

big PLANS in print

Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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Children and Families Learn How to Start Smart Stay Safe

Whether you are a parent, family member, teacher, school administrator or police officer, you can learn about Start Smart Stay Safe (S4) and how you can bring this positive change to your community.

S4 is a collaborative initiative between the Calgary Police Service (CPS), Calgary Board of Education (CBE), Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) and Mount Royal University (MRU) and is now being offered in elementary schools across Calgary. The S4 initiative will help strengthen children, families and communities, and in the long-term, decrease victimization and youth involvement in criminal activities.



S4 is a proactive, strengths-based model of teaching/learning where police, families, and schools partner together to actively build positive relationships, create

safe communities and prepare children for the challenges of our complex, changing world.

What does 'strengths-based' mean? Strengths-based is about paying attention to the good things (being optimistic) and downplaying the not so good (being negative). Being strengths-based gives feelings of hope as daily challenges are seen as opportunities for growth and learning.

Strengths-based is about paying attention to positive behaviours, skills and characteristics we possess. As we focus on these positive behaviours, instead of a person's faults or negative behaviours, we encourage and will motivate more of the positive behaviours.

S4 focuses on children's strengths. The more we focus on what our children are doing correctly, the more likely it is that they will grow into happy, responsible adults. S4 encourages children, schools, and police officers to work together in building a safe and caring community.

Start Smart Stay Safe (S4) provides opportunities for children and their families to develop skills, tools and strategies that will enhance lifelong learning. These are built on four cornerstones, which are the foundation of S4.

S4 focuses on the following:

- Having a strengths-based attitude (seeing challenges as opportunities to grow)

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Parents Learning About Needs and Skills

4108 Montgomery View NW

Calgary, AB T3B 0L9

Phone: 403-685-4229

Fax: 403-685-4227

www.bigplans.org

Continued from cover story...

- Knowing your personal strengths and skills
- Learning how to develop these strengths and skills
- Accepting that there will be times when you will need support to deal with daily challenges
- Learning that your strengths along with support systems in your life will allow you to become resilient
- Embracing the importance of being resilient in order to be successful in our changing world

together with their families, police and schools to face today's challenges.

As children find success in each cornerstone they feel better about themselves and make positive choices to make their community safe.

Whether you are a parent, family member, teacher, school administrator or police officer, as part of Start Smart Stay Safe (S4), we have resources to show you how you can bring this positive change to your community. You can visit our website at www.startsmartstaysafe.ca for activities, book lists, tools, tips and resources for you and your family to see. S4 is an elementary school program for children in kindergarten to grade 6, but families can access resources and activities to try at home at any age – even with preschool aged children.

If you are part of an elementary school with the Calgary Board of Education or the Calgary Catholic School District and would like to start S4 at your school, visit us on our website and sign up to get started! <http://startsmartstaysafe.ca/contact-s4/becoming-an-s4-school/>



The four cornerstones of Start Smart Stay Safe (S4) guide the lessons that children experience at school and at home.

These cornerstones originated from the Circle of Courage (an Aboriginal perspective on raising a child), which focuses on children's needs and teaching the whole child. Each of the four cornerstones (Significance, Self-Awareness, Success and Service) teach children about their unique talents and abilities, and how they can work



Try This At Home

The following are a few simple family activities from each of the S4 cornerstones found in the Level 1 Family Activity Handout:

Significance - Read Together: Let your child pick out his/her favourite books and spend time reading together. Enhance literacy by helping your child follow along with the words by pointing to the sentence with your finger as you both read along. You can also have your child turn the page for you, or ask your child what he/she thinks will happen next.

Success - Provide Healthy Choices: Children can gain a sense of accomplishment through making choices about their lives. Allow your child the opportunity to choose for him/herself while ensuring he/she makes healthy choices by giving him/her two equally appropriate choices. For example for a snack you can ask your child if he/she would like grapes or an apple.

Self-Awareness - Play Dress Up: Pretend play and dress up games offer your child many opportunities to practice taking on different roles. Playing in different roles will help your child discover what kinds of things he/she enjoys doing. Spend time playing dress up with your child and ask questions about his/her different jobs. What does he/she like about playing teacher? What is the best part about being an astronaut?

Service - Make a Birthday Card: Next time your child has a friend's birthday to attend, have your child make a birthday card for his/her friend, rather than buying one at the store. This will help your child think about the way that he/she can have an impact on other people by using his/her own special way to share a meaningful message with a friend.

Excerpt of activities from the Level 1 Family Activity Handout - <http://startsmartstaysafe.ca/s4-your-family/family-resources/>

PLAYING WITH STRENGTHS

Use These Strengths - Recognition Activities to Increase Communication and Awareness:

You've Got Talent!

Have a family night to display each member's talents. Talents can be worked on and enhanced with encouragement and support.

Confidence comes from experiencing personal success

Knight of the Round's Table:

During a family meal, initiate a 'family props' round. Compliment strengths, positive traits, and healthy behaviours you've noticed with each person.

Notice strengths for continued positive behaviour

Letter: An important first step in autistic children's education

THE GAZETTE JULY 21, 2014

Re: "Preschool for autistic children in jeopardy" (Gazette, July 16)

Parents of children with autism, who have stepped in where the public system has failed, are actually supporting the public system.

Autism in the classroom is difficult for teachers, parents and the child with ASD. The inability for these children to decode the world around them or in a classroom setting often makes education stressful for the child and everyone who supports them. With public school budgets decreasing as the number of children who are diagnosed is increasing, schools and parents are left with good intentions but limited resources.

Facilities such as the Little Red Playhouse play a crucial role in supporting these children before they start school, and can represent the difference between one ASD child who thrives, versus one who consistently struggles. In an integrated classroom setting, ASD children who have received early intervention are better prepared for the transition to school, and also relieve some of the burden our dedicated teachers face in their crowded classrooms.

Our schools are consistently doing more with less. Our government must find a way to innovate and build partnerships with all centres that support children on the autism spectrum. By depriving parents and their children access to private services and other resources, the government is in effect depriving itself.

As a parent of two children with autism I can personally attest to the benefit of early intervention and how it has helped my children thrive in public school. Like many others out there, the wait was too long, and the urgency too great, so we developed our own path and are still navigating the road ahead. Autism is after all a lifelong disability; starting these children off on the right foot in their education will definitely help them reach their potential.

Jennifer Maccarone

Chairperson, Parents' Committee
Chairperson, Special Education Advisory Committee
Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board

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Have you ever wondered how to find out about free events in Calgary? Or where to find the best playgrounds? What about drop in gym time or gymnastics?

Family Fun Calgary may be the solution you've been looking for. It is a complete resource of events and activities for your family to enjoy in Calgary and surrounding areas! For example, on their Calendar of Events, they pull every single event posting on their website and lay it out chronologically so parents can see what is happening that day or the upcoming weekend.

Another great section of their website is "Cheapies & Freebies" (you'll find that section under either the Events header or the Places header). Here you will find a list of everything happening in Calgary that is free or cheap (under \$5.00) or is heavily discounted.

For example: Did you know that select Calgary Parks and Recreation pools offer free swimming on statutory holidays and \$2 admission for adults and \$1 admission for seniors and kids every Sunday? Did you know that you can visit your local LEGO Store on the first Tuesday of every month and you can learn how to build a cool mini model, and take it home - for free! Or did you know that Home Depot stores offers free Know-How Workshops for kids ages six to 12 the second Saturday of every month? Children accompanied by an adult can construct projects from pre-fabricated kits, learning Do-It-Yourself skills and tool safety, while enjoying a real sense of accomplishment.

Visit familyfuncalgary.com for more information on these and other great events and happenings in Calgary.

World's Best Playdough Recipe

- 1 cup white flour
- 1/4 cup of salt
- 2 tsps cream of tartar
- 1 cup water
- 1 tbsp oil
- 2 tsps food colouring

Mix flour, salt, and cream of tartar in a medium pot. Add water, oil and food colouring. Cook and stir over medium heat. When mixture forms a ball in the pot, turn out and knead on a slightly floured surface. Store in airtight container or plastic bag. For variety, add Kool-Aid powder to dry ingredients instead of food colouring. It will smell great!

Recipe courtesy of PACT website.

Image source: themamadramalogues.blogspot.ca



No One Will Play With Me

Helping Your Child Make Friends

My usually bright, feisty, full of life, three year old boy was sullen, withdrawn and sad and it took me the better part of a week to figure out why he suddenly didn't want to go to preschool any more.

"No one will play with me" he said with tears rolling down his cheeks...

He seems so sad and confused by this strange occurrence, he thought that going to preschool would mean lots of friends and people to play with.

My heart breaks a little for him, but I smile, because I know that going to preschool will mean lots of friends and people to play with, but it will take time to learn how to make friends, how to join in, and how to deal with the disappointment of being told 'you can't play'.

Children are not born innately knowing how to play together. Social play is a skill that develops over time and is dependent on a child's age and stage of development.

Ways to Help Preschoolers Make Friends

1. Don't expect too much too soon

At around three years of age children are only just taking their very first steps in developing more social play. They most often engage in Parallel Play (see table on the right). At three to four years of age Associative Play develops and children begin to interact with each other during play, but only sometimes. They are slowly beginning to understand the concept of 'friendship' and wanting to play with others. Expecting children at this stage to play complex, co-operative, social games without adult support is probably expecting too much.

2. Support their Social Play

Young children need adult support to be successful in social situations. Be there when your child plays with others to help them find the words to successfully join in, to



guide them when they are not sure and to help when altercations arise. You don't need to be a total 'helicopter parent' and do nothing but hover about waiting for something to happen, but do be close by and step in if you need to.

3. Model Successful Social Behaviour

Enjoy time with your own friends and family members with your children. Make sure you are modelling positive social interactions and positive social language when interacting with both friends and family.

4. Set Up For Success.

Set up your environment to make social play easy for children. If your child is in the early stages of social play (parallel play) set up activities where they can play next to, but not necessarily with other children. While it may appear that the children are 'ignoring' each other, they are actually learning many important social skills from each other by playing side by side and building up their confidence too.

Make sure you have enough toys so that sharing and taking turns is a positive thing. If you only have a dozen blocks between three children no one will have enough blocks to build anything, which is frustrating and not conducive to co-operating.

5. Practice!

Help your child practice social skills and develop friendships by organising to spend time with other children at a similar stage of development (who may or may not be the same age, because children all develop skills at different rates), and with similar interests.

Invite the child and a parent over for a play. Having Mum or Dad stay with the visiting child will help give them confidence and make everyone feel more at ease. Keep the play date fairly short in the beginning and set up a few activities that you know both children enjoy so they are actively engaged.

Join a group or activity of interest to your child. While they may not be engaging in 'active social play' while at a music class they are still learning and practising many important social skills such as taking turns, listening etc and they are getting to know other children with similar interests.

My boy is at preschool with a group of children who are three or almost four (like he is) so there is still a lot of time for him to practice his social skills and make friends... and I am sure he will. Which stage of social play is your child in? Have they started to form friendships with other children yet?

Reprinted from: <http://childhood101.com/2011/05/no-one-will-play-with-me-helping-your-child-make-friends>

An early childhood educator and Mum of four who lives on a small property, 'The Pickle Farm,' in 'almost rural' Victoria, Kate blogs about all kinds of crazy things. Read more of Kate's adventures at <http://picklebums.com>.

Stages of Play

Unoccupied play

The child is not playing, just observing

Solitary play

The child plays alone, focussed on their own activity, unaware and uninterested in what others are doing. Most common in children aged under three.

Onlooker play

The child watches others at play but does not engage in it. They may talk about the play, but they do not join in. Most common in children aged 2-3 years.

Parallel play

The child plays separately but close to others often mimicking their actions. Often seen as the beginning of more complex social play. Most common in children ages 1 1/2 - 4 years.

Associative play

The child is interested in playing with others and interacts with others during play, but the activity is not organized or co-ordinated. Most common in children aged 3 - 4 years.

Cooperative play

The child is interested both in the people playing and in the activity. The activity is organized, and participants have assigned roles. This is the beginning of "team work". Most common in children aged 4 1/2 - 6+ years.

Adapted from Mildred Parten's Stages of Play theory.. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parten%27s_stages_of_play