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# The Parent Connection

## A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

### Leadership Qualities

*Help your children develop these traits early*

**D**uring the months of January and February, famous American leaders are often remembered. But before any of these people were leaders, they were children in school, parents in a community and people with regular jobs. So what made them leaders? Talk to your children about leaders today in your community, school, state and nation. Do they know why a society needs leaders?

#### Leaders are everywhere

Do your children know how to differentiate a good leader from a bad leader? Are there friends that your children follow or from whom they take suggestions? Talk about those friends. Are your children becoming

leaders? You can enhance leadership abilities even from an early age. Model for your children personal responsibility for property and family. Teach an understanding of others and acceptance for those who are different. Expect your child to be truthful, honest, compassionate and caring.

A leader needs to be a capable speaker and a consistent listener. These are qualities you can model and practice at your dinner table every day. Ask the children about their day. Ask them why they think particular events turned out the way they did. How did the participants cause the outcome? Should other choices have been made?

We are not all going to be leaders all the time, but most of us have leadership roles some of the time, even in elementary school. Leadership skills aren't tested on paper or even on computers; they are tested every day in the lunchroom, the classroom and the living room.

### Field Trips from Home

- 1) <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/GiantPandas> Watch the new panda baby, Tai Shan, at the National Zoo via "Panda Cam."
- 2) [www.connectwiththetroops.com](http://www.connectwiththetroops.com) Use these free templates to create a page in the largest scrapbook ever, in support of our troops in Iraq.
- 3) [www.booksforafrica.org](http://www.booksforafrica.org) This website will help you organize a community project to donate gently used books and school supplies to children in Africa.

### Audiobooks for All

*Books on tape or CD are enjoyable and educational for the whole family*

**S**ometimes it's relaxing to listen to someone else read. But to a child just learning how to read it can also open a door into an exciting new world. This is particularly true for children just moving into easy chapter books who can sound out words and comprehend nicely, but are stuck at a plodding speed. Reading along with a tape or CD can bring fluency and fun to this newly acquired skill.

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### Books to Share

*Secrets at Dolphin Bay* by Marie Birkinshaw (DK Publishing, 2000). This is a book featuring LEGO® blocks in all the photos. After reading the story, build some of the sets or machines together.

*Ralph Masiello's Ocean Drawing Book* (Charlesbridge, 2006). This is a beautifully simple step-by-step approach to drawing. Get out lots of paper, crayons and markers. Build a complete ocean scene inside a cardboard box.

*Dolphin Talk: Whistles, Clicks, and Clapping Jaws* by Wendy Pfeffer (HarperTrophy, 2003). A nonfiction book that shows what dolphins do in their own communities.

*Stink: The Incredible Shrinking Kid* by Megan McDonald (Candlewick, 2005). Judy Moody's little brother stars in this funny beginning chapter book.

*Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Birds* by Jim Arnosky (Simon & Schuster, 1992). This story tells of an elderly mountain man who invites readers to go bird-watching with him. He shows what common birds look like and how best to catch a glimpse of them in their natural habitat. Put a feeder out and see who comes to visit.

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## Audiobooks for All

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By reading along, a child is also often able to read slightly above his or her independent reading level to manage a book of particular interest, like one that corresponds to a movie currently in theaters.

Along with the narrator's voice, many audiobooks also include background music or realistic sound effects that add to the excitement of the story. These books on CD are also wonderful for children who have not yet begun to read. They should not be used as a substitute for reading aloud, but rather as an additional source of read-aloud pleasure. The rhythm and cadence of human speech as well as vocabulary development can be strengthened through this medium.

### Listening separately or together

Adults, especially business travelers, can be seen listening to books on CD while on planes or waiting in airports. Children can enjoy the same experience while riding the school bus or waiting at the bus stop. Personal CD players make it easy to walk or ride and listen at the same time without bothering others.

Audiobooks can also provide an enjoyable shared family activity. A CD can play while you drive the kids to practice or across the state to visit relatives. Listen to the story while you all cook or do dishes together. The family can curl up in the living room after homework and baths to listen to a couple of chapters while relaxing and unwinding from a busy day.

## Celebrate Success

*Mark accomplishments, large or small, with your children*

In the middle of the school year, students often wonder if spring will ever come. Perk up your children's days with some celebrations. Let the kids know that you see their progress. Celebrate things like a spelling test that is better than last week's or home-

## Websites for Parents

- 1) [www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/learning\\_tools/parents/homework.htm](http://www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/learning_tools/parents/homework.htm) Homework and test preparation help for parents can be found year-round at this site.
- 2) [www.coopext.colostate.edu/4DMG/Children/children.htm](http://www.coopext.colostate.edu/4DMG/Children/children.htm) For parents interested in gardening with children, information is available here for dealing with every phase of the project.
- 3) [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/parentcarers](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/parentcarers) This is an excellent site for parents of children with special education needs.

work that gets completed without a battle. Throw a popcorn party when the social studies project is done a day early and pop in a favorite movie to enjoy together or play some board games. Bring home a bag of donuts or fruit to thank the kids for getting ready quickly this morning when you had to be at work early.

Remember how excited you were the first time you tied your shoe? Now, that deserves a celebration. So does losing one's first tooth, taking one's first test, reading one's first book all the way through and remembering to bring everything home from school. A tiny celebration here and there can help carry kids over their daily hurdles.

### Simple celebrations

"Celebrations" can be as simple as letting your child light candles on the table for dinner. It can be staying up 15 minutes longer or getting the first shower. Sometimes, it might be picking out where to go for dinner or selecting the next box of cereal to open.

Of course, there are the bigger celebrations reserved for birthdays and such like movies, sleep overs, trips to a skating rink, etc. But those little acknowledgements – the ice cream cone on Tuesday or the smiley stickers in the lunchbox on Thursday – really help. ↓

## Skill-Builders at Home

**Hearts and Flowers** – This crafty activity teaches symmetry as well as strengthens fine motor coordination. Set out scissors and various colors of construction paper. Create a few basic hearts and flowers by folding the paper in half and cutting along the fold. Increase the challenge by creating more intricate designs like snowflakes and paper-doll chains.

**Forward and Backward** – This memory game can be played anywhere for any length of time. Say three digits and ask your child to repeat the sequence forward and then backward. Next try four digits, then five and keep going until someone gets mixed up.

**Who's That?** – When listening to the radio or watching TV and a notable figure is being profiled, ask the kids, "Who's that?" This current events game will sharpen listening as well as memorization skills. Mix in politicians, sports stars, authors, etc. Ask your children to summarize what's going on with that person.

**Rewind and Play It Again** – This is a fun way for kids to learn through repetition. Often there are things to study that just need to be repeated over and over like spelling words and times tables. Have your child spell or talk into a tape recorder so he or she can rewind and play it again or just use that phrase when you want the task repeated. This is a fun way to achieve plain old practice in any skill.