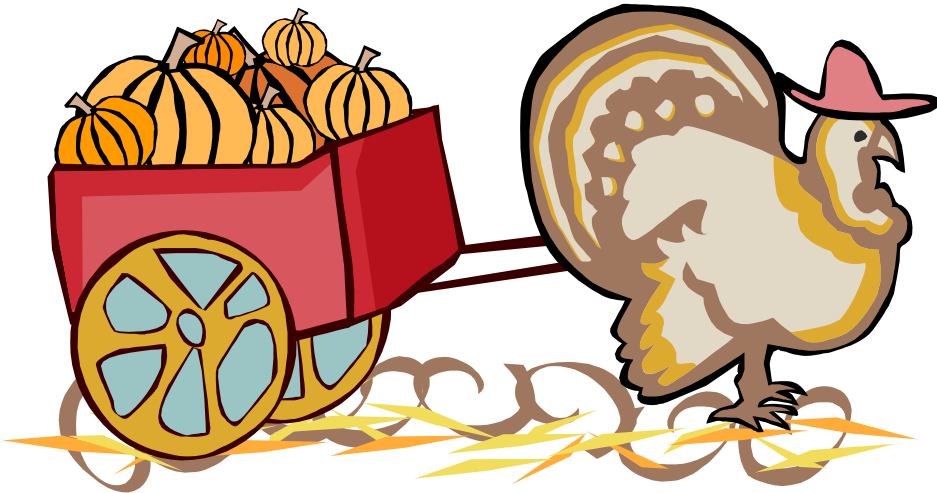
October 14 - Tuesday

The entire college, including the
Children's Center, following a
Monday schedule
(Tuesday college classes will not
meet on October 14)



Curriculum Notes - Investigator Group

by Elise McHugh, teacher



Happy Birthday

Joey

October 8

Happy Autumn to all! As we begin the fall season, the children are settling in nicely and learning classroom routines. They are working on taking turns, sharing, and listening during group time. Of course, they will continue to improve these skills throughout the school year.

We began the school year with the theme "Building Friendships." To help the children learn each other's names, we sang name songs and tossed a beanbag back and forth while saying our names. This activity reinforced turn taking as well.

One classroom goal is for children to participate in both small and large groups. Music and movement activities are incorporated into our large group time. Not only do these activities help the children to improve coordination and learn to follow directions, but they also provide a release for their energy. Then they are ready to settle in for a story. During our small groups we have introduced many art materials and techniques, such as oil pastels, paint daubers, and finger paint. Children learn to share, take

turns, and "use their words" when they want something passed.

Since children were so interested in our chicken and cow puppet, our next theme was "The Farm." For snack we served fruits and vegetables that grow on a farm as well as scrambled eggs. The children enjoyed Debbie's horse-related items, such as a saddle, reins, brush, and blanket. Another day we explored items made from wool which comes from a sheep. No discussion of the farm would be complete without showing dairy foods, which come from milk that comes from a cow. We discussed how the farm wakes up the senses with all its sights, smells, and sounds.

This theme lent itself to many science and math activities. Two math charts showed what you need for a farm and favorite farm animals. The science and discovery center had several activities related to chicken and egg, including a puzzle of an egg hatching and a game to match egg halves with different shapes inside.

The classroom and hallway were decorated with many farm art projects. Clay farm animals are on display in the glass case in the hallway. The children painted with cookie cut-

ters, feathers, and veggies. They marbled painted eggs and glued yarn "wool" on sheep. We sang many rousing choruses of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."

Next up: In order to keep our children and staff well, we are working on a Health and Nutrition unit. We will focus on healthy foods and healthy habits. The science center will have many objects showing how the body works. And of course we will focus on frequent hand-washing!

As part of a college campus, we have many people who provide enrichment to our program. Volunteers in our class provide an extra pair of hands to read a story to a child, or give a push on the swings. Also, Sarah McQuarrie, a music professor on campus, comes to our class every Thursday afternoon to sing with the children. She has been singing "Puff the Magic Dragon" the last few weeks. So if your child suddenly wants to play dragon, you know why! We are very lucky to have Sarah provide weekly music activities.

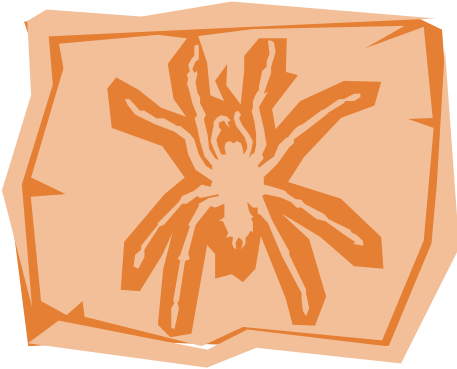
Reminders:

The weather is beginning to change, and it is still sometimes quite cool when we go out at 10 a.m. It may be best to dress your child in light layers that can be removed as the day warms up. Also, many of the extra clothes provided at the beginning of the school year were shorts and short sleeved shirts. Although it's not yet time for long johns, you may want to bring in long pants and long sleeves in case your child needs to change.

Last month we sent home a sheet titled "All About Me" for you to fill out with your child. We are making a classroom book to learn more about each other. Please send that page back at your earliest convenience. If you cannot find the original sheet, ask the teachers for another copy.

Curriculum Notes – Explorer Group

by Joanne Hogan, teacher



Happy Birthday:

Lily	October 14
Logan	October 26
Tyler	October 31

It's hard to believe that September is already behind us. The transitions that occur in the beginning of the year can be difficult and overwhelming for some children and you may have noticed a few tears in our classroom at one time or another. During the first few weeks of school we focused on helping the children to feel safe, secure, and happy. We encouraged interactions among the children so that they could make new friends and be comfortable in the classroom environment. In our mixed aged classroom, many of our returning children assisted in teaching their younger peers about our routines and have been supporting them emotionally (we've even witnessed some older children comforting and holding the hands of younger ones!). All of our activities revolved around feelings and friendship. We are hopeful that we will continue to build close, personal relationships that will last throughout the year.

Problem solving is a natural process in our classroom and we encourage the children to work out difficult problems with their words. As teachers, we are available to give the children the

language to use if they have difficulty expressing themselves and try to help them to develop empathy for their peers. Social development is an important part of any preschool classroom and is an essential part of our curriculum.

We hope that many of you have encountered our science and nature center in the back corner of our classroom. We began the month by focusing on spiders and provided the children with a variety of materials to explore to help them to overcome many of their real or imagined fears of spiders. The children quickly learned that spiders are not insects, but arachnids, and they have eight legs, not six, as insects do. They also researched the names of many different types of spiders and often used photographs that were provided for them to compare the differences among our plastic spiders and insect puppets. After discovering that spider



webs are made of silk, we created our own spider webs with marble painting. The most exciting part of this unit, however, was going on a bug hunt and bringing different types of insects into the classroom to examine with magnifying glasses. We hope to introduce many science and nature activities this year. Check our science table when you have a chance!

Up and coming:

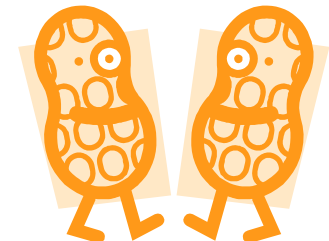
October means that Halloween will soon be upon us. We would like to acknowledge this holiday in a more "low key" manner. We have found that in past years, many children can be overwhelmed and even frightened by a costume party. With that in mind, we will be providing the children with a special treat that we will make with both groups on the day that they are scheduled to attend. We will also celebrate with holiday related songs, stories, and age appropriate activities. Please check your mailboxes for more information related to these upcoming events.

Reminders:

Please label all of your child's personal belongings (especially bedding and stuffed animals). There are a large number of children enrolled at the Children's Center and things do get mixed up when they aren't labeled.

The weather has been unpredictable lately. Please have a sweater or light jacket in your child's cubby.

One last note, we cannot have any peanut or tree nut products in the classroom due to children's allergies. Please read the labels on the products that you send in for lunch. If we do notice a peanut product in a lunch box, we'll need to send it back home. Try not to take this personally, we are simply trying our best to keep all the children safe. Thank you!



Routines: Start Mornings Off on the Right Foot

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the cheek. It eloquently says, "Welcome to a new day, my dear one." Some families play music; from reggae to classical — it's the ritual that counts, so use what your family likes. To provide some morning cozy time, you can turn bedtime stories into breakfast stories. The kids listen as they munch away.

- Plan easy ways to carry personal belongings. You'll never leave the house without items in tow for everyone. Provide each child with a different colored and labeled backpack or canvas bag. For loose items, such as crayons or pencils, a small, clear plastic toolbox is great.

- Set the stage for organization. Whether it's a cardboard box hand-decorated by the kids or a snazzy wooden shelf, identify a specific storage area for each child. That's where they should keep personal items that will come and go with them. It can be in their room or near the door. Make children responsible for keeping their space organized.

- Use visual cues to coach kids in the routine. Create a poster listing the steps for smooth mornings. For young children, illustrate the list with drawings or actual photographs of the kids going through the steps. Ask children to help make the poster. For instance, older siblings can write the words, preschoolers can paste or tape on photographs.

- Use *to do* checklists for each child. Some families use a handy erasable message board — usually displayed in the heart of the home: the kitchen. For each child, the board lists morning tasks to accomplish. Before leaving, check off all items. At day's end, it's erased for a fresh start the next morning. *To do* checklists can include: use restroom and wash hands; make bed; eat breakfast; brush teeth; wash face and hands; brush hair, put on clothes and shoes; grab coat and backpack. If you have pets, assign someone the

morning feeding, too. And by all means, don't forget to list the most important thing: a hug and kiss good-bye!

- Share the load. Delegate morning tasks according to the child's age and development to pave the way for success. For instance, children can reach their own clothes or back packs more easily when they are hung on child-height clothing rods or hooks. This helps build self-help skills, independence, and organization. Some large families assign color-codes to socks, underwear, and even dresser drawers. It makes kids' dressing times more efficient.

- Ask older siblings to help younger children. Older siblings can be in charge of making sure preschooler's teeth are brushed, faces washed and hair combed after breakfast.

- Help kids *hear* deadline cues. Set a timer so kids can *hear* when they have 5 minutes to take-off. Some parents think an alarm clock for wake up is too harsh for children, but some kids like the adult feel of it — you decide.

- Establish and consistently enforce consequences if children don't cooperate. Every parent determines what expectations and consequences are appropriate for each child. Base them on children's age, development, and previous experience. Though it's hard, respond to temper tantrums with patience. Your confident, clear, and firm guidance will help children manage their emotions better. Logical consequences help keep children on track. I've known parents with preschoolers to require uncooperative dressers to leave for child care while still dressed in pajamas. Once at child care, the parent asks the provider to allow the child to privately finish dressing on his or her own. Such matter-of-fact consequences are rarely needed more than once.

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About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. She writes a weekly column for parents in her local newspaper. Karen is author of two books and frequent contributor to *Child Care Information Exchange*.

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