



Parent March News

CHILD DEVELOPMENT: Understanding Death and Grief

Several families at RecSchool have recently experienced the death of a loved one: family member, close friend or pet. One parent commented, "I was totally unprepared for answering all my son's questions. He wanted to know where the body went, why she died and if we (parents) were going to die too. I didn't know what to say!"



Ms. Karen helped Hannah cut out one of the circles for her snow daddy.

Many people find the subject of death uncomfortable, but discussing death with young children *before* they actually experience the loss of a loved one helps build a framework of understanding for future events. Picture books are a wonderful tool for approaching the subject before parents or family members are emotionally distraught and groping for answers.

Parents can help young children understand and accept natural life cycles:

- Look for opportunities to talk about death and answer children's questions. Share personal stories about grief, "When my Uncle Steve died, I was really sad." Older preschool children may benefit from attending a funeral or calling hours to experience the process.
- Provide simple, honest answers. "The loved one will not come back. He is not asleep. His heart has stopped. He is not breathing anymore."
- Listen calmly to children's fears and honest emotions. Some children feel angry that the doctors were not able to fix a loved one. Others may begin to realize that all people die eventually, including parents. While parents can't promise that they will never die, it's honest to say, "I love being your mommy. I will be your mommy for as long as I can."
- Realize children may or may not understand the finality of death. Many years ago, our class guinea pig, Sprite, died. Weeks later, two children continued to ask when she would come back, even though they had said goodbye and helped bury her body behind the barn.
- Suggest commemorating a loved one by writing or drawing, making a small scrapbook or taking flowers to the grave.
- Be prepared to discuss a loved one's death again, when the child's memory is triggered or as understanding develops.

A few views from children:

- "I got a doggy, Cortez. He's buried. Axel's not buried. Cortez got old." - age 3
- "You grow up, you grow old and then you die." - age 3 ½
- "Sprite died. We buried her behind the barn. I miss her." - age 4 ½
- "When you grow up, you're gonna die." - Child 1. "Nuh-uh! When I grow up I'm gonna be a mommy." - Child 2, both age 5
- "I'm not gonna see my Oma anymore. She got cancer and passed away. That's sad." - age 5 ½

The library carries many books that may help a child understand death and grieving. We recommend:

- *Lifetimes: A Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children* by Bryan Mellonie (covers animals' life cycles; stunning illustrations).
- *Tough Boris* by Mem Fox (shares the simple story of a tough pirate and the death of his beloved parrot).
- *We Love Them* by Martin Waddell (the acquisition and death of several pets is interwoven with touches of humor).
- *I'll Always Love You* by Martin Waddell (addresses the death of a beloved pet, the accompanying sorrow and the burial).
- *Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs* by Tomie DePaolo (details a young boy's loving relationship with his bed-ridden great-grandmother and her eventual death)



Oliver, Parker and Braxton tried to break the ice with sticks.

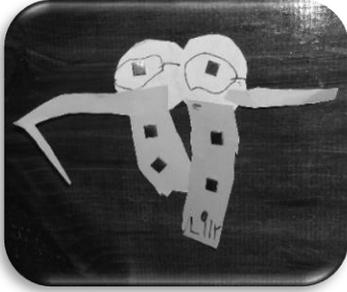
EARLY ACADEMICS: Developing Critical Thinking Skills

To help your child develop critical thinking skills, ask open-ended, thought-provoking questions. Open-ended questions encourage creative thought, rather than seek a right answer. Any question becomes open-ended when the phrase "do you think..." is inserted in the middle of the question. "What happened?" (a question that seems to ask for the correct answer) becomes "What do you think happened?" (a question that focuses on the child's viewpoint). "Do you think..." questions challenge children to communicate personal ideas, project what might happen, and think deeply. There are always a few children who answer, "I don't know." Don't let them off that easily; wait them out! Respond with, "Keep thinking. I am sure you can think of something." When the child does offer an idea, repeat what the child says, "So you think...? You may be right!" Learning to think creatively, about possibilities, is the basis of all science and always more important than coming up with the "right" answer.

EARLY ACADEMICS: Creative Art

Look at all the learning that happens when children are given time, materials and support.

<i>Social and Emotional</i>	<i>Language and Literacy</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Physical</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing own ideas • Feeling competent • Self-control: sharing materials and space with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining work to others • Writing child-made signs • Recording ideas with paint, markers and playdough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning work • Creating patterns • Exploring materials • Experimenting with print 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using tools to support ideas: scissors, hole punches, pencils, tape • Small muscle control • Whole-body coordination



IN THE CLASSROOM: Friendships, Crushes and Respect

While waiting in line to wash their hands, a boy tried several times to kiss the girl in front of him on the cheek. Each time, she leaned away, smiling a little, but also looking uncomfortable. He giggled. The girl quietly said, "Please stop." He turned away, and tried to kiss her again. A teacher approached and quietly said, "Joseph, did you hear Lindsey? She said that she doesn't want to be kissed." Joseph looked away. The teacher smiled and said, "I know that you really like Lindsey, so stand here beside her while you are waiting to wash hands."

Even though it is natural for young children to test each other's limits, they need to respect friends' wishes and personal body space. This is the foundation of healthy relationships throughout life. Later, the teacher talked individually to each child, encouraging the girl to use strong words when someone doesn't listen and reminding the boy that he needs to listen to his friend's wishes.

As children approach age 5, they become more aware of gender, and those natural friendship crushes may take on new meaning. It is normal for young children to imitate the relationships they see in their own lives, including boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. However, when young children or the adults around them begin identifying their friendships as "boyfriend/girlfriend" the focus often changes. They may have a difficult time getting attention in acceptable ways, playing together comfortably or working together productively. Guard your children from well-meaning adults who put unnecessary emphasis on friendly relationships by asking, "Is she your girlfriend? Did you kiss her?"

At RecSchool, we say, "Boys and girls can have good friends, but only adults can have real boyfriends and girlfriends." We also stress that, "Kissing is for families. You need to ask your friends if they want a hug or to hold hands. They might say yes and they might say no. It's always important to ask before you touch another person."



Alexa, Grayson and Aubrey built a tower, following a pattern, and hoped it wouldn't fall!

New friendships should always be nurtured and supported regardless of the gender of the children and protected from interfering comments. The ability to work and play comfortably with people of all genders is a desirable skill in the classroom, on the soccer field and in the workplace.

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES & COMMUNICATION

Thanks to all the parents who attended a "Developmental Observations" Parent/Teacher conference. Teachers truly enjoy a quiet chance to share what we see in the classroom. With three months left in the year, there's lots of time for growth and change. Feel free to touch base with teachers later in the year with any new or unresolved questions.

Important Dates

Tue., March 5	April Tuition Due
Tue., March 12	Scholastic Book Orders Due
Mon., March 18	RecSchool Open; SWCS Closed
Mon., March 25-Fri., March 29	RecSchool Closed for Spring Break
Tue., April 30	Slate Run Family Field Trip (Details to Follow)

Photos taken during the downstairs classes; children were hard at work, play and learning!



Carter and Evie Created snow kitties!