

Family Focus

Helping a Child Who Procrastinates

Part 1: Age Eight and Below

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

When all procrastinate at times; it is normal and natural. Many of us are really good at finding lots of other things to do when laundry is piling up, home repairs require attention, or closets need organizing. It is when procrastination is chronic and we miss deadlines, commitments, or responsibilities that it becomes a problem.

One frustrating challenge for parents is having a child who frequently procrastinates, especially if you are at the other end of the spectrum and enjoy getting tasks done way ahead of time. But even if you also tend to procrastinate, your child's behavior may disturb you if it taps into your own dissatisfactions with yourself.

It is important to address procrastination as early as possible. It may become a more entrenched behavior as a child ages, and older children are typically more resistant to parents' intervention. First we will look at how to help your young child, under the age of eight, and in a future column we will consider strategies for older children.

The first rule of thumb is never let your child hear you identify him as a procrastinator. Young children tend to define themselves as their parents see them, and you want to avoid having your child label himself negatively. In fact, in order to overcome procrastinating tendencies a child needs to think highly of himself and his abilities. If a child regards himself as a person who can't please his parents and teachers, doesn't do things "right," or is "lazy," he will become discouraged and will be less likely to improve.

Children respond well to having tasks broken into small parts that they can master. They need to learn to work hard, take a short break when needed, and then work some more

until a task is completed. Parents can show empathy along the way, saying that you know it is difficult to keep working and focusing. Remind your child how good it feels when he has completed a task and how proud you are of him.

It is essential for you to maintain a positive and encouraging approach (even if you are ready to scream inside!). If parents show irritation or impatience, a child may become frustrated or discouraged, and these feelings will get in the way of his progress. Your child needs to experience the satisfaction of completing a task on time in a positive atmosphere so he can build greater confidence and self-discipline.

Charts with incentive rewards are usually highly successful. Target one specific behavior at a time and follow through until your child has mastered it. For example, each day you can chart that your child completed his homework or practiced his musical instrument for the required time. For a much younger child you can pick a task such as putting away his toys. Only note your child's successes on the chart and leave out his lapses.

In the beginning it doesn't matter whether he does the task completely on his own. You may need to prompt him a bit or even help him. But later it will be time to see if he can achieve success without your help.

Many parents tell me that it is hard to be consistent when using charts, and that they forget about them over time. The trick is to make a chart for just one week at a time. Pick a week when you know you will be able to monitor the behavior you want. Then skip some time if necessary and go back to charting for another week. When the behavior becomes consistent, pick a different

behavior and change the reward. Use stickers for one chart, stars for the next, and perhaps happy faces for the next.

A few things can get in the way while helping your young child. An attitude of perfectionism, either yours or his, can sabotage his ability to work steadily until he completes a task. Procrastinators often say that they are afraid to start a project or task unless they know they can be perfectly successful. This all-or-nothing approach can be very inhibiting. Encourage your child to try and not to be afraid of making mistakes along the way.

Impatience can also get in the way, either on your part or his. Try to see the bigger picture when your child is slow to shed his procrastination tendencies. You are working toward a long-term goal. Be a cheerleader for each small positive effort he makes and help him realize that it takes time to change habits.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margjerye@yahoo.com. She is also available for parenting consultation.

Pack 114's Pinewood Derby

Submitted by Kim Vaughn



Lafayette's Cub Scout Pack 114 recently held its Pinewood Derby. Trophy winners were St. Perpetua students (from left) Christopher Ruane, Ryan Vaughn and Marcus Erickson. Photo provided

Miramonte Student Named to NCL Youth Council

Submitted by Dan Pittman



California-based National Charity League, Inc. (NCL) has recently appointed Alicia Macler to its 2010-2011 Tick-tocker Advisory Council. She is a member of the organization's Acalanes Area Chapter as a Tick-tocker (girls in grade 7-12) and is a junior at Miramonte High School. Photo provided



Checkmate: Los Perales 2nd Place

Submitted by May Lo



Top Row: Hari Stoyanov, David Stambuch, Ryan Yick, Sean Donovan, Jack Yang Bottom Row: Suleman Syed, Richard Gross, Delu Zhao, Zack Donovan, Leopold Gross, Jillian Yick Photo May Lo

The ten members of the Los Perales Elementary School chess team are celebrating their second place win at the Berkeley Chess School Elementary School Tournament held on Saturday, May 7, at Cragmont School in Berkeley. One hundred and sixteen students from thirty four schools in five Bay Area counties competed in six games of chess during five hours of play. Los Perales and Ocean View (Albany) were tied for first place through the fifth game. Two other Lamorinda schools, Glorietta and Burton Valley, were also in attendance.

Los Perales third grader Sean Donovan went undefeated, winning all six games, and fourth grader Ryan Yick won five out of six games. Donovan's and Yick's individual scores were also ranked among the tournament's top ten scores. Six year old kindergartener, Zack Donovan, the youngest participant in the tournament, won three of his six games. Los Perales' top four players, Sean Donovan, Ryan Yick, Hari Stoyanov, and Jack Yang received trophies and the remaining team members received medals.

The Los Perales (LP) chess team is comprised of students from every grade and is coached by Berkeley Chess School instructor David Stambuch in LP's chess after school enrichment program.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

Acalanes Union High School District
Board Room AUHSD Office
1212 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lafayette
Wednesday, June 1, 7:30pm

Orinda Union School District
OUSD Office
8 Altarinda Road, Orinda
Monday, June 6, 4pm

Lafayette School District
LAFSD Office
3477 School Street, Lafayette
Wednesday, June 22, 7pm

Moraga School District
Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium
1010 Camino Pablo, Moraga
Tuesday, June 14, 7:30pm

Troop 233's New Eagles

Submitted by Kevin Nitsos



From left, front row: Alex Hoff, Ian Woods, Matthew Lai; back row: Sean Lerner, Connor Nitsos, Camron Stevens Photo provided

Boy Scout Troop 233 is proud to announce that six new Eagle Scouts have joined the troop's Eagle family. Alex Hoff, Matthew Lai, Sean Lerner, Connor Nitsos, Camron Stevens and Ian Woods will be honored at Troop 233's Eagle Court of Honor on June 4th at Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church.

Scoutmaster Don Larwood will be presenting the Eagle awards, the highest rank in Boy Scouting.

The Eagle Scouts and their projects:

Alex Hoff (Miramonte) planted redwood trees at the Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church in Orinda. These will replace some Monterey Pines which the City of Orinda and the Orinda-Moraga Fire department have both requested to be taken out due to fire hazard.

Matthew Lai (Acalanes) constructed and installed a six foot by three foot cross at the Main Hall for the Contra Costa Gospel Church at Walnut Creek California. He also

built three wooden benches for the church to enhance outdoor activities.

Sean Lerner (Miramonte) developed a project protecting the native Bay Oak from being overcrowded by invasive non-native weeds and trampling by cows. He protected fifty Oak's that were deemed by the Briones ranger to be weak with wrap-around chicken wire enclosures.

Connor Nitsos (Acalanes) installed numbered disks to existing trail markers over 23 miles of trail in Briones Regional Park, benefiting people unfamiliar with using a trail map, giving them numbered references to follow.

Camron Stevens (Miramonte) honored family friend and longtime Glorietta teacher's aide, Toni Russell, by constructing a memorial bench and redwood trellis feature at Glorietta Elementary School.

Ian Woods (Miramonte) created a hexagonal bench around the tree near the 4th and 5th grade playground at Wagner Ranch Elementary School.

Submit stories to
schooldesk@lamorinda weekly.com

Los Perales Chess Team

- Sean Donovan (3rd Grade)
- Zack Donovan (Kindergarten)
- Leopold Gross (1st Grade)
- Richard Gross (3rd Grade)
- Hari Stoyanov (2nd Grade)
- Suleman Syed (5th Grade)
- Jack Yang (5th Grade)
- Jillian Yick (5th Grade)
- Ryan Yick (4th Grade)
- Delu Zhao (2nd Grade)

Top Ten Schools

1. Ocean View 21.0 (Albany)
2. Los Perales 19.5 (Moraga)
3. Marin 17.5 (Albany)
4. Head Royce 17.5 (Oakland)
5. Cornell 16.5 (Albany)
6. Havens 16.0 (Piedmont)
7. Kaiser 15.5 (Oakland)
8. Dorris-Eaton 15.0 (Walnut Creek)
9. Beach 14.0 (Piedmont)
10. Jefferson 13.5 (Berkeley)