

NOTES FROM UPSTREAM

News from the [Arkansas Children's Trust Fund](#)

Fall 2012

Children Playing in the Street

Michael Ungar, Ph.D., is a family therapist, researcher, and Co-director of the Resilience Research Centre. He defines resilience as the capacity of people to navigate to the resources they need to overcome challenges, and their capacity to negotiate for these resources so that they are provided in ways that are meaningful. In addition to his research on resilience in youth, he writes extensively on the ways that adults often undermine the development of resilience, and how we should instead be nurturing it.

In his blog, [Nurturing Resilience](#), Ungar shares a story about a group of kids playing a game of street hockey. The game ends after a complaint from a neighbor, but Ungar goes on to explain how the episode demonstrates the failure of adults to understand and nurture true resilience.

What Kids Could Learn

Ungar considers the act of ending the game “uncivil”. He believes that such acts tell children they have no place in a community. It tells them to go away (one can only speculate to where). It threatens the building blocks of good citizenship and attachment to community, resulting in what is ultimately a less resilient and less safe community.

Ungar describes this phenomenon as “idiot compassion”. Idiot compassion is what happens when the people raising children do what makes *them* feel safe and secure, such as removing the kids from the street. It would be insisting they leave their neighborhoods and play in designated places, usually places where they need parents to drive them. It results in children who may be safe, but are also isolated, dependent and less healthy.

Genuine compassion, on the other hand, gives children what they need, even if it is not convenient for the adults. What children need, contends Ungar, are communities built for interaction, where resilience is allowed to develop. What they need is to play hockey in the street.

What Kids Should Learn

Psychologically, and physically, informal games such as street hockey teach children:

- How to organize their own activities.
- How to create and follow rules of their own making.
- How to exercise (children in informal activities get more exercise than when playing formal team sports).
- How to resolve conflict (there is no referee).
- How to include everyone who wants to play without an adult telling them what to do.

A few weeks ago, a group of children were playing hockey on a suburban street in my community when a neighbor complained. The police came and the game ended. What an un-neighborly thing to do. I hope whoever complained got their house egged.

~ Michael Ungar

As for parents who might feel that pick-up games such as these are not good for a child’s self-esteem, since every child does not get to play equally, Ungar says “So what?”. Taking the occasional risk, and learning to accept the occasional failure, is also part of developing resilience. Parents should only get involved in instances of bullying or intimidation.

Adults are doing children a bigger favor by giving them a little compassion and plenty of opportunity to navigate on their own. In this environment, kids will gain their own experience, find their own strengths, and develop their own relationships. Children who know that they are liked and welcome feel secure about their place in society and behave accordingly.

This sense of community results in communities with greater social capital.

Social capital refers to the assets and resources that a community claims—its capacity for resilience. Resilient people and communities are much better prepared when crises, big or small, happen. They are able to use their skills and connections to create caring communities, where citizens are capable of coming together to overcome and solve problems. They understand that the crisis is not when children are playing in the street, but when they are not.



PROGRAM NEWS

Children's Trust Fund Welcomes Grant Specialist



Kim Drake has joined the staff of the Arkansas Children's Trust Fund, where she is the part-time Grant Specialist.

Prior to joining the Trust Fund in September, Kim worked in a variety of nonprofit settings—Red Cross, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, and Girls, Inc. She also worked with the Chafee Independent Living Program for the Department of Children and Family Services for five years.

When she is not working to process grantee reimbursements quickly and accurately, Kim is the mother of three boys and stays busy as a den mother, PTA mom, and active member of her neighborhood association. Her hobbies include reading, camping, and calling the hogs!



631:

The number of home visitors, family support professionals and other parent educators who attended some portion of the 14th Annual Arkansas Conference for Parent Education and Home Visitation.

News from the Field... "Simply A-mazing"

After a maze of twists and turns, I stopped in the middle of a dirt road. There was not another road or a home in sight, but my GPS stated I had reached my destination. A call to the prospective client's number revealed that her mother had forgotten we were to meet on this date and she requested that we reschedule.

Since this was a recruitment visit, I was prepared with the necessary consent forms and intake survey. I told her I had traveled a great distance and believed I was semi-lost, and that it would only take a few moments of her time to discuss the home visiting program and obtain her signature for the consent forms.

The mother hesitated but agreed to come to where my car was parked. I described my location and within a few minutes a truck appeared from a wooded area with an opening the size of a bike trail.

We emerged from our vehicles and converted the hood of her truck to a desk. We discussed the program



and with great excitement for the social and educational value of the program for her daughter and soon-to-be grandson, she signed the consent forms. We set an appointment for the following week to complete the Family Map, said our goodbyes and nice-to-meet-yas, and went back to our vehicles.

As I traveled back to my office, I thought about the stark contrast between the home visit I had just experienced and the one I had imagined during training. So, if someone tells you being a home visitor will take you to places you never dreamed, they would be correct.

The lesson in this as a new home visitor, however, is not just where a road leads, or how precarious it is at first to traverse, but rather, once we arrive, the new road that will begin for each client we serve... a road full of hope and endless possibilities.

Submitted by Tonia K. DeVries, LPN, FSW

Parents' Guide to Choosing Children's Toys

Tips for choosing toys that promote healthy play and avoiding toys that undermine it

Top Ten Questions to Ask Before You Buy

1. Is the toy developmentally appropriate?
 - challenging but not frustrating
 - appropriate level of complexity
 - appeals to age level (color, shape, texture, style)
2. Can the toy be approached from a variety of levels?
 - variety of developmental areas or stages
 - does not have a fixed functionality
3. Is the toy safe?
 - passes the choke test
 - no sharp edges or danger to eyes
 - is not a suffocation hazard
4. Is it appropriate for intended use?
 - fits in the available space or stores easily
 - works indoors or outdoors
 - can be enjoyed by more than one child
5. Is it durable or made for extended use?
 - waterproof; easy to clean
 - will have play value beyond a few weeks or months
6. Are the play opportunities open-ended?
 - stimulates different ways of thinking
 - more than one right answer or method of use
7. Is the toy free of stereotypes?
 - multicultural or unisex
 - does not dictate a certain role
8. Will the addition of the toy add variety to the existing play setting?
9. Is the toy non-violent in nature?
10. Is the toy a responsible purchase?
 - is not disposable
 - toy and packaging may be recycled
 - price of toy reflects value
 - toy is within your budget

Non-violent vs. Violent Toys

Violent toys:

- encourage children to act out aggressive scenarios
- teach violence is the best way to settle a dispute
- depict violence as fun, harmless and “cool”
- glamorize war and combat
- promote male dominance and female passivity
- provide negative depiction of ethnic groups
- promote excessive materialism
- foster aggressive competition
- lead to anti-social behavior
- condone environmental destruction

Non-violent toys:

- promote prosocial behaviors
- encourage building and creating rather than destroying
- stimulate creativity and imaginative play
- promote cooperation and problem-solving
- encourage creation of scenarios rather than recreation of television, movie or video game plots
- are free of racist and sexist stereotypes
- promote learning new skills and help children develop their own talents
- are open-ended with no predetermined “right” or “wrong”
- challenge children to think for themselves

Toys to Avoid

- Toys that make violence the focus of play
- Toys that make sexiness and appearance the focus of play
- Toys and games that encourage imitation of something seen on the screen
- Toys masquerading as books rather than encouraging children to make out the meaning of pictures and print
- Toys that teach very young children to push buttons rather than to interact and explore



RESOURCES

Smart911 Service Now Available

The State of Arkansas has adopted a statewide service known as Smart911. The service allows Arkansans to register important information that may be needed when utilizing 9-1-1 emergency services.

Smart911 is a free service that allows residents to store information that appears to the 9-1-1 operator and first responders in the event they call 9-1-1. Examples of information that can be provided to Smart911 include:

- medical conditions/physical challenges/allergies
- children's photos
- your physical address
- your emergency contact info, in the event that your child calls 9-1-1
- Location of bedrooms and number of people living in your house
- Other personalized information you feel police, fire or EMS personnel should know in an emergency

Safety profiles are kept confidential. Information can be updated or deleted at any time.

For more information about Smart911, or to register and enter information, visit <https://www.smart911.com>.

NOTABLE DATES

Fun and interesting dates to plan a parent group meeting or family activity around:

November 13	World Kindness Day
November 28	Make Your Own Head Day
December	Safe Toys and Gifts Month
December 5	Bathtub Party Day
December 18	Bake Cookies Day
January 14	Dress Up Your Pet Day
January 20	Hunt for Happiness Week
January 28	National Kazoo Day
February 7	Wave All Your Fingers at Your Neighbors Day



WEB RESOURCES

For full-page copies of the **Parents' Guide to Choosing Children's Toys and Shopping with Children** to print and share with parents, visit the Children's Trust Fund website at <http://www.arkansasctf.org/publications--downloads.html>.

A Pregnancy Test for Schools

A Pregnancy Test for Schools outlines the ways that federal, state, and local laws, policies, and programs can change the landscape for pregnant and parenting students and ranks how well the state laws and policies address the needs of these students. The report describes the particular challenges faced by pregnant and parenting students, highlights the requirements of federal laws, reviews relevant state laws and policies, and concludes with recommendations for both policymakers and for schools. The full report, as well as a toolkit and fact sheets, can be found on the National Women's Law Center web site at www.nwlc.org/reports-overview/pregnancy-test-schools-impact-education-laws-pregnant-and-parenting-students.

Where to Seek Help

Bright Futures at Georgetown University has created a simple guide to help family service providers develop a community-based referral network. The easy to use guide, *Where to Seek Help*, can be down-loaded from www.brightfutures.org/Tools/BFtoolsWhere.pdf.

When a Parent is Incarcerated: A Primer for Social Workers

Developed as a guide for those who work with incarcerated parents and their families, this publication includes sections on how to work effectively with law enforcement, including immigration agencies; how to prepare for visits or reentry; and how to encourage communication and relationships between parents and children. It can be viewed or down-loaded from the Annie E. Casey Foundation web site, <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={5F4FB9E9-8CD1-41EA-89B2-E3985D08F4FF}>.

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