

Not just at school

Books, magazines, walks and conversation all play role in learning

As a parent, it's up to you to help your children get the most from their formal education — while at the same time introducing them to out-of-the-ordinary learning experiences.

The sooner your children learn to value books, the better. No skill is more important than reading when it comes to getting a good education.

When you read to your kids before bedtime, it's a stress-free transition between activity and rest. Even pre-verbal tots enjoy the pictures, the cuddling and the rhythm of the words.

Start making trips to the library every week, and take your children along to help choose. You'll discover a few books you and your children enjoy so much you'll want to own them.

On gift-giving occasions, give your children books that tie into their developing interests: stories about magic and fantasy, illustrated how-to books; paperbacks with puzzles and riddles.

Let your kids see you reading for

pleasure, rather than watching TV. As you open the newspaper each day, share the comics with them. And when someone questions the meaning or spelling of a word, reach for the dictionary.

Assemble a home library of books and periodicals that will help your children during their school years; include an encyclopedia, fiction classics, children's magazines such as *Owl* and *Chickadee* and others such as *National Geographic* and *Canadian Geographic*, an atlas and an almanac.

SCHOOL SCENE

It's hard if you're working full time, but if you possibly can, volunteer to help in your children's classrooms.

You'll get to know the teachers and the other students — making it easier for your children to discuss the day's events after school, and giving you perspective when they do.

"Use mathematics to solve real life problems," suggests Judy Larkin, associate editor of *Family Circle* magazine. "How much gas did we use on our car trip? What percentage of our weekly food money goes for ice cream? Measure the sugar in a cookie recipe."

Routines are important. Your children should understand that they

may not play or watch TV until homework is completed. If they need help, supply suggestions or explanations, but avoid doing the work for them yourself.

Set aside a study area — ideally a desk in the child's room — as an "office" (just like Mom's or Dad's). Make sure it has adequate lighting, drawers to store paper and supplies, shelves to hold books and a comfortable chair.

Review homework assignments and ask to see graded tests. If your child seems to be having difficulty, it helps to catch the problem early — before report cards are handed out.

Remember, praise is probably the most important ingredient in building a child's self-esteem.

"Praise their efforts — not just their accomplishments," suggests Ms Larkin. "And share your enthusiasm about learning a new skill like refinishing furniture — showing your children that learning is a lifelong experience."

If your child has a learning disability or just can't seem to keep up in school, consider getting outside help. There's no shame in working with a tutor or signing up at a learning centre — and the results can be dramatic.

Most schools have extracurricular activities that offer excellent learning opportunities. Organizations and businesses may sponsor certain areas of study, or donate computers and software. Special programs provide otherwise unavailable opportunities for low-income and minority students.

Do your children have interests they cannot explore at school?

Chances are these can be found elsewhere in your community. Art, dance and music are taught at studios and by private instructors; public recreation centres, YMCAs and private health clubs offer team sports and athletics.

EXPLORE THE WORLD

How often do you sit down to dinner or drive along the highway with your children and no one says word?

Make an effort to encourage conversation, as a way of sharing your own knowledge — but avoid lecturing!

For example, you might reminisce about experiences and people from your past, and share what you learned from them. Tell about your first job, school experiences, travels to foreign countries, more.

Just taking a walk with your children can be an opportunity to impart information. Explain what it means when a fruit tree blooms, where to look for birds' nests, what safety signs mean, and why street lights turn yellow before they turn red. If you don't tell them, who will?

Let your teens watch as you pay bills, balance your chequebook and budget your finances for the upcoming weeks. They should have their own savings accounts and long-term spending goals.

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Schools in New York City's South Bronx are paying parents a small stipend to attend workshops at their children's school. It's part of an effort to improve kids' academic performance by increasing parent participation.

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Eating for education

What you feed your kids can help or hurt their grades at school

Does it seem like your son's grades don't reflect his abilities? Does your daughter become fractious and irritable after meals or snacks?

The problem could very well be what your children eat. Every parent knows that too much sugar can make an active child really bounce off the walls.

But did you know that an allergy to milk makes children lethargic, depressed and forgetful? Or that children who are deficient in certain vitamins and minerals are easily fatigued, irritable and have trouble concentrating?

The forthcoming book *Eating For As: A Delicious 12-Week Nutrition Plan to Improve Your Child's*

Academic and Athletic Performance by Dr Alexander Schauss, Barbara Friedlander Meyer and Arnold Meyer (Pocket Books) offers tips on spotting nutritional weaknesses and how to remedy your child's eating habits.

"No matter what we think about the well-rounded child, we never think of him sitting down and eating," say the authors. "Yet a child's behavior is influenced by the chemical reactions of his food choices."

Many North American children suffer from what the authors call "overconsumptive malnutrition." Most kids eat a lot but most of it is overprocessed, denatured food that has been stripped of its nutritional

value.

"People assume that whatever is sold in a supermarket must have some kind of nutritional value," say the authors. "In fact, many favorite items might not even be considered food at all because they cannot be classified into the traditional food groups."

The authors recommend at least a 12-week commitment to wean children off "non-foods" such as corn chips, doughnuts and soft drinks for two reasons. First, your children can't change their eating habits overnight. Second, it takes most children that long to stop craving the sugar rush they get from most sweet afternoon snacks.

Changing your child's eating habits also requires a commitment on your part. It takes time to read package labels, stock the kitchen with the right foods and prepare an interesting menu.

LEARNING NUTRIENTS

There are 12 nutrients that affect a child's ability to concentrate and learn.

Necessary vitamins include vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, pyridoxine, folic acid and vitamin C. Minerals include iron, magnesium, potassium, zinc and chromium.

Deficiencies in nearly all of the learning nutrients manifest themselves in the form of fatigue, mood swings, depression, slowed intellectual processes, inability to concentrate, poor sleep and impaired memory.

Eating for As advocates getting the nutrients you need from the food you eat rather than from vitamin and mineral supplements. That means lots of whole grains, fresh fruits and

vegetables, nuts and seeds, chicken, fish, tofu and other healthy items most kids claim to hate.

FOOD ALLERGIES

Food and chemical allergies are another source of learning problems, but how do you know if your child suffers from an allergic reaction?

Behavior is one key. Sudden mood swings after eating, craving a particular food or if the ability to read or reason changes from one day to the next could signal a food or chemical allergy.

Also look for physical signs, such as dark circles under the eyes, a

persistently stuffy or runny nose, flushed cheeks, chronic laryngitis or cold hands and feet.

Common pediatric food allergies include cow's milk, wheat, eggs, corn, chocolate, beef, pork, peanuts, oranges and grapes, sugar and artificial food coloring and preservatives.

Some ethnic groups are more prone to different allergies. For example, most Orientals, blacks and many Jews can't tolerate the lactose found in cow's milk. (If this is true for your family, other sources of calcium include soy beans, broccoli, collard greens, fish, kidney beans and almonds.)

Other food allergies might be harder to identify; you can start by



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THE SNEAKY CHEF

Once you've brought home the good groceries, how do you get Bobby and Spidee to eat the healthy bounty?

The authors recommend a surreptitious approach.

"Most people (adults included) are skittish about trying new, unfamiliar foods," say the authors. "That is, if they know."

Go ahead, be sneaky, and don't be ashamed about it. This is especially important during the early weeks of the plan.

Some nutrition boosters, such as wheat germ or brewer's yeast, can be added to most dishes without detection. And children who never touch vegetables will probably eat celery chopped up and mixed into tuna.

Plan menus for visual and textural appeal. Don't overwhelm your child with platters of unfamiliar food — start with small portions.

As the weeks progress and your child grows accustomed the healthy foods you've been stealthily introducing, you can be more open about the foods you serve. A child who never ate vegetables will probably start to enjoy them stir-fried by the sixth week.

quantities. Although this might be the most economical option, avoid purchasing huge amounts of anything while your child is still adjusting to his new eating habits. In any case, produce, poultry, meat and fish should be bought for immediate consumption whenever possible.



Even young children can appreciate that smart nutrition makes smart, alert youngsters.

eliminating certain foods. If necessary, consult a doctor.

THE SHOPPING LIST

Getting your child on a better diet doesn't mean you have to run to the nearest health-food store to restock your kitchen. The 12-week plan means you gradually replace bad choices (such as snacks with white sugar) with better foods.

Happily, larger supermarkets have gotten better about carrying items that were once the domain of health-food stores. Now you'll find things like soy milk, whole-grain breads and whole-wheat flour. For foods like tofu (in its many forms), brewer's yeast or carob powder, however, you may need to visit a health-food store.

Wherever you shop, it's important to read labels carefully. The authors point out that food manufacturers are sneaky. For example, carob syrup, diastatic malt and sorbitol are all sugar in one form or another. Another example is refried beans, which are an excellent source of protein and carbohydrates — but most brands contain lard.

The authors also offer smart shopping tips:

- **Concentrate on outer aisles.** That's where you'll find the freshest produce and better foods.
- **Beware of lower shelves.** That's where junk-food items are placed to catch the eye of junk-hungry children. The check-out stand is another area to watch out for. Bring along some carrot sticks or apples to appease hungry children or, better still, leave them home while you shop.
- **Be willing to switch brands.** Fancy packaging raises the price, and reading labels might make you switch.
- **Don't purchase items in bulk**

Family affair

Children whose parents participate in a family weight-loss program are more successful than those who diet on their own. Kids who try to lose weight on their own often end up heavier.

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Top trends for the in-crowd

Predictors of back-to-school vogue see plaid in a variety and plethora unequalled since kilts. Krissy Carlin, buyer for Fred Segal, sees plaid for dresses, shorts, pants and shirts. They'll stock baby-doll dresses in

cotton florals, rayons and velvets. She sees lots of hats for both boys and girls — cloches, fedoras, baseball hats and bowlers.

The "four eyes" stigma is gone, says the Luxottica Group, the world's

largest eyewear manufacturer. Popular celebrities such as Meg Ryan, Sly Stallone and Spike Lee have made wearing glasses hip. Vintage-inspired frames and classic preppy specs are available in metals, tortoiseshell and rich-colored plastics.

In most schools there exists a rigid footwear code; bonding takes place from the ground up. Keeping pace with this pivotal prestige issue can be expensive, but there are usually reasonable knockoffs to be had. Boys want Nike high-tops, white or black. Girls are hankering for rhinestone go-go boots.

Sports paraphernalia abounds. A big, expensive school jacket could be your guy's favorite cover-up. Also considered "cool" are baggy sweats, baseball caps and woven bracelets. Chicks need a full spectrum of leggings with coordinating "scrunchies" for their dos.

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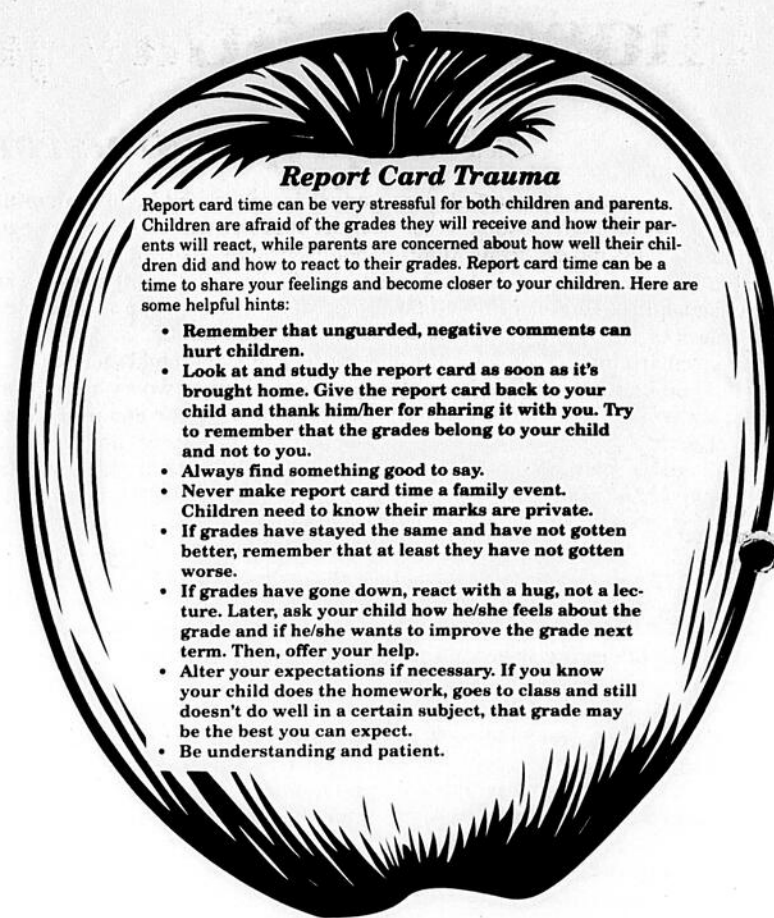
A child's first examination before going to school should be a thorough eye exam. Vision problems that can affect a child's ability to learn include lazy eye, near-sightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, crossed eyes and color vision deficiencies.

Parents too

The Suzuki method of music instruction is considered the most successful because of the parental involvement it requires. Parents have to learn the instrument along with their children.

Liking reading

Frequent visits to the library and allowing little ones to check out books of their own choice helps children learn to like reading.



Report Card Trauma

Report card time can be very stressful for both children and parents. Children are afraid of the grades they will receive and how their parents will react, while parents are concerned about how well their children did and how to react to their grades. Report card time can be a time to share your feelings and become closer to your children. Here are some helpful hints:

- Remember that unguarded, negative comments can hurt children.
- Look at and study the report card as soon as it's brought home. Give the report card back to your child and thank him/her for sharing it with you. Try to remember that the grades belong to your child and not to you.
- Always find something good to say.
- Never make report card time a family event. Children need to know their marks are private.
- If grades have stayed the same and have not gotten better, remember that at least they have not gotten worse.
- If grades have gone down, react with a hug, not a lecture. Later, ask your child how he/she feels about the grade and if he/she wants to improve the grade next term. Then, offer your help.
- Alter your expectations if necessary. If you know your child does the homework, goes to class and still doesn't do well in a certain subject, that grade may be the best you can expect.
- Be understanding and patient.



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Those first-day jitters

A little preparation can calm a lot of nerves on first day of school

From the age of 10 through his senior year in high school, Peter Proulx's family moved from Montreal to San Francisco to Los Angeles to Philadelphia. The result was four first days of school in a completely strange environment.

"But you know," he remembers, "I was always excited about making new friends."

Mr Proulx's parents, anticipating the anxiety a child of those self-conscious years is bound to feel, focused on the positive and took the time to mentally prepare their son. Now 36, he recalls the adventure, not the fear.

First-day jitters are a given with children, even if they've been attending the same school for six years.

Sue Brown, a homemaker with two preteen boys you would trade your own kids for, has always made it a point to make that first week of school, and especially the weekends before and after, free of commitments.

"There's this anxiety, and they're so tired. They just need you there and they need to know you will be there."

Jessie Attiyeh, a 15-year school counsellor, says, "Any chance a parent has to introduce the school setting beforehand is helpful. Teachers are back at school a week or so before school begins, so new parents can bring their kids to look around."

Familiarize your child with the location of the classrooms of her grade (your school may not post the

exact class your child will be in until the first day), then from that vantage point locate the bathrooms, the cafeteria, the drinking fountains. Ask at the office where your child's play area outdoors will be.

Anticipate your child's fears.

"Small children worry that Mom won't show up at the end of the day, so beforehand, agree on the area you'll meet, and stand in it together so that he can visualize it," says Ms Attiyeh.

If you work and your pickup arrangement is with a neighbor or an older child, ask if that person will walk through it with you and your child beforehand.

A good idea, too, is to "give your child a small item of yours, nothing valuable — a barrette, key ring, comb, handkerchief. They can touch it from time to time and remember that they have something of yours to give back to you at the end of the day."

"Older children," says Ms Attiyeh, "worry about lunch. Have your child with you when you buy the cafeteria cards so they know their lunches have been arranged for. Older kids also worry if anyone will talk with them."

You can practice conversation with your child, teaching her to open one up with a comment such as, "I like your sneakers" or, "Do you play softball? We just moved here and we haven't found the rec centre yet."

Teens are concerned about clothes, hairstyles, the right book bag — they're painfully afraid of not fitting in. Older kids need to scope out what the other kids are wearing, so you might put off buying the new wardrobe until after the first week, when your teen knows what he would like, and what he would be comfortable in.

Worry about work

"Kids also worry about whether the work is something totally unfamiliar and if they'll be able to do it," says Ms Attiyeh. "They need to know that the teacher will take those first few days slowly, that much of it will be review, and that they'll be able to adjust. Let your kid know that there are always differences in a new setting, and if it's hard to adjust, it's not his fault and he shouldn't try to hide it."

Whatever her age, talk with your child about her concerns and ques-

tions.

For instance, does your young child have a weak bladder? By tucking a spare pair of underwear and pants in the bottom of his backpack

he no longer has to think about *what if*.

After the first day, "expect exhaustion," says Ms Attiyeh, "or edginess... or exuberance. It can go any

way and it's not an indication of how the rest of the year will go. Comfort your kids that the first day isn't the end. Comfort yourself with this thought, while you're at."

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'Nice' is nasty

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When it comes to clothing, kids have only one thing in mind — popularity. They don't want to look "nice." They just want to look like the person they most admire — peer, rock star or otherwise.

This pursuit taxes both pocketbook and patience. The most a parent can do is to infuse these trend-fangled wardrobes with comfort, durability and practicality.

Parents used to cringe when their child came to breakfast decked in plaid and polka dots. Now new trends endorse these devil-may-care combinations. Droopy T-shirts,

Spandex with cottons, short pants, long shorts, uncoordinating accessories, different shades of the same color thrown in together.

A next-generation combination of skateboarder chic and ethnic influence, these wild getups are children's answer to MuchMusic and MTV. Resale and thrift shops may prove your most reliable resources.

You want your child to make it to school without contracting pneumonia and then avoid asphyxiation once in class. Layering coordinates, such as sweaters, sweatshirts and leggings, are the ticket for ever-changing climates. The diminishing emphasis on matching makes pulling it together easier. Don't forget to tag all articles with your child's name.

Young children who resist clothing aren't necessarily hankering for nudism. They may just have an aversion to a fabric finish or detergent residue. Hypersensitive children can

become irritable in wool and rough synthetics. Check for redness or rashes. Use liquid soap and rinse laundry thoroughly.

Powwow with children before making way for the malls. Go through newspapers, catalogues and magazines. Determine what look the children are after. Set some limits on expenditures and make sure they understand budget as an issue. Do other errands during this shopping trip, and try to shop with just one child at a time.

The travails of prying children out of bed in the morning and force-feeding them something nourishing leave little energy for helping them get dressed. Make it easier on yourself and your child by thinking about the next day's clothes the night before.

Intricately decked-out little people are adorable. But realistically, who has time to fuss with complicated

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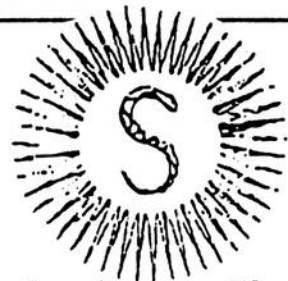
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closures and accessories in the morning frenzy? Adopt a fire drill dressing philosophy. You want clothes that go on fast, easily and without controversy. Pull-on tops, simple snap closures, elastic waists and perma-press fabrics are a beleaguered, somnolent parent's best friends.

Let your child choose his or her own accessories. Kids cultivate mythology around their ornamentation. Different jewelry, hair accessories and hats represent their alliances and give them a kind of power.

Do it yourself

If all the grasping at pricetags leaves you woozy, you might want to stitch that clothing yourself. Home sewers can provide top style and quality at great savings. You'll be assured of adequate seam allowances, strong stitching and well-attached notions. You can reinforce elbows and knees and even allow for alterations as your children grow.

Sportswear separates such as McCall's Jumping Beans line are low-cost, easy-to-sew patterns. Different fabrics make these patterns infinitely versatile. Simplicity's Yes I Can Learn to Sew pattern collection is manageable even for the homemaker who's all thumbs. Singer publishes a volume titled *Sewing for Children* available at bookstores and Singer retail centers.

A cautionary note: Save the unique detailing for your own wardrobe. Kids don't want distinction; they want to be carbon copies.

Tips for coping with sick kids

Of all the pressures working parents face, the problem of how to handle a child's illness can be one of the most intense. Most employers do not allow absences to care for a sick child, but parents without in-home child care usually have no choice but to stay home with the child themselves.

How to juggle the demands of your workplace with the needs of your ailing child? While there are no ideal solutions, the following may help:

• Call the doctor at the first sign of your child's illness.

When you hope for the best, attributing the first signs of illness to something your child ate or a later-than-usual bedtime, you may find yourself faced with the worst: several days home with an illness that might have been cleared up by antibiotics within 24 hours.

If your doctor isn't receptive to such calls, or is not understanding of your problems as a working parent, perhaps you should look for another doctor.

• Build a roster of sitters who may be available to care for a sick child.

It can be worth your while to cultivate sitters who are available to come to your home during the day on short notice if your child is ill. This may take some effort. You can advertise in your local newspaper, post a notice at your church, call the

job services department of a local college, or ask other working parents in your neighborhood for referrals.

• Consider forming a baby-sitting pool with other working parents.

Joining forces with other parents to keep a sitter on retainer to be available to care for sick children may make sense if your child is in his first year of day care or nursery school, when most kids get sick often.

• Attempt to reason with your boss.

If your boss is at all receptive, talk

to him or her about your problems in caring for a sick child. Make it clear that while you've made certain emergency arrangements, sometimes you have no choice but to stay home. Let it be known that you don't want to lie when your child is sick by calling in sick yourself and that you are concerned about getting your work done.

Even if your company has no policy regarding sick children, your immediate supervisor may be willing to work out an arrangement with you. Perhaps you could bring work home or make up for lost days on the weekends.

• Keep your child comfortable, but don't make staying home sick too much fun.

If staying home sick means a wonderful day playing with Mom or Dad, some kids will attempt to stretch out illnesses or will plead to stay home at the slightest twinge. Keeping a sick child in bed, limiting activities and going about your own business in the house at least part of the day will not only help your child get well faster, but will also make him or her look forward to getting back to day-care or school as soon as he or she feels better.



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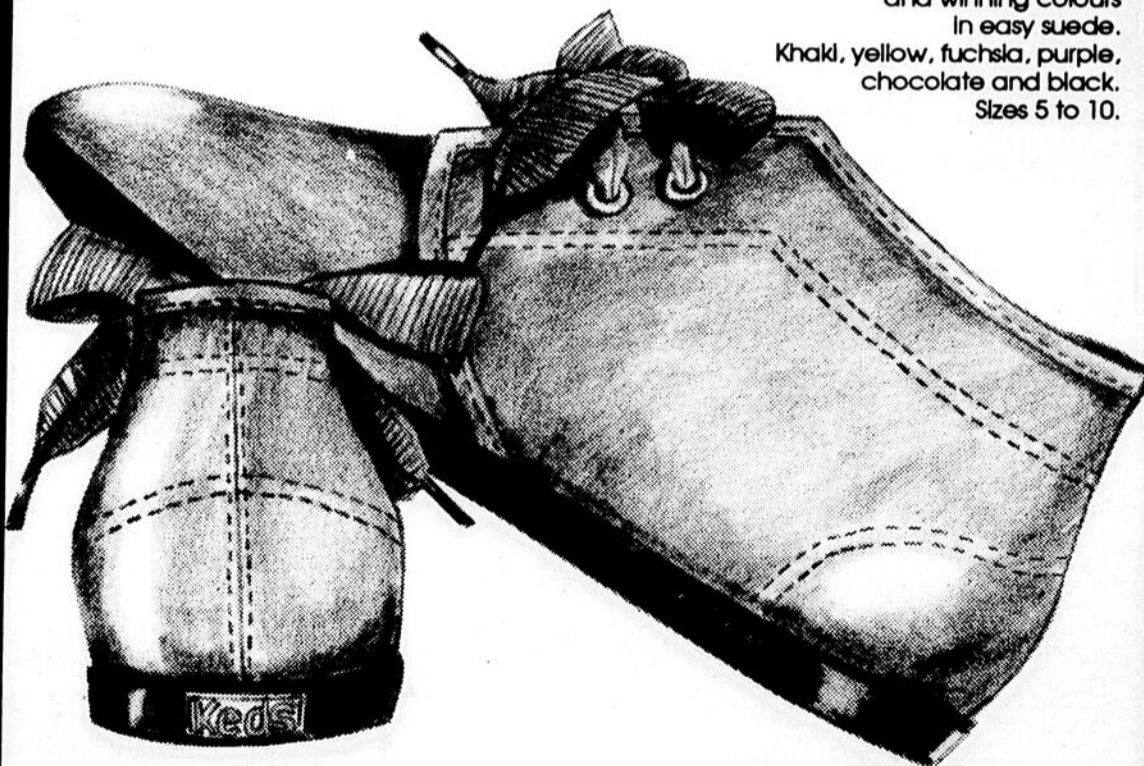
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Steady or not?

Story recalls tough choices of teens 30 years ago

The following feature first appeared in The Westmount Examiner and The Monitor in September, 1961 — 30 years ago. It was written by Gloria Anchel of Northmount High School.

Going steady is a time-honored tradition. It means that a girl, if she doesn't "cheat," dates only one boy, until he is caught "cheating."

In the United States, going steady can start as early as 10 with girls and 11 with boys. Canadian youths usually wait until the ages of 12 or 13. Normally, there are three types of teenagers who go steady:

- The first is the "convenience" type. These are the teenagers who go steady just for the sake of having a date. "So what if I don't really like him that much?" asked one local youngster recently. "It's better to have a date every Saturday night than to be forced to sit home alone."

- Secondly are those who are out for fun. They usually find that if they go out with only one person all the time, they have someone whom they know quite well, can talk to and in whose company they can be completely relaxed.

- The third and most important type is the boy and girl who are serious about each other. In this case, going steady if often followed by engagement and then marriage.

Mr M.I.P., prominent west-end businessman, says: "I think it's a wonderful institution, depending on the age level. I do not approve of high school kids going steady unless they are in their senior year."

Boys and girls in their early teens are much too young for love, or for going steady. They haven't had enough dating experience to be able to trust their own judgments and emotions, adult opinions indicate.

If they have been dating for several years and are old and mature enough, and close enough to one another, there are many arguments in favor of settling down to a going steady relationship.

Assuming that each thinks the other to be something pretty special and important, they usually find that they like each other more and more. As the relationship grows they find themselves less and less interested in other dates.

A decision to go steady must be based on practical reasoning. If one or the other is away at college, for example, the pair will not see each other, except on rare occasions. A going steady relationship such as this is highly impractical.

On the other hand, if they are both at home, going steady can be enjoyable and interesting.

The bad side

If going steady can be a rewarding, meaningful experience, why is it so many people-wise people — people who should know — are against it? Are they just getting old and cranky or do they have some valid points worth considering?

Well, for one thing, teens start going steady too early, so that they make themselves look ridiculous. Kids 12 and 13 act like old married couples, bored and boring because they're stuck with a first choice date, most adults believe.

Boys and girls go steady, not from choice, but from pressures which are difficult to resist — pressures from their own age group. If "all the kids are doing it," nobody wants to be left out of the fun, so they're hooked. Going steady, carried to the

extremes prevalent in some communities, can mean that a girl doesn't have a chance for a normal date if she isn't going steady, so she is cut off from companionship with boys unless she succumbs to the group pressure for steady dating.

No wonder mature people look askance at the custom. Mrs A.D. says, "No I don't approve of it unless they're old enough and serious enough to know what they're doing."

Perhaps the most pressing reason for being against going steady is the fact that constant companionship makes it hard to keep things on a strictly buddy-buddy relationship.

A handclasp is nice, but soon it becomes a kiss, and then, bingo, after a period of fun, the problem of necking arises. At first it doesn't seem a problem — necking is enjoyable or it wouldn't be indulged in — but when a couple is together constantly it may run out of control.

Local resident M.S. says: "Going steady is an extremely good thing if

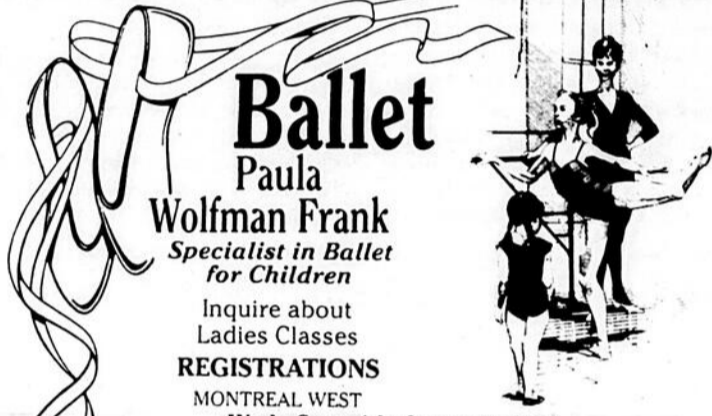
you are mature. However, you must be honest and also realize that once you are going steady, that's it!"

Most boys and girls feel the same way. They agree that once they commit themselves to going steady, there are certain obligations to be met.

"Cheaters" are considered to be just about the lowest form of teen life. Teenagers generally feel that if a boy or girl going steady wants to go out with someone else, he or she should speak to their "steady" first. They might decide to break up completely, or just keep on going out "steadily."

Some teens, along with most parents, feel that going steady is foolish. Steady dating can be done without the public formality of a ring, bracelet or pin. Why accentuate the fact that they are going steady when both parties know their true inner feeling?

Going steady can be a good experience if done sensibly and properly.



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Good nutrition, fitness habits keep children healthy

Remember those blissful days before you were a parent, when you thought of children as angelic little beings who looked cute in clothes, loved to be cuddled and were an unceasing source of joy?

Of course you love your kids dearly, but reality has set in: They occasionally throw up, have runny noses, wet their beds and, in general, tend to get sick when it's most inconvenient.

It ain't easy being a parent — even if you're home all the time. And especially if you're not.

The good news is that keeping kids healthy is easier than ever. Antibiotics can put an end to ear infections, vaccinations keep killer epidemics at bay, breakthroughs in dentistry have all but cured cavities. In some places there are even day-care centres that specialize in looking after sick kids.

Wise parents keep abreast of what's new in pediatric medicine, and are aware of anything — from the quality of local playgrounds to after-school activities — that impacts their children's well-being.

The following is a compendium of health and safety news you'll find helpful for your school-age children. (Of course your child's pediatrician should be your first and foremost source of medical advice and information.)

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Where there's smoke, there's cancer.

"So the experts are unanimous in their advice: Don't expose your children to your smoke," says *Prevention*

magazine. "And just as important: Don't let your child start using tobacco in any form — including snuff or chewing tobacco, which is popular with preteen boys."

Other cancer-preventing health tips:

- Keep your kids away from areas you've sprayed for bugs. Risk of leukemia increases in children exposed to insecticides.

- Protect kids from skin cancer by keeping them clothed, covered and slathered with sun screen. "Just one bad sunburn can in crease your child's chances of developing malignant melanoma," advises *Prevention*.
- There is an association between certain cancers and high fat intake. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables on hand for after-school snacks, and forbid greasy treats.

Enforcing good nutrition is one of the hardest tasks for parents, but also the one with the biggest payoff — after all, you want your kids to live longer than you do.

EXERCISE AND FITNESS

Studies have shown that the more children engage in sedentary activities, such as watching television or playing video games, the more prone they are to being overweight, and to health problems related to obesity (high cholesterol, high blood pressure).

Help your child set reasonable fitness goals — perhaps a half-pound weight loss in one month (but only if the doctor say he or she needs to lose weight). Work up to a two-mile walk or bike ride in three weeks' time.

Offer small but tempting rewards for each goal reached, and then set another goal immediately.

Make a point of exposing your child to a variety of athletic activities: gymnastics, swimming, karate, skating, tennis, racquetball, skiing, more. Kids are more receptive to trying new things than adults are; if they're not exposed to sports now, they may not be interested later.

SAFETY, SUPERVISION

From the day we bring our newborns home from the hospital, our children's physical safety is a constant concern.

Often tragedy results from simple oversights — such as forgetting to cover the hot tub or replacing the batteries in a home's smoke alarm. (A rule of thumb: change the batteries every time you change the clocks, in spring and fall.)

Toys have never been so safe, thanks to stringent industry regulations. But parents should never take anything for granted; evaluate any toy — from teething rattles to archery sets — by imagining the "worst case scenario."

Wouldn't it be nice if kids needed less supervision as they got older? Unfortunately, even adolescents should not be left alone for long periods of time — studies have shown that latchkey kids are more likely to abuse alcohol, for example.

Sex, drugs, violence, war — it's a hard world to grow up in. Kids today are especially vulnerable.

There are therapists and support groups who specialize in helping kids deal with emotional problems, from coping with the absence of a parent to the trauma of witnessing a violent crime.

If your child is experiencing emotional problems, or you suspect substance abuse, consult his school counsellor or family physician for referrals.

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Creativity in kitchen can make healthy eating easy

Back to school means back to the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic — and nutrition.

The information-age has made us more aware than ever that a child's diet has a major effect on his development and future lifestyle — but what to do with kids who won't eat breakfast, who trade away healthy lunches and then pig out on high-fat snacks after school?

Start at the grocery store. Smart eating starts with smart shopping because kids eat what's on hand and easy, according to nutritionists.

Instead of chips and cookies, stock up on banana chips, trail mix and date-nut or other fruit breads. Instead of high-fat bologna, for example, make turkey or chicken your deli selections. Fill the refrigerator with juices instead of soda.

Purchase items like nuts, raisins, crackers and dried fruits in bulk, then divide them into single servings as quick grab bags for snacking or to toss into lunches. Keep your fruit bin full of a variety of the season's best.

This isn't to say kids have to give up on all the high-sugar, high-fat foods they seem to crave. Most kids won't — they'll trade for snack cakes at school and buy soda or candy bars on the way home.

But if your house is stocked with a large variety of tasty and easy healthful options, they will snack there at least occasionally — and so will be mixing healthy choices with not-so-healthy selections to end up with a relatively balanced diet.

The key to convincing children to eat healthier choices is basically not to convince them, experts say. Rather, once your pantry is healthy, let the child choose what he wants to eat — within reason.

Just set the basic guideline that Junior's lunch or breakfast should include one item each from the food groups — meat and alternatives, bread and cereals, fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products.

If he wants peanut butter and crackers, cold pizza or spaghetti for breakfast, so be it. Waffles with fruit for dinner? Serve it up.

And if he misses one of the food groups now and again, don't fret — it usually can be made up at other meals or at snack time.

make kids look forward to opening their box or bag. Occasionally it can be edible — oatmeal cookies, popcorn or granola — but other times it can be a colored pencil, a flexible straw or a cheery note with a joke, riddle or piece of trivia.

Elementary students thrive on carrying lunch boxes — as long as they're cool. A lunch box's lifespan is

often incredibly brief, as characters lose their luster from year to year. But buying a new lunch box each year is a small price to pay to keep kids interested in good eating.

For middle schoolers, paper bagging is the way to be cool.

And since recycling is the word on most school campuses of the '90s, both paper and box lunches should

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BREAKFAST BASICS

Not all kids will stomach the traditional breakfast package of a glass of orange juice, bowl of cereal and whole-grain muffin. Younger kids may be too groggy to feel like eating; teens may be avoiding meals in an attempt to lose weight.

For beauty-conscious teens, try pointing out the benefits of eating a balanced diet for complexion, hair texture and muscle tone.

To entice the appetite of all youngsters, spice up hot or ready-to-eat cereals by adding dried or fresh fruit and sprinkling with chopped nuts.

Also consider the eye-opening novelty of breakfast foods to go — hard-boiled eggs, scrambled eggs in pita bread, fruit chunks in a plastic bag, a mini-carton of yogurt or a fruity muffin.

As another option, remember it's the rare child who'll turn down a milk shake — a tasty breakfast shake replaces ice cream with low-fat yogurt and frozen fruit and packs a protein punch with the addition of nuts or wheat germ.

LUNCH BUNCH

Once they've had their fill at the breakfast table, send kids packing with healthful lunches they wouldn't think of trading away.

While sandwiches are the standard, they are by no means the only option. If your child tires of bread-and-meat combinations, substitute whole-grain crackers, rice cakes, cereal, rice or pasta salad.

Kebabs are another fun option. Threading cubes of leftover meat, low-fat cheese and vegetables onto straws satisfies a child's love for treats cut into bite-size pieces and interesting shapes.

Cut-up veggies and fruits satisfy the eat-with-your-fingers urge — especially when paired with a dipping sauce such as peanut butter and honey, cream cheese and crushed pineapple or hummus.

To keep lunchtime interest high, the meal should include a treat to

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be packed with reusable plastic containers — whether for juice, pasta salad, sandwich or vegetable dips.

MUNCHIES WITH MORE

Between-meal snacks are an important part of a child's diet and overall food intake, according to nutritionists. Young kids need snacks to satisfy hunger and keep energy high, but this often is where they lapse into poor food choices — especially if a parent isn't at home to guide their selection.

Youngsters aren't likely to bother with a snack that is difficult to prepare, so wise parents do the more difficult cooking or cutting by themselves or with the children on the weekend, leaving easier tasks for children to complete on school days. For example, freeze leftover pancakes on the weekend so kids can microwave them at snacktime and top with yogurt and fruit or applesauce and cottage cheese.

Or cut up and freeze fruits such as melons, peaches, blueberries, strawberries and bananas for kids to toss in the blender with some fruit juice or milk to make quick smoothies.

Cream cheese is a simpler snack-time staple — just spread on a celery stick, toasted bagel or English muffin — and you'll never go wrong with fresh fruit. A full fruit drawer — and easily accessible canned fruit — can tame a snacker's sweet tooth in no time at all.

Any veteran of early-morning tantrums, harried leave-takings and late arrivals at work knows about the getting-out-of-the-house-in-the-morning problem. Here are some (almost) foolproof tips for getting you and your child going with maximum efficiency and minimum stress:

• Do what you can the night before.

Pack non-perishables — box juice, apple, crackers — in your child's lunch box. Make sure everything he needs, from his homework to his show-and-tell toy, is packed and ready to go. With your child, choose and lay out clothes, down to underwear and socks, for the next day. Put backpacks, briefcases, keys and coats by the door for quick exit.

• If waking up is a problem, establish an earlier bedtime.

This is such a simple solution to can't-get-up-in-the-morning blues, but one that many parents overlook. Often the reason is that parents don't want to get up too early themselves. But in my book, being jumped on by a 3-year-old at 6 am beats a struggle at 8 am any day.

Morning madness?

Here's some tips to soothe the way

• Establish a morning routine.

Children like routines, and even if you're a play-it-by-ear type, a morning ritual will go a long way toward smoothing your path to the door. It may take some thought to devise a routine that works best for your family.

Choose a pattern that's consistent with your nature and your child's: If you can't function without coffee, make that your first priority. If your child needs a long snuggle in order to face eight hours at nursery school, don't sacrifice that purely for the sake of efficiency.

• One good rule: Everyone should be dressed before going downstairs or heading to the kitchen.

If at all feasible, this should be the one constant you build into your morning routine, even if it's antithetical to the way you have been operating up until now. If worse comes to worst — if the eggs burn and the homework's lost and everyone gets distracted — at least you'll be ready to go outside when the school bus honks at the front door.

• If you have a baby in addition to school-age children, get in-home child care if you can afford it.

Many parents of small children who can afford to do otherwise nevertheless bring their children to a babysitter's home. All things being equal, this is a mistake. It saves an enormous amount of time and energy to be able to get yourself ready in the morning and leave the baby's breakfast, bath and clothing to a sitter.

• Learn the art of always doing two things at once.

Mornings are so hectic for working parents that combining tasks often is a must. You can cook breakfast (or wash the dinner dishes) while the coffee brews, eat while you

watch television, combine putting on coats with hugs goodbye. There's plenty of time to relax once you get to work.

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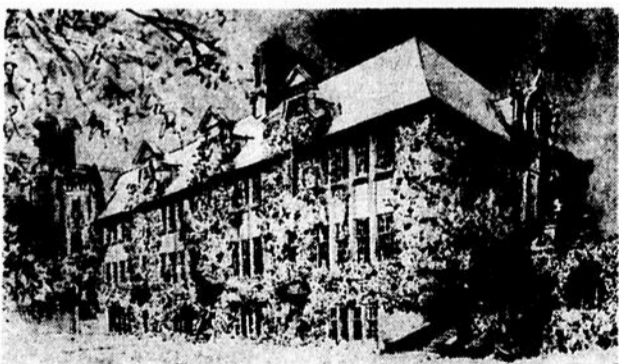
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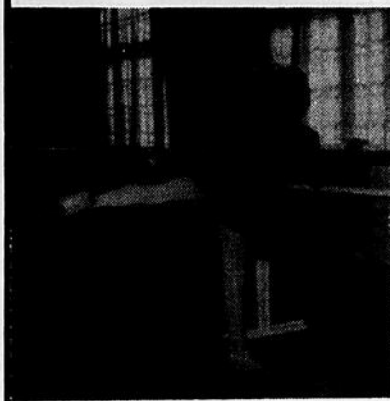
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When talking supplies for the back-to-school set, you're dealing with a lot more than a ruled tablet and a handful of just-sharpened pencils.

Sure, the basics for reading, writing and arithmetic are, basically, the same. But, it's a whole new box of crayons in terms of the astounding array of choices in everyday supplies, not to mention the bevy of toys, teaching aids and accessories designed to help kids before, during and after school.

Depending on the product, the newest wave of school supplies can inspire a budding artist, reinforce teacher's lessons, help a child tote a load of homework back and forth or teach him a new concept.

Some are just fun, others strictly serious and still others a combination of both. But all share a common goal — to make learning fun. Following are a few of the newest innovations:

TAKE IT WITH YOU

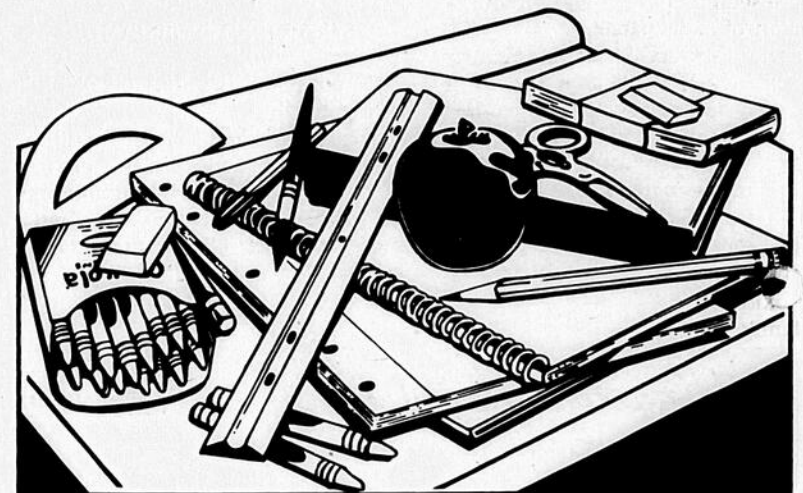
Getting from Point A to Point B is as easy as 1-2-3 for school-age children, thanks to the proliferation of creative totes designed to hold books, papers and such.

Some of the newest ideas include colorful knapsacks and backpacks in an assortment of shapes and sizes. Kids can find carriers emblazoned with everything from their first name in big, bold letters to favorite cartoon characters. Or, they can personalize their own with colorful stickers.

Fannypacks are smaller, but perfect for carrying pencils, keys and other personals. From surfer-inspired neon brights to packs shaped into wearable stuffed animals, the wide selection in fannypacks is as much about small-fry fashion as it is function.

WILD THINGS

Does Junior know a stegosaurus when he sees one? Learning about dinosaurs — or horses, insects,



whales, snakes or jungle beasts — can be child's play with the wide assortment of animal toys that double as educational tools.

Kids, for instance, can get a literal grip on the wild and prehistoric kingdoms with collections of molded or stuffed animals; they're a natural for both play and display.

Other wild-side fun-and-games

include Insect Dominoes where players match bugs instead of dots; spongy dinosaur shapes for bath-time; and model kits for constructing wooden dinosaur skeletons.

Youngsters who like to have something creeping, crawling, splashing or swimming about the house can get an up-close-and-personal look

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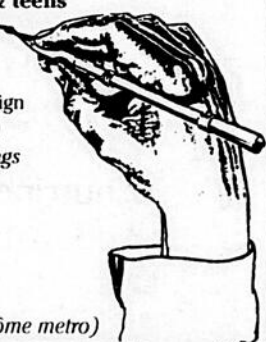
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ASPIRING ARTISTS

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There also are poster-size pictures in black and white that beg to be colored and displayed, and stamps, stickers and glittery inks waiting to dress up everything from a notebook to plain-Jane stationery.

My First Sony's Electronic Sketch Pad allows little Picassos to paint on television screen in 12 colors.

Kids who can't stay out of the family toolbox, meanwhile, might

plan and pound out an assortment of projects at a mini workbench or drafting table.

And, with easy-to-play electronic keyboards and rhythm band instruments such as triangles and tambourines, budding musicians can practice the tunes they learned at school at home... whether or not they're taking music lessons.

SUPPLIES TO DEMAND

It's not just a spiral notebook... it's a statement.

That's the underlying thought behind school supplies of the 1990s; there are so many choices that even the pickiest students will likely find something they like... and hopefully will like to use.

Myriad cartoon characters, colors, logos and motifs now grace

the covers of notebooks and binders, while pens and pencils engraved with the owner's name ensure that they'll never wander too far.

Kids can wipe away mistakes with tiny erasers cut into animal shapes, or get creative with sophisticated art boxes that house colored pencils, crayons and watercolors all under one roof.

Even quintessential crayons have been given a 1990s twist; Crayola recently replaced eight of its classic crayon colors with shades such as wild strawberry, dandelion and royal purple.

GLOBAL AWARENESS

Today's kids know the world doesn't begin and end within the boundaries of their city limits, and dozens of learning aids are helping them gain a clear perspective of its past, present and future.

Take the traditional globe, for instance. Variations include a clear globe that lets the observer see through the surface for a true sense of geographical positions and a seemingly magical levitating version that floats in midair, thanks to high-tech electronics and electromagnetic wizardry.

Other globally related tools include electronic games such as GeoSafari, where kids choose one of 18 map games and use the control panel to answer questions about countries, capitals, waterways and more, and collection sets that help them compile and categorize rocks, stamps, coins and seashells from both home and abroad.

YOUNG SCIENTISTS

Potions bubbling in the kitchen and a volcano exploding in the bedroom aren't unusual sights when there's a budding scientist in the house.

Educational toy companies have created dozens of instruments and projects for those with a penchant for science, such as scaled-down microscopes just for kids, magnet sets for exploring the powers of positive and negative attraction and even a kit that lets one build and erupt his own volcano.

Kids with stars in their eyes can learn all about the solar system through night-sky posters, glow-in-the-dark planet mobiles and, of course, telescopes for peering at the constellations from bedroom windows.

STUDY HALL

The kitchen table is out — and personal work spaces in when the issue is homework.

As a result, many parents are helping their children create pint-size study centre with scaled-down desks, bookshelves and even computer stands for an everything-in-its-place effect. With the right equipment, a spare corner, the space under an elevated bed or a little-used closet can become a prime place for learning.

After the basics — the dictionaries, rulers, scratch pads and thesauruses — accessories and equipment might include a child's electronic typewriter and calculator with large keys and bold numbers and letters, and a speaking dictionary that pronounces over 50,000 words.

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Pain in neck

Overstuffed backpacks can be a royal pain in the neck. Make sure kids don't overfill their packs and that they carry something in front to distribute weight evenly.

Take a break

Kids who spend hours hunched over homework should take regular breaks to stretch, walk around and rest their eyes. Also, chairs should offer plenty of back support and computer screens should be at eye level.

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