

## The Challenge Facing The 21st Century School Age Child

When a child reaches Elementary School Age, many of their basic needs change in scope and direction. While all children continue to need nurturing from parents and teachers, the nature of their need changes. Starting around 4 years old, children start to transfer their dependence on adults in their lives to their peer group. This is the beginning of their quest for independence. A quest that will culminate in their leaving home and leading an adult life. It is a primary goal of parents and other significant adults (ie. teacher, etc.) to offer guidance and support to children as they travel along this road to independence and maturity.

We have been meeting the developmental needs of children for over 40 years, our 2 centers have a long history of education and experience meeting the needs of our communities. We have seen amazing changes in society, education and technology. Ten or more years ago, most of our mom's didn't work full time out of the home. The demand for full time child care and for care for school age children after elementary school was very small. That has changed dramatically. Whenever a major shift occurs relevant to children, we reassess our programs, changing needs, changing demands, changing programs.



Our School Age Program has been reassessed and some focus has shifted to areas we think need to be emphasized. The children of today have many more experiences outside of the home that the children years ago. They travel more, see more of the world, have computers in the home, etc. There is so much more available to the children of today in a multiplicity of areas, then there was available a few short years ago. Families today are busier outside the home than before. Finding time to enjoy family time at home is limited by demands of career and of single parent homes and extracurricular activities. The downside of some of these changes is the potential for becoming a human “doing” rather than a human being. The danger for developing children is that their lose their creativity and their opportunity for intellectual growth. The children of today spend a lot of time being passively entertained. Many are losing the ability to entertain themselves without technology. Boredom is a common complaint. Does that mean if we lost electricity, we can't make it? There is a whole world of learning and creativity open to our children. We adults

must help them open and explore the world. To help them enrich and nurture their spirits, their relationships, and their minds.

Our School Age Summer Camp and Afterschool Programs are based upon the philosophy that our job as educators is help our children make connections with themselves, their peers and adults. We want to help them tap into their own creativity, their own intellectual curiosity. We do not believe in “warehousing” (putting children in a room with “stuff” and leaving them to their own device with cursory supervision.) Nor passive entertainment. We want them up and actively engaged with our children and with their teachers- learning and practicing social skills, creating games and activities, problem solving and asking questions. Our goal is to provide a challenging environment to stimulate ideas and design projects.

Perhaps our greatest challenge as responsible adults is to foster an environment that allows children to communicate openly with adults and other children. The media is full of tragic stories of alienated children who have turned violent because they didn't know how to deal with anger or other strong emotions. Together, we can keep the pathways open between us, nothing is more important than our children. They are truly our future. Our goal is to be a resource for families, a supportive partner, who can continue to offer programs based on traditional family values, supervised by qualified adult staff.

