



HAPPY HOLLOW SCHOOL

*Providing Quality & Caring Education
for Preschool through Kindergarten since 1956*

HAPPY HOLLOW COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

DEALING WITH YOUR CHILD'S EMERGING UNDERSTANDING OF FEELINGS

Parents of children in the Lower School (including the pre-kindergarten and preschool, pre-k groups) will know from our paper on SEPARATION our philosophy on leaving your child those first few days and weeks. Parents of children in the Upper School (the kindergarten group) may have dealt with separation anxieties in previous situations and may feel less qualms. Be assured, please, that our every effort is directed towards making each child comfortable in his new situation - learning WILL take place, but positive feelings and bonding are our first goals.

One hears a lot about "feelings" in the schools today - about making children aware of their feelings, in getting them to recognize the names of their feelings, to talk about them, even to draw about them. We as adults may perceive our own inadequacies in certain areas and out of protectiveness and anxiety for our children may decide that they should be better prepared than we were. It is common nowadays to watch adults struggle to get in touch with their feelings - BUT let us not let the heat get on little children to learn about their feelings. Let us think about this:

Emotional adjustment, unlike facts and skills, cannot be structured for easy learning. Feelings are powerful in the early years but not too responsive to logic. A major task for our young children is actually to learn WHAT TO DO when overcome with affection, fear, shyness, pride, ambivalence, envy, longing, possessiveness, bewilderment, loneliness. Such feelings are caused mainly by children's interactions with other people. Their feelings are clarified and dealt with bit by bit in active participation with each other. Children DO need help in coping with their feelings, but the most useful kind of help comes in the form of suggestions for alternative social behavior. One can also help by accepting the legitimacy of children's feelings (not necessarily their actions!) and by helping them understand the difference between feelings and actions---unfortunately, sometimes a fuzzy borderline.

Some guidance does involve appropriate talk about one's own and others' feelings---but this, talk should flow out of direct concrete experiences with others. We, as teachers, don't want to teach merely vocabulary, for does defining 'compassion' lead to

compassion? Does the word 'sad' help a child deal with sorrow? Children will comply and repeat words, but the real crucible of emotional adjustment is in the living situations where children argue, share, disagree, agree, cooperate, barter, get hurt, hurt others, love and are loved until slowly, as the capacity for reflective thought begins to emerge, they come to understand how feelings can be managed for greater personal and social effectiveness. We hope our awareness of the developmental process is ever alert to the needs of our young children, and we NEVER assume that there are shortcuts for this long struggle into adulthood. The learning process is forever, and how exciting it is! At this point of time, your children are on the brink of a tremendous step forward, and we shall be there to guide them safely and lovingly ahead.

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