



DEAF AND BLIND EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FORMED

Twenty-two people have been appointed to serve on the new Deaf and Blind Education Advisory Council. This group will continue with the work begun at the Deaf and Blind Education Summit held last summer; all indications are that this is intended to be an open process with good stakeholder involvement. The first meeting will be January 20, and at some point after that biographical sketches, photographs and contact information for the members of the Council will be posted on the State Board of Education web site, www.boardofed.idaho.gov. Ten members of the Council will be concerned mostly with deaf/hard of hearing educational issues, ten with blind/visually impaired issues, and two will be working with both sub-groups.

The appointees on the “deaf” side of the aisle are: Two parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing, Renee Higbee and Jenny Hirai (both Idaho Hands & Voices members!) two teachers of the deaf, Sheila Robertson and Patty Evans; Kristin Negilski, speech-language pathologist; Steven Snow, executive director of the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Dr. Michael Graham of the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; Emily Turner, director of the interpreter and teacher of the deaf training programs at ISU, and advocates Steven Stubbs and Ron Schow. There are also representatives from the Idaho Project for Youths with Deaf-blindness, the Idaho Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Welfare (which is responsible for the Infant-Toddler Program and Idaho Sound Beginnings.)

TWO CHANCES TO ADVOCATE FOR EARLY FAMILY SUPPORT

All indications are that the Advisory Council’s work will be an open process, with input from parents around the state welcomed. With that in mind, one of the recommendations of the Summit was to get in place a program for family support from both parents who have been there and adults who are either deaf/ hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired. These two components of family support are highly recommended by both the National Agenda and the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention organizations, but are usually the last to fall in place. National Hands & Voices has developed a “Guide By Your Side” (GBYS) program that Idaho Hands & Voices would love to see implemented in our state; it could easily be adapted for families with children who have visual impairments. The big hurdle is money, and with the economic downturn and state cutbacks it may be a matter of getting everything lined up for the recovery. We’d like to encourage parents to write to Aylee Schaefer, the transition coordinator at the Board of Education, to let her know that this issue is important to families of newly-identified children. If you have received early support from another parent or a deaf adult, whether through Hands & Voices or elsewhere, let her know what it meant to you. GBYS parent guides would be trained to support families using the non-biased approach of Hands & Voices. Aylee can be reached at aylee.schaefer@osbe.idaho.gov or PO Box 83720, Boise ID 83720-0037.

Project TIES, a grant-funded program at Florida State University, is conducting a survey to examine effective practices for assisting families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. There are two way to add your input to this survey—you can visit www.tiesprogram.com before May 5 to complete the survey online, or call (850) 645-6567 or email your address to cjackson3@fsu.edu to have a hard copy mailed to you. Information from surveys such as this is what eventually determines how early intervention happens, and whether family-to-family or deaf mentor support is part of it.

IDAHO EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETER ACT EFFECTIVE NEXT FALL

The Idaho Educational Interpreter Act became law in 2006. For the past three years we've been in a transition period designed to allow classroom interpreters to improve their skills in order to pass the Educational Interpreter Proficiency Assessment. The law goes into full effect July 1, 2009. Educational interpreters must have either passed this assessment or hold equivalent certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or the National Association of the Deaf. There are a couple of loopholes that parents should be aware of. New graduates of interpreter training programs have one year before they must get certification or demonstrate competency on the exam. A newly hired interpreter (one who has not previously worked as an interpreter in an Idaho school) may apply to the state board for emergency authorization. This is good for two years and may be extended for another year. Theoretically this situation would only arise if a school district is absolutely not able to find a qualified interpreter, but parents need to keep a close watch and make sure that their child is receiving the services they need. It may be helpful to make your school aware of your knowledge of this law and to inquire as to whether your child's interpreter has been assessed/certified or is operating on a temporary authorization.

BIG ARTS EVENT COMING!

Quest 4 Arts is coming to Idaho April 20-24. ISDB, Boise School District, Meridian School District, Deaf Center of Idaho, and the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are working together to secure funding for a week-long arts experience for deaf students. A professional Deaf troop from the Gallaudet Regional Center at Ohlone College will come to work with the kids, incorporating academic skills into the performing arts. There will be performances for the schools and the community, and workshops for parents, teachers and interpreters. Watch for more information. To learn more about Quest 4 Arts, visit their website at www.quest4arts.org.

ACTIVITIES COMING TO THE TREASURE VALLEY

Susie Jones applied for and got some grant money from the Idaho Community Foundation to support quarterly family get-togethers and other Hands & Voices events in the southwest region of the state. She and Renee Higbee are starting to plan activities, but could use some help, especially as Renee will be relocating to Pocatello this spring. If you live in the Boise area, now is a great time to get involved in Hands & Voices! Call Susie at (208) 853-4314.

MAGIC VALLEY VALENTINE PARTY

Come to the Jerome Library for valentine-making, treats and other fun activities Saturday, February 14 from 3 to 5 pm. The library is located at the corner of Lincoln and 1st Ave E (one block north of the stoplight at Main St in the center of town)—parking is to the east of the library. Please call Lorna at 324-7544 if you plan to come. Watch for a reminder postcard.

)))))))))))))))

RAISING KIDS—WITH HUMOR

Renee Higbee

This November, the Early Years Conference was held at Boise State University. I had the opportunity to attend a breakout session with Humor Specialist Paul E. McGhee, PhD. Paul was a pioneer in humor research, laying the groundwork for the current interest in the health benefits of humor. He is internationally known for his own humor research, and has published over 50 scientific articles and 13 books on humor. His keynote and breakout presentations focused on the benefits of play, laughter and fun in a young child's development. As we all may know and have experienced with our own children, humor can be a blessing

as a stress reliever for parents. More importantly humor can be a great way to build your deaf/hard of hearing child's vocabulary, pre-reading/reading skills, and boosts their self-esteem. Here's some interesting data concerning the stages of humor development (taken from P. McGhee, *Understanding and Promoting the Development of Children's Humor*, Kendall/Hunt, 2002):

Stage 1: Laughter at the Attachment Figure (6 to 12-15 mo) By the age of six or seven months, you can find infants laughing at any unusual behavior of a parent. This might include something like: waddling like a penguin, making silly faces, sticking half a banana out of the mouth, making exaggerated animal sounds (barking, mooing, etc.), sucking on a baby bottle, and so forth. If you haven't done these to amuse your infant, you might want to give it a try. These things are funny because infants recognize them as something beyond parents' usual behaviors. If the child's parents had always walked like penguins or had bananas sticking out of their mouths for the first six months of the child's life, these would be normal behaviors and would not be funny.

Stage 2: Treating an Object as a Different Object (12 or 15 months to 3, 4 or 5 years) By the beginning of the second year, infants begin to show a new and exciting behavior—pretend. For the first time, they start treating objects as if the objects were something else. Not all pretend play at this or any other age is humor, but it is this capacity for pretend that paves the way for the earliest humor created by the child. Once the first birthday is passed, you may begin to see any of the following: putting a bowl, diaper, washcloth, etc., on her (or your) head as a hat; using any small long object as a toothbrush; or holding a shoe (or spoon) to her ear saying, "Hello daddy."

Stage 3: Misnaming Objects or Actions (2 to 3 or 4 years) While humor based on using objects in "wrong" ways continues, budding language skills generate new opportunities for humor. After age two, parents increasingly hear, "What's that? What's that?" Two-year-olds are very excited by the realization that everything has a name, and they are thirsty sponges for every name you can give them. Since they have built into them a strong drive to play with all new skills, it's just a matter of time before they begin playing with the names of things. So what do they do? They give you the wrong name! Many parents first see this new form of humor in the "Show me your nose" game. Even if you've always played the game straight yourself, the day always arrives when you say, "Show me your nose," and your child gets a mischievous grin on her face and points to her ear! She may or may not laugh, but there's no doubt that this is pretty funny to her. Once children achieve this insight—that it's hilarious to call something a name you know is wrong—every object or person is fair game. Cats will be called dogs, mommy will be called daddy, daddy will be called the child's own name, and so on. It's all just too funny! Go along with your children on this and enjoy their enjoyment.

Stage 4a: Playing with Word Sounds (not meanings) (3 to 5 years) Several new forms of humor emerge by the end of the third year. Simply calling things by the wrong name continues to be funny after age two, but a new way of playing with words appears around age three (as early as two for some children). Children become very attuned to the way words sound, and begin playing with the sounds themselves. This often takes the form of repeating variations of a familiar word over and over, such as "daddy, faddy, paddy," or "silly, dilly, willy, squilly." Sound play may also show up by altering the sound of a single word in an otherwise normal sentence, such as "I want more tato-wato-chatos" for potatoes. Complete nonsense words may also appear, as in "Let's all spooty-dotty-ditty-bip."

Stage 4b: Nonsense Real-Word Combinations (3 to 5 years) In addition to playing with the sounds of words, most (but not all) three-year-olds also start putting real words together in nonsensical combinations known to be wrong. Their budding linguistic competence tells them that words are put together in certain combinations, but not others. So we would expect them to find great fun in simply putting words together in silly ways that they know are wrong. These combinations appear to simply be another way of distorting the known properties of objects. The following are typical of this kind of humor:

"I want more tree milk."

"I have a mail box flower."

"I want more potato (dirt, guitar, etc.) juice."

Stage 4c: Distortion of Features of Objects, People or Animals (3 to 5 years) By age three, children go beyond knowing that things have names to an understanding that these names apply to classes or categories of objects that share certain key features. Even though the child has been using the word “dog” correctly in referring to many different dogs, this is the first point at which “dog” is thought of as a category of animals with certain shared features. This includes barking (vs. meowing or mooing), a certain range of differences in size, color, hair length, etc., four feet, no hands, two ears, etc. A new form of humor, then, can be expected to involve a violation of any of these features that define “dog” in the child’s mind.

Stage 3 humor still occurs at this point, but children are now beginning to play with concepts. Most now find it funnier to distort some aspect of their new conceptual understanding of objects than to simply call them by the wrong name. The examples below illustrate the most common forms of humor at this stage, although they are not exhaustive:

- a) Adding features that don’t belong: a dog’s head on a man’s body, a tree with cakes growing on it, cats and dogs coming from clouds instead of rain.
- b) Removing features that do belong: a cat with no tail or legs, a car with no wheels, a person with no nose or ears.
- c) Changing the shape, size, location, color, length, etc. of familiar things—a person with a square head, polka dot ears, or eyes in the wrong place.

Pre-Riddle Stage: Transition Period (5 to 6 or 7 years) By age five (and sometimes earlier), most children become interested in the verbal humor of older children around them. They hear other kids ask puzzling questions and then give what appear to be very arbitrary answers that are followed by laughter. So they simply imitate what they hear other kids doing. This can make parents think the riddles children tell are understood, because they are telling them correctly. But all parents have also heard their kindergartners tell such riddles or knock-knock jokes as: “What did the cat say to the mouse? I’m gonna eat you up!” “Knock-knock. Who’s there? Nobody’s home!” “Knock-knock. Who’s there? Piece of bread. Piece of bread who? Piece of bread... Want another piece of bread?”

When five- and six-year-olds tell these not-quite riddles and jokes, they typically laugh as soon as they tell them. Parents can genuinely share this laughter—but for a very different reason. Children’s off-the-wall answers to their own riddles are very funny, because they make no sense at all. Kids don’t really understand the riddles at this age, so their answers seem just as good as those older kids give. By the age of 6 or 7, children begin to understand the double meanings involved in the puns and these “off-the-wall” answers gradually disappear. When it comes to young children’s humor, there is no period more delightful than the preschool years. Take the time to enjoy and nurture your own child’s budding sense of humor.

For more about children and humor, visit McGhee’s website www.laughterremedy.com.

(Note: McGhee’s stages of humor are written with hearing children in mind, but be aware that “sign play” is just as possible as “word play” –though hearing parents may need to go looking for resources. And the earliest stages of humor development are independent of communication choice.)

))))))))))))))))))

For our next issue of “Wavelengths” (early March) we want to list possible summer activities for our kids. If you know anything about summer camps, programs, classes, play groups or other activities, please send the information to niwri2@msn.com. If still in the planning stages, send us contact information so that anyone interested can follow up directly with the planners. If you have any other ideas for articles, or news to share, please contact Lorna Irwin at the above email address or 208-324-7544.