

RACKHAM GRADUATE PARENTS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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WORKING FROM HOME

For many people, working from home is seen as a luxury; however, for those of us who lack office space on campus or who find the cost of childcare overwhelming (\$1100/mo. fulltime), working from home isn't an option, it's a necessity. Yet, working at home with children can present some real challenges. After talking to several graduate parents, considering my own experience with a newborn, and doing some research, four common threads came up that deal with space, rules, time and help when trying to work from home productively.

Most parents I talked to found it useful to have a designated work space. For some, that was converting a spare room into an office; for others, it was using part of the kitchen table. In one case it was simply anywhere mom was sitting with her laptop. Ideally, by designating physical space as an office, both parents and children learn that when mom or dad is present in the that space, she or he is not to be bothered. This, of course, is often better in theory than in practice. Several parents mentioned creating a workspace for their children to keep them out of theirs. Providing kids with old computers and cell phones allowed them to play "work" or "research" next to their parents so that they could focus on their own work.

That leads us to establishing rules. Each family I talked to had a different set of rules, and it seems that while they vary, they are necessary. For some, a closed door to the "office" means the working parent is unavailable except for emergencies. This seems to work fairly well for older children, however, for younger ones, a closed door just means a door waiting to be pried open. Those who didn't have a closed-door policy usually had other rules to keep the children from disturbing them while they worked. For example, the children were allowed to play in the same room, but had to play alone quietly if the working parent was reading or at the computer.

When talking to parents about what kind of hours they worked, two camps emerged: those who followed strict schedules and those who were more flexible following their children's lead. Those with set schedules usually had their children away at school or childcare or children who regularly slept for long periods of time. At least two parents mentioned that they worked at night, once everybody was asleep. Those in the other camp said they tended to work in short bursts of thirty minutes to one hour while their children were napping or playing. These parents also noted that the work they did at home was mostly tasks that didn't require a lot of mental labor because the limited time didn't afford them the chance to enter deeply into their material, but at least it kept them in touch with their projects. (Cont. on pg. 4)

SUMMER CAMPS

In the U.S., going to camp as a child is part of our American culture. That can imply either going to a residential camp (where kids spend the nights) or a day camp. Both offer opportunities to meet friends, learn new activities and create life-long

memories. According to one website, there are more than 8,000 residential camps in the US (<http://www.camppage.com/summer-camp-choosing.htm>). One of the most popular residential camps in the Ann Arbor area is Camp Al-Gon-

Quian, run by the YMCA. Children from 8-16 stay one to two weeks in rustic cabins and participate in a variety of activities like canoeing and horseback riding. Many churches offer residential camps as well. (Cont. on pg. 3)



NEXT GRADUATE PARENT EVENTS: BABY SIGN LANGUAGE & LESLIE SCIENCE CENTER

July marks the last month of our organized graduate parent activities for the school year. The last two events are a workshop on baby sign language and a visit to the Leslie Science Center.

As you see on page three, there are many benefits to teaching your children how to articulate their needs using sign language at an early age. Besides the potential benefits, it is a fun way to spend an evening with your children and other

graduate parents. Join us at Rackham on Tuesday, June 17th at 6:00 pm in the East Conference Room. Pre-registration is required at <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/calendar/>

Our last major outing will be to the Leslie Science Center on Saturday July 19th. We will enjoy a raptor presentation to learn about different kinds of birds of prey, their habitats and behaviors. Before or after the event, parents and children

are welcome to stroll through the 50 acres of fields, prairie, woods, and ponds. Parents are encouraged to bring a picnic lunch. More details will be provided on the Rackham website in late June.



PREVIOUS EVENTS: DOMINO'S PETTING FARM & JUMP CITY

In a repeat of last year, the weather did not cooperate with us at the Domino's Petting Farm event as you can see from the photos below. Nonetheless, participation was fantastic as we packed the lunch room for our pizza lunch. The bolder parents and their children left the warm confines of the

barn braving the cold and wind to visit the llamas and cows. Farmer Judy gave a stimulating talk and showcased some of the more exotic and popular animals.

In late May, laughter filled the room in Jump City as parents and children alike

jumped their hearts out on five different inflatables. The climb and slide was clearly the most popular with a constant trail of kids climbing the inflatable wall and throwing themselves down the slide. If you missed either of these events, we will be sure to repeat them again next year.

PICTURES FROM DOMINO'S PETTING FARM & JUMP CITY



SIGN LANGUAGE: EARLY COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD

Ever wonder what your baby's trying to tell you? Wish you could help your toddler express his or her wants and needs, rather than cry with frustration? Sign language can help young hearing children communicate long before they can speak.

From as early as six-months-old, many babies have enough motor control to produce signs, even though the fine motor skills for speaking will develop slowly over the next two years. Using sign language may help babies to answer caregivers' questions and make requests, reducing frustration and tantrums from miscommunication. Using sign language, babies can communicate, "I need milk," or "I want to go outside," or even "My ear hurts" *instead* of crying.

Signing may also help young children spark conversations about an AIRPLANE overhead, an ELEPHANT at the zoo, a TELEPHONE ringing, or other things they find interesting and, up until now, had no way of expressing clearly. Signing encourages a stronger, more intimate bond between parent and child through this new, positive way of communicating.

Research has shown that signing with hearing babies and toddlers allows communication and spoken language to happen earlier and faster, and helps parents to better understand children's early words. A study funded by the National Institutes of Health has shown that children who sign as infants are advanced linguistically and

cognitively in preschool and have higher IQ's in elementary school than non-signing children.

To learn more, Rackham is offering a free preview class where parents can get a taste of how to sign with their children on Tuesday, June 17th at 6:00pm in the East Conference Room, 4th floor, in the Rackham Building. Bring your infant or toddler (six months-two years) and join Kathy Brady, a *Signing Smart* Certified Instructor.

If you are interested in finding out more about the instructor or interested in signing up for ongoing classes taking place around Ann Arbor, visit www.ssannarbor.com.



Signing book



Signing duck



Signing change diaper

CONT. FROM PG. 1. SUMMER CAMPS

Not all children, however, enjoy the idea of leaving home for a week or two, especially younger ones. Another option is attending a day camp where parents drop off and pick up their kids each day. Three of the most popular organizations in the Ann Arbor area which offer day camps are the YMCA, Washtenaw Rec. and Ed., and U-M's Kidsports. Most programs are thematic, focusing on one sport or activity, like soccer or swimming. There are also many camps that are educationally focused like YMCA's CSI, Whiz Kids, and Prodigy camps. Day camps have programs for children as young as three years old. And for about the same price, day camps offer children a fun alternative to daycare. All of the programs offer scholarships for low income parents. For more information, visit these websites:

- http://reced.aaps.k12.mi.us/reced.home_catalog__registration_form__related_information
- http://www.annarborymca.org/camps_day.php
- http://www.umove.kines.umich.edu/KidSport_2008_Brochure.pdf



CONT FROM PG 1. WORKING FROM HOME

One day while playing soccer, I overheard a team member telling another player how she had a nanny come in every morning while she worked in her home office. This, to me, seemed to defeat the whole purpose of staying at home to work or so I believed until I had my own child. With my own newborn, it has become quickly obvious that if I want to get any work done, I need somebody to help out. My daughter is still too young to entertain herself for very long and she hates to be left alone or put down to sleep. Now I, like the person I initially scoffed at, bring in somebody to watch my child while I work. Unlike my fellow team member, however, I can only afford this option a couple days a week and not every week. But for now, it is enough to get our family through the first few months until I feel more comfortable sending my daughter to daycare. Other parents talked about how they share children watching responsibilities with their partners, one works while the other watches the child.

Another common theme that emerged while talking to parents is the difficulty or impossibility of working from home. Many parents said they found it untenable to get really serious work done from the house no matter if their child was older or younger, quieter or noisier. Working from home just doesn't work for everybody.

What I found most heartening was that most parents spent as much time telling me about how they organized their work from home, as telling me about how they created free time to spend with their children. While we might worry that our chosen lifestyles as students and academics are not ideal for raising children, my initial peek into this subject suggests quite the opposite. Parents are going to great lengths to assure that quality time exists to spend with their children. Moreover, by working at home, perhaps we can help make our jobs and studies more explicit for our children who often do not quite understand what it is we actually do. By working at home with our children around, we can hopefully instill in them the same motivation and work ethic that has gotten us where we are today.*

SUMMER ART IN ANN ARBOR

Summer time is perhaps the nicest time of the year to live in Ann Arbor for those who enjoy the arts. One of Ann Arbor's most popular events, affectionately known as Top of the Park, starts June 13th. Top of the Park is just part of the larger Ann Arbor Summer Festival. At the nightly events, you and your children can listen to live music or watch an outdoor movie (both free) on Ingalls Mall, located in front of the Rackham Building. In addition to the music and movies, this year there will be an outdoor aerial performance by the Dream Engine that runs from June 25th -28th (also free). According to the Summer Festival website, "The Dream Engine sends its performers into the sky, suspended as aerialists beneath large helium balloons and oversized, inflatable structures. Floating and gliding, they tumble and turn with balletic grace to the sound of wistful music, exploiting the uncharted spaces between street and rooftops." Check out their website for this truly spectacular event: www.thedreamengine.co.uk/. For movie and band times check the Summer Festival Website at www.annarborsummerfestival.org/.

Two weeks after the Ann Arbor Summer Festival ends, a collection of four art fairs begins on July 16th and lasts for four days. Major streets around campus, like South University, North University and State, are closed to traffic and fill with artisans from around the nation selling their arts and crafts. Kids especially enjoy the Artzone where they can create their own arts and crafts like bag hats and dinosaur feet. The Artzone is usually located across the street from Rackham. For more information, visit <http://www.annarbor.org/events/artfairs.asp>

The goal of the Rackham Graduate Parent Newsletter is to help our graduate and professional student parents participate in the local and University community. Our aim is to provide information about organizations and services to make your time here in at the University as enriching as possible.

If you have any comments about our newsletter or ideas for future articles, feel free to e-mail:

gradstudentlife@umich.edu

*Written by A. Hesp, a PhD. student in Romance Languages and Literature and a parent of a restless newborn.

