

<p>The Saklan School</p> <p>Pre-K Through 8</p>	<p>creatively <b>think</b></p>
<p>Open House Dates Kindergarten - 5 10/5 &amp; 12/7 Middle School 11/2 &amp; 1/11 www.saklan.org</p>	<p>compassionately <b>act</b></p> <p>Est. 1954 <b>live</b> courageously</p>

## Family Focus

# Fair Fighting in Family Relationships

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

First off, I wish you all a Happy New Year, one that is filled with peace, happiness, fulfillment, and love. Recent tragic events make me especially appreciate our current teachers and school personnel who protect, nurture and give their very best to our children day after day. We all have heavier hearts after the Connecticut tragedy, and fortunately our schools and the media have provided guidance to help us support our children.

It seems more pressing than ever for us to be sure that we, and those around us, raise healthy families. One important component of this involves helping our children deal with their anger. How, if, and when we express our anger and frustration helps determine whether or not our family relationships can be positive and healthy.

Here are some signs that you or a family member may not be handling anger effectively within your family:

- Making mean comments or critical remarks in anger.
- Throwing things, slamming doors, and/or screaming.
- Touching someone in anger.
- Becoming defensive and lashing back at a family member who calmly and respectfully expresses dissatisfaction with you.
- Not expressing your anger and instead keeping it to yourself.

You may want to avoid conflict, or perhaps you don't feel comfortable or entitled to feel the way you do. Or you may not even realize that you are harboring anger. Over time the anger builds up to the point where you finally release it in exaggerated and sometimes harmful ways. Alternatively, you may not give voice to your anger at all. Internalizing your feelings may lead to depression, withdrawal, and low self-esteem.

Managing our anger effectively and fighting fairly involve some pre-planning. Conflicts are bound to arise from time to time in close relationships. As a matter of fact, it's an unhealthy sign if there isn't occasional conflict. That can signify a lack of caring, an avoidance of important issues, a fear of disagreement, or a build-up of unexpressed rage.

One mother and teen daughter I see have had a tumultuous relationship over the years. Both are headstrong, determined people who have used arguing with each other as a means of forging intimacy. They have difficulty communicating unless they are passionately disagreeing, shouting, and crying. Their behavior builds up to a crescendo that eventually results in remorse, greater understanding and temporary closeness. Some couples practice this unconscious dance as well.

This mother and daughter are learning alternatives to bickering and becoming defensive. A primary goal is to end the mutual name-calling, belittling, blaming, and attacking. They are working hard to undo years of damaging interaction.

Here are some basic communication tools I am encouraging them to use:

- Avoid using categorical terms such as "You always ..." or "You never ..." or for that matter, starting sentences in a blaming way by using the word, *you*. Of course we're going to get defensive when we feel accused. Nothing will get resolved if both parties feel unfairly treated.
- Using the word, "I" and then put-

ting a feeling afterwards is much easier to listen to: "I worry," "I'm frustrated," or "I'm sad" are some examples. For example, instead of saying, "I'm frustrated that you refuse to do dishes," you could say, "I'm frustrated that I have to do the dishes every night." The more you can stay with "I-messages" throughout your communication, the better.

• Think first before framing your message. It can be difficult to produce an effective message when we are upset. When we take the time to convert some of our feelings to more rational expressions, we will accomplish much more.

• Stay calm. The same principle of taking your time and thinking first applies when responding to an angry, accusatory child. Remember, the person who remains calm has the most control in the conversation. If you yell and scream at your child, he may experience a secret triumph that he is able to upset and frustrate you.

• Have rules and consequences in place to identify what verbal and physical behaviors you will not tolerate from your child. Then it is easier to detach from an angry child and calmly implement your plan. You have every right to *feel* angry, outraged, and/or frustrated. The challenge is to manage these feelings so that you don't react spontaneously and irrationally.

Some children and spouses shut down altogether rather than engage in arguments. Some want to avoid conflict, but others withhold as a way of having some control. Some teens become especially adept at withdrawing during a power struggle with a parent. And some parents show so much frustration with their teen's lack of response that they essentially lose the power struggle that they never even intended to have!

If a child refuses to communicate, you will need to get his commitment for a time when he is willing to talk. If he won't talk, you will need to take action: "If you are unwilling to discuss this, then I have no choice but to go ahead and take away your ... (fill in the blank) for two days." By having a plan, you can proceed in a calm, methodical manner.

If a spouse refuses to communicate, seek counseling – as a couple if possible, and individually if he or she refuses to participate. And if you, your child, or spouse is exhibiting anger that is out-of-control, or withdrawal or depression, it is important to get professional help as well.



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# Is Your Child Ready for Kindergarten?

Submitted by Theresa Mahoney

Kindergarten is an exciting time for kids, but it can fill parents with trepidation.

For Lafayette resident Katherine Tanner, the thought of sending her daughter, Madison, to kindergarten sends shivers down her spine. "I'm really nervous about whether Maddie is ready," Tanner says. "She has a lot of friends in her preschool, but only one of them is going to be at the new school." And while Tanner is certain the preschool Madison attends is a good one, she still isn't 100 percent sure her daughter is ready.

"Will she be able to handle the longer days? The school work?" Tanner wonders.

Karen Goodshaw, principal at St. Perpetua School in Lafayette, says kindergarten readiness means being prepared with the basic skills to ensure your child's success as a student. "These skills fall into four basic categories: academic development, motor skills, social readiness, and personal care," says Goodshaw. "It is important to realize that these

skills develop at different times and rates for all children. Also recognize that your child will continue to obtain skills after the initial application process. We encourage parents to understand that it is not necessary for a child to master all of the skills at the time of 'readiness testing,' which at St. Perpetua School is Feb. 9."

Goodshaw says there are a variety of ways to determine a child's individual readiness for the kindergarten classroom: a publisher-created kindergarten assessment, feedback from the preschool teacher, and information from parents regarding developmental milestones should all be weighted in that decision.

According to Goodshaw and St. Perpetua development director Natalie Deininger, there are several ways parents can help their children prepare for that first day of kindergarten:

"Give your child opportunities to interact with text and develop appropriate verbal skills to practice academic development like singing the

alphabet, or finding letters on a page or in a puzzle and see how they come together in the words of a favorite bedtime story," she says. "Improve your child's fine motor skills with Play-Doh, coloring, and experimenting with written expression."

"Encourage the development of gross motor skills, like balance and coordination, by playing ball games and spending time on play structures; Practice social readiness through play dates," adds Deininger. "And foster your child's independence by having them take care of basic personal needs, such as going to the bathroom and getting themselves dressed."

Giving a child these opportunities can not only prepare them for kindergarten, but can help reduce a parent's anxiety as well.

St. Perpetua School is hosting an annual open house on Jan. 27 following the regular 9:30 a.m. Children's Mass. For more information on any of these events, or to schedule a school tour, visit [www.stperpetua.org](http://www.stperpetua.org) or call (925) 284-1640.

## Kindergarten and Transitional Kindergarten Registration

Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda Union School Districts

For the 2013-14 school year, only children age 5 as of Oct. 1 will be allowed in kindergarten, while students whose fifth birthdays fall between Oct. 2 and Dec. 2 will be eligible for a transitional kindergarten program. Transitional kindergarten, according to the California Department of Education, is the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate. California school districts are required to provide a transitional kindergarten program so that children who will be affected by this change – those with birthdays between October and December – will have an opportunity to continue building their skills and abilities. Their time in transitional kindergarten will help them to succeed in kindergarten, become leaders in the classroom and confidently navigate the school day routine.

### Lafayette School District

Registration for kindergarten and transitional kindergarten programs will take place at the district's four elementary schools Jan. 22-23 at the following times:

Burton Valley Elementary: 9 to 11 a.m. and 1 to 3 p.m.

Happy Valley Elementary: 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Lafayette Elementary: 9 a.m. to noon

Springhill Elementary: 9 to 11 a.m.

Registration packets can be obtained from the schools prior to registration, beginning Jan. 7, however the earliest day completed packets will be accepted by the schools is Jan. 22, during registration times. It is not necessary to bring your child on registration day. The registration process may take from 30 minutes up to two hours, depending upon the number of registrations. For more information, visit [www.lafsd.k12.ca.us](http://www.lafsd.k12.ca.us).

### Moraga School District

Kindergarten and transitional kindergarten registration for the 2013-2014 school year will be held on Feb. 7-8. For information, visit [www.moraga.k12.ca.us/kindergarten](http://www.moraga.k12.ca.us/kindergarten).

### Orinda Union School District

Registration for children entering Orinda public schools as kindergarteners and transitional kindergarteners in August 2013 will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at each of the elementary schools Feb. 4-7. For information, visit [www.orindaschools.org](http://www.orindaschools.org).

## TEEN SCENE

### Reading Sets the Mind Free

By Youngjoo Ahn

Watching television was not part of my childhood experience. Some may think that I was a stereotypical Asian child with parents who forced education on me from an early age. Although my parents cancelled the television subscription, I was not deprived. I loved to read and my enjoyment for reading has continued through my teen years.

Books and educational toys can make a child smarter, but they also influence how the brain grows, according to new research by the Society for Neuroscience. Parents can help young children develop their cognitive skills by providing a stimulating environment and my parents did just that.

After a long day, reading is a wonderful way to unwind. Reading allows the mind to imagine settings and characters while entertaining our souls. Our brains thrive on imagination and creativity.

"My brain is always so exhausted after school and it's tempting to watch TV. I choose to read because it relaxes me no matter how tired I am," student Yurika Kazama said.

As a passive activity, when we watch television, our brains do not interact with characters or scenes. Educational stimulus is prevented as we watch scenes unfold without participating. Books on the other hand teach us about history, society, and the world we live in. The more we read, the better writers we become. Greek tragedies like *Antigone* or Steinbeck's *East of Eden* are as relevant today as they were when they were penned.

Human behavior has not changed much since Shakespeare was writing plays. The hero's journey, a popular theme in fiction, may have been first witnessed

in *The Odyssey* yet continues to form the plot lines of movies and novels today such as the *Star Wars* sagas and *The Hunger Games*.

Whether we read for entertainment or education, it's important to incorporate reading into our lives. Reading gives us a perspective into other people's existence, a view of the history of humanity, and a glimpse into a possible tomorrow.

My parents were wise in developing my addiction to books. Reading is the key to opening the door to a successful future. This New Year, make a resolution that will benefit you for a lifetime. Open the floodgates of imagination and read. Books set us free.

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Teen Scene is YOUR voice. If you have something to say or have writing skills and want to be part of our Teen Scene team, email our Teen Coach, Cynthia Brian, [CynthiaBrian.com](mailto:CynthiaBrian.com).