Jack Oldham is our man at City Hall

The time from Pre-K in 2002 to 2013 has been a great Montessori trip for Jack Oldham. Now he’s a Woods High School sophomore and showed his mettle this Fall. He was successful in his bid to be chosen for the Mayor’s Youth Council for 2013-2014. He will be a Senior Aide for District I.

From more than 200 applicants ages 14-18 who live and attend school in Houston, 44 were chosen. The winners were chosen on the basis of a written application, interview and community leadership experience.

The Youth Council was established in 1998 to provide students an opportunity to learn about city government, gain leadership skills and serve as a voice for Houston’s youth.

The Mayor’s Youth Council is administered by the Volunteer Initiatives Program, a division of the Dept. of Neighborhoods. Jack and his fellow students took oath of office on October 29 in City Hall Council Chambers, administered by Mayor Annise Parker.

Many more Parent Education events coming up

Refer to the calendar on page 8 and you will see all the great Parent Education sessions lined up for December and January.

The big ones in January are our Lower School “Open House” programs for one and all to attend. And these are open to the public, too. If you have friends interested in Montessori, Early Childhood through Grade 6, bring these programs to their attention.

The Book Club, coming up soon

Yet another reminder: the annual Book Club event is just around the corner. Have you read your book yet? If not, well, get busy. Even with the holidays and other school activities intervening, you still have time to do it. The date: February 27; the book: Your Brain at Work by David Rock.

School of the Woods Gala
Friday, March 7, 2014
Save the Date
In his book, Playful Parenting, Lawrence Cohen states that in observations of animal behavior, it has been found that the more intelligent an animal is, the more it plays. Slugs don’t play, but chimpanzees have rituals of play that, among other things, help diffuse angry situations between group members. Children have an instinct for play. By age two or three, this instinct is flourishing.

Play can occur anywhere at any time. It provides a way for parents to actively help their children develop. Play can help create good connections between parent and child. It can help with some of life’s toughest aspects for parents, including the toddler throwing tantrums, the preschooler with a biting problem, anxious elementary children, and the emotionally volatile preteen.

Play is more meaningful than we may think. It is a way for children to experiment with what it is like to carry out adult roles and skills. It helps satisfy a child’s need to feel close to the parents or other significant people in their lives by fostering affection and attachment. And it is also a way for children to recover from the emotional stresses that arise from time to time in their lives.

Parents can help their children with life’s stumbles and challenges by engaging in play; they can help their children recover from hurt or gain confidence in building new skills. Play can give the opportunity for parents and children to reconnect after an upset. It can restore family harmony after a long day. Play is also a way for children to process new information.

You can see children processing new information through games when they have been exposed to something new. You may notice them mimicking a new behavior they have observed in other people. For instance, perhaps they noticed a blind person for the first time, and they role-play being blind.

Games like peek-a-boo and tag that we play with young children give them practice with closeness and distance. Dr. Cohen describes what he calls the "contact, or near miss" game where a child or adult may pretend to be hit by a swing every time it comes forward. A game of ball builds hand-eye coordination and gross motor skills while creating bonds between the players.

A child playing the giver of the shot in a game of doctor can diffuse some of the pain and insult of getting an injection. Role reversals help children regain confidence after a dismaying experience over which they have no control. You may both enjoy a game in which your switch roles - the child plays the parent and the parent plays the child.

At times when a parent is really tired of nagging a child to get dressed or finish breakfast, singing the request or playing a role play with dolls or stuffed animals can provide a little levity and enhance the cooperative mood.

Pretending to be an exaggerated version of yourself can sometimes lighten a tense situation. If something makes them laugh, do it some more! Laughing releases tension. Play can even be useful for relieving the tensions that result from sibling rivalry.

For a child who is having trouble playing with peers, such as understanding the rules or being able to accept losing, playing with a parent can be a safe place to learn those skills.

"Play is one of the best ways to engage with children, pulling them out of emotional shutdown or misbehavior, to a place of connection and confidence" (pg 16).
Cohen points the way toward living with your child without having to resort to punishment and domination as a way to correct behavior. Instead, you can connect with your child's feelings through play and then help them discover better ideas about how to behave. After all, when we first thought about having children, we were not thinking that we would be really good at time out or applying consequences, it was the warmth and connection we expected to have with them that we thought about. Getting down on your child's level can help keep this ideal alive.

When your child was an infant, it was easy to connect through love and affection. It is natural for adults to mirror the infant's mood. The trick is to continue this as they grow up, even when their behavior is not so cute. When things aren't going right, rather than buckling down with the punishments, the parent can reconnect with their children to bring out their best by joining them in their world.

Most children live in the world of play, but as adults, we often forget how to play. To make a connection, it is important to bring yourself to the child's level. Even though we may be a bit stiff when we get down on the floor to play and may have to work at lightening our own mood, it is worth the time and effort.

There are some other obstacles that may prevent parents from enjoying play with their children. Perhaps we have lingering needs from our own childhoods. Exploring these things in ourselves can free us to connect with our own children. The two essential factors in developing playful parenting are to find our own playful spot that allows us to play and to create a deep emotional connection.

We will get disconnected from our children from time to time, and playing is the quickest and easiest way to rebuild those connections. For busy parents, there are times when we are just too tired. Sometimes we just don't want to join in the play. A father might have trouble getting into dolls or dress-up with his daughter or a mother might have difficulty with her son's desire to play with ripping the heads off his action figures.

Many parents have trouble with their children being angry or when children are anxious or scared. Often when children are displaying a distressful emotion, we try to talk them out of it. Sadness is painful to watch in our children. When they are sad, we bribe, threaten, or try to distract them, and then when they stop crying, we think it's better. It is more helpful to spend time with your child and get into the emotion. Play gives children a way to express their emotions.

While it is easy to think about being playful when there is no stress, it is hard to be playful when you are experiencing the stress of seeing your child misbehave. Dr. Cohen urges parents to be playful even during those rough times. In all misbehavior, there is an element of disconnection - us or them. Usually when we make the reconnection, the problem is solved or lessened.

Connect with your child before you try to redirect the behavior. "It works best when the adult provides the insistence on connecting, but the child actually sets the terms of how the two are going to connect," (pg 52). Play builds confidence by letting the child be in charge. "Tuning in does not mean questioning our children about every little detail of their lives." (pg 39). If we tell an interesting story about something that happened to us, it can give the child an opening to talk. Children need a certain amount of time to spend on their own so they can develop independence, but they also need times when we are paying attention to their feelings and discoveries.

Dr. Cohen wants us to realize that connection is at the heart of everything. It provides a deeper understanding of your child's emotions as well as your own. Children who are thriving will feel strong connections to those around them, confident in their sense of belonging, knowing that they matter. Play is one of the best ways to build those connections with our children.

Source for this article:
Playful Parenting by Lawrence J. Cohen

"When you are dealing with a child, keep all your wits about you, and sit on the floor"-
Austin O'Malley
Well!!

Our much-anticipated Halloween celebration didn’t quite come off as expected. It rained lizards and bunnies, in addition to cats and dogs.

However, we are nothing if not resourceful and everyone made it a fun day, anyway.

Here are a few snaps for the record.
Typo Alert!

Our apologies go to Mrs. Lutzel. A pesky typo bug caused us to use a wrong name on page 1 of the November issue of Inside the Woods. Mrs. Lutzel’s class won $100 for having the most parent cooks competing in the Chili Cook-Off, October 27th.

We are very sorry that happened.

Ed.
Laugh And The World Laughs With You

Some of the good news about parenting is that you can use your sense of humor. And it may be best if you can learn to look with humor at some of the predicaments you will find yourself.

The young child under the age of six years is a literal learner and doesn’t get jokes or play on words. They do laugh at slap stick humor—funny faces, noises and gestures. Start to laugh, and an under-sixer will laugh with you. They might not know why, but if you laugh, they’ll laugh.

As soon as your child starts with the knock-knock and elephant jokes, you’ll know that they have entered into a new developmental stage of learning. Our over-sixers love jokes and learn through using humor.

Since 1948 the Goofus and Gallant cartoons in Highlights magazine have been using humor to show children thoughtful and thoughtless manners. The adventures of Goofus and Gallant endure because they tap into the elementary-aged child’s sense of humor.

As parents we can tap into that sense of humor to help our children learn. We don’t want to use sarcasm or ridicule as a type of humor. Also, it is helpful if we see our children’s behavior as part of the process of growing up. Babies with food smeared all over their faces are adorable. Their messy faces aren’t a statement of us or a reflection of how we parent. Babies are naturally messy as they learn to feed themselves.

Elementary-aged students aren’t going to be as clean and manicured as an adult. They are too busy getting out and exploring the world to worry about how they look. Again, it’s about their stage of development. Teenagers will want to spend a lot of time with their friends, and use enough shampoo to make up for their earlier years. Remember, it’s about them, not about you.

Laugh and sing and be silly with your under-sixes. Need them to get into the bathtub? Then sing “This is the way we take a bath, take a bath, take a bath, this is the way we take a bath, when we are this dirty,” and march like the Pied Piper to the bathroom. We don’t have to be serious all the time. Learn a few elephant and knock-knock jokes or make up a few of your own. Knock-knock. Who’s there? Your mother. Your mother who? Your mother who is still waiting for the dinner dishes to be put in the dishwasher. Why did the elephant cross the road? To see if they could find dirty gym clothes.

For the teenager, limericks might be a way to tap into their or your sense of humor. For the sixteen-year-old stressing over prom:

There once was a girl named McGew
Who looked for the perfect prom shoe
She looked in the store
And need I say more,
That they were there, silver and blue.

Laugh. Laugh with your children. Have fun. Use their sense of humor to make parenting and teaching fun for you. Laugh and the world laughs with you. Your children will, too!

Maren E. Schmidt, M.Ed.
www.kidstalk.com

The greatest events come to pass without any design; chance makes blunders good . . . The important events of the world are not deliberately brought about; they occur.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg
German Scientist 1742–1799
Literature classics for the Board Book age group

A trend has been growing a few years in the sector of children’s books known as board books. The concept of this trend is to use works of literary art – “classics” – adapted for babies and toddlers.

Parents are flocking to these kinds of board books, which skip the complicated narratives and instead use the stories as a springboard to explain counting, colors or other concepts like opposites.

Publishers of these books say that these parents follow advice of developmental experts to read to babies early and often. They also believe that children can display aesthetic preferences even at very early ages.

Further, the idea goes, even though toddlers can’t be expected to follow the plot of *Moby-Dick* they can learn about harpoons, ships and waves, through an age-adapted version.

With sales more than 300,000 so far, deep into this other publish--one other *Romeo and Juliet, Sense and Sensibility, Les Miserables, Wuthering Heights, Dracula, Alice in Wonderland, Jane Eyre, Sherlock Holmes, Anna Kare Jabberwocky.*

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that television should be avoided for children younger than two years old, and studies have suggested that babies and toddlers receive much greater benefit from real interactions than from experiences involving video screens. In addition, the new board books can id otherwise abused just like the old ones.