

# HO'OLAULIMA | MOANALUA

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Vol. XXVII, No. 1

October - November 2020



## Life-Long Learning

it's what we do here at MES!



**Aloha, Surfrider 'Ohana!** There's no question that 2020 has been like no other year in Moanalua history! We lost the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 2019-2020 school year to the initial coronavirus outbreak which forced us to cancel our Aloha Run, Aloha 'Aina Day, May Day, Service Groups' field trip, and Sixth Grade promotion celebration. Schools across the state and nation lost their proms and graduations to the pandemic. Although we had been optimistic and hopeful for a speedy return to "normal," sadly, this has not turned out to be the case as we found ourselves starting the 2020-2021 school year in Distance Learning mode.

I hope you have all been staying safe and well and that Distance Learning has been productive for our students and families. Hats off to you if you were already a video-conferencing pro going into the "stay at home/work from home" period! The majority of us have had to up our "lifelong learning" game.

I hope you will enjoy the short article on page 2, "*4 Tips on How to Prevent Homeschool Burnout*" -- although written for the benefit of homeschooling parents, offers sound advice and a glimmer of hope to parents in this age of Distance Learning.

It's been decades since handwriting has been a focus in schools and as the article asks, is there even a need in this digital age? Please check out "*Does My Child Still Need to Learn Handwriting?*" on page 7 to find out why handwriting practice supports reading and writing skills and, in turn, benefits the child's learning.

These past six months have probably been the most family time you've spent together since your kids were infants. During this time you may have become aware of things you hadn't really paid much attention to before. Hopefully, you've learned how awesome and resilient your children are. Parents I've talked to mention that one thing they have noticed, and are not too happy about, is that their kids tell

lies -- about both small and big things. They admit that this probably isn't a new behavior but is one that has recently come to light because of the increase in time spent with their kids. As I was researching this it turns out that lying is pretty common behavior and, fortunately, one that can be changed. Check out "*12 Tips for Raising Truthful Kids*" on page 3 to learn ways to encourage honesty.

### **What's ahead, and what's not...**

- The first quarter of the 2020 - 2021 school year ends on October 2 -- woohoo! You survived!
- **October 5 through 9 is Fall Break** - our mini one week "vacation" celebrates the completion of the first quarter of the school year. Get off the screens and enjoy the week off!
- **Parent-teacher conferences are on the calendars for October 28 - November 6.** This year, to maintain safety protocols, all conferences will be done via WebEx. Your child's teacher will be contacting you to schedule your conference appointment time.
- *Students' picture-taking days* are also on hold. This event, usually scheduled for August will be rescheduled to early in 2021. I apologize if this messes up your tradition of holiday gifting your children's portrait to family and friends. You will be notified once dates can be confirmed with photographers and are in accordance with safety measures.
- As you probably already know, for health & safety precautions, our PTO's annual **Fun Fair** will not be held this year. This cancellation marks the first time that this annual event is not being held -- so sad because it's an event our students and community have always looked forward to. I hope you will continue to support our PTO who do so much for our school, students, and staff. Send in your membership form and check their website at <[www.moanaluapto.org](http://www.moanaluapto.org)> for up-to-date information.

Please feel free to contact me by phone (305-1210) or email ([mes\\_pcnc@yahoo.com](mailto:mes_pcnc@yahoo.com)) if you have any suggestions, questions or concerns.

- susie



# 4 Tips on How to Prevent Homeschool Burnout

by Gretchen Roe, August 27, 2020  
<https://demmelearning.com/learning-blog/>

Homeschooling can be a stressful experience, but it doesn't have to be. Often homeschooling parents create stress because of underlying anxieties about whether we are doing enough for our kids. We see how slow the learning process can be, and we panic.

In my experience, homeschooling burnout can come from two directions: from your child or from you. Either way, there are many strategies to alleviate stress. Today, I want to offer you four tips to help avoid burnout.

## 1) Empower Your Kids To Request Short Breaks

I am the textbook definition of a Type-A parent. I have five adult children and a 14-year-old. Recently my kids and I were talking about our adventures in homeschooling. I realized that as a Type-A Parent, my mentality was often that if I had set a goal, we were going to meet that goal no matter what happened. This put my kids in a position of not feeling like they could advocate for themselves.

We can inadvertently sabotage our children's ability to self-regulate when we try to force them to overextend beyond their capabilities. Create a system of checks and balances where your student can say, "I need 10 minutes to just go sit by myself" or where you can say to your kids, "I need a break. Let's go outside and look at the clouds for 15 minutes."

Homeschooling is a marathon, not a sprint. One of the hardest things about homeschooling is for us to realize that this is a job where you don't see the fruits of your labor while you're laboring. Let me encourage you to breathe, to relax. You're fighting a good fight and you're doing a great thing with your children. If you're teaching your children to advocate for themselves and become lifelong learners, then you're doing a fantastic thing. Taking breaks is an important part of the process.

## 2) Embrace Laughter

The second tip is to embrace laughter. As a colleague reminded me this morning, "You know, for homeschooling to work, you gotta be able to laugh at yourself. You have to be able to laugh at your mistakes." That's really true. Laughter is something we should take into all of our endeavors. Find what's

comedic in everyday life. Spend time with your kids remembering past funny experiences. Last Christmas, I gathered with all my kids and grandkids and we had a fantastic time. And what we remembered most vividly from the days of homeschooling were the funny things that happened.

## 3) Find Friends Who Let You Vent

My third tip is that it's important to find someone to talk to who's a good listener, and who is probably not related to you. What does that mean? Sometimes we're just too close to an issue and that can cause friction. Often we're tempted to try to immediately solve everything instead of just listening. As a parent, it becomes important for you to have someone that you can call or chat with, or have a cup of coffee with and say, "I'm really struggling with this right now." Someone who can hear you, provide feedback, and help guide you.

I was blessed to have two friends with whom I had the kind of friendship where we could call and say, "Hey, I don't need advice. I just need to vent for a minute." And the other person would sit and listen. That was a wonderful gift and those ladies are still part of my life. A good friend can be such a powerful encouragement, to keep you in the game and help you avoid burnout.

## 4) Record Happy Moments on a Post-it Note

My fourth and final tip is that when you and your kids experience a funny or happy moment, write it down. I have a Mason jar where I keep all these notes. And then when I'm having a day that I feel like, "Hmm, the knot at the end of my rope is a little frayed," I take out my jar and I start reading through those notes. It encourages me. The biggest blessing is that at the end of the year, you can pull out those notes and you and your children can look at the year and say, "Wow, look at all these fantastic things that happened."

Homeschooling is not an easy experience, and you will have stressful days. Remember on days that you and your student feel like you're hitting a brick wall to take a break, laugh, vent to a friend, or read through your positive Post-it notes.



*Above all else remember you **ARE** doing a good job.*

## Tools of the Trade

### **BrainPOP.com**

Access animated videos that cover every subject under the sun, from decimals to ancient cultures.

### **Flocabulary.com**

This site and app uses educational hip-hop music to teach. After all, lessons are more likely to stick when accompanied by a beat!

### **NASA.gov/KidsClub**

Discover out-of-this-world games (Roving on Mars, anyone?), STEM activities, tutorials on building rockets, and more.

*Supplement schooling with these helpful—and free!—apps and websites.*

### **Read.Conmigo.com**

Find eBooks, podcasts, coloring pages, and memory games that develop bilingual skills.

### **StorylineOnline.net**

Kids will love the website's videos featuring actors (Jaime Camil, Hector Elizondo, Rita Moreno) reading children's books.

### **Quizlet.com**

This app and website is the ultimate resource for study tools, including flash cards, games, and, yes, quizzes!



# 12 Tips for Raising Truthful Kids



Parents rate honesty as the quality they most want to teach their children.

We asked the experts for their best advice for raising honest kids.

by: Charity Ferreira (<https://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/cferreira/>) | November 7, 2016

Brace yourself for the cold, hard truth: all kids lie. They do it for many of the same reasons adults do: to avoid getting into trouble, to avoid hurting another person's feelings, or to make themselves look better. The ability to tell a lie develops early — as young as 2½ for some kids — and it's a normal and important stage of kids' cognitive and social development. By age 4, all kids lie; by age 6, some estimates are that kids lie as often as once an hour. And if you're thinking, 'Not my kid!' note that research shows parents score little better than chance in determining whether or not their child is telling a lie! ([https://www.ted.com/talks/kang\\_lee\\_can\\_you\\_really\\_tell\\_if\\_a\\_kid\\_is\\_lying](https://www.ted.com/talks/kang_lee_can_you_really_tell_if_a_kid_is_lying)) How can you convey to your preschooler the difference between the truth and the whoppers she tells you about her day? Or teach your elementary school-aged child that it's better to come clean about having made a mistake? Or get your teen to be honest with you about where they were on Friday night? We asked experts - researchers, child development specialists, and psychologists - for their advice on teaching kids the value of honesty at every stage.

## *Model honesty*

It sounds obvious, but if you don't want your kids to lie to you, don't lie to them, and don't let them hear you telling lies. "It's one thing to say to kids that honesty is important, but then if they see you lying, it sends a mixed message," says Victoria Talwar, associate professor in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at McGill University in Montreal and a leading researcher on kids and lying.

It's surely less effort to say, "I don't have any money with me" than to explain to your child that they can't have ice cream because they've already had a sweet treat that day or because it's too close to dinner. Or to tell the fundraiser on the phone that you aren't interested in donating rather than saying you already did. But over time, so-called "little white lies" teach your child that dishonesty is okay in some situations — and leaves them to interpret which situations those are. If you want your child to grow up with the belief that honesty is the best policy, do your best to live by that credo, too.

## *Don't set them up*

Particularly for preschool-aged kids, one way to deter lying is simply by not inviting them to. When you see your child with a juice-stained lip and an overturned bottle on the table, there's no need to ask, "Did you spill this juice?" Kids this age will lie out of a desire to avoid getting into trouble, says Dr. Peter Stavinocha, a clinical neuropsychologist for the Center for Pediatric Psychiatry at Children's Medical Center of Dallas. "If you know they did it, don't ask! If you ask, you're giving them the option to lie. So they lie, and then you get upset about that, and now there's two things where there used to be only one," Stavinocha says.

"Looks like you spilled some juice. Let's clean it up together," keeps things focused on the issue at hand. And if you're not sure who broke the vase, or which sibling is lying about it, Stavinocha says, go straight to the consequence. "Don't engage with the question of did they break it or which child broke it. Focus on what you want accomplished. 'We have a mess here. I'm asking you both to clean it up.' You're showing them that there's no positive consequence for denying responsibility."

## *Tell positive stories*

In a study led by University of Toronto psychologist Kang Lee, researchers including Talwar found that kids ages 3 to 7 who heard the story of George Washington and the Cherry Tree, which illustrates a positive consequence of honesty (George is praised for telling the truth), were much more likely to tell the truth than kids who heard the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf, which illustrates a negative consequence of lying (the shepherd repeatedly calls for help as a prank, but the one time he really needs help, the villagers don't come to his rescue).

"We talk about lying being bad, but we don't highlight the alternative behavior. Kids need examples for how to behave in situations where lying might be easier, stories that show how to be honest, what does that look like? Those are important messages," says Talwar. For older kids, talking about the honesty of the characters in the books they're reading can provoke inspiring and instructive discussion.



## *Ask for a promise*

If you need a straight answer about something you're concerned about, such as an incident at school, asking your child to promise to tell you the truth before asking them a question increases the chances that they will, studies suggest. But note that this strategy is not a guarantee, and it should be used sparingly so that you don't wear it out. "You don't want to overuse this one or it may lose its efficacy," says Angela Crossman, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at City University of New York. And as Talwar notes, promises tend to feel more binding to younger kids.

## *Say truth-telling makes you happy*

Young children, under the age of 8 or so, are very motivated to please authority figures, says Talwar. Her research shows that telling kids that you'll be happy with them if they tell the truth increases the likelihood they'll be straight with you. Tweens and teens, she notes, tend to care somewhat less about pleasing authority figures and more about their own internal sense of what's right. (Another study found that telling 9- to 11-year-

continued on page 5 ==>>



# M.E.S. News & Notes

## October



2: End of First quarter

5 - 9: **Fall Break: no school for students!**

28-30: **Parent-Teacher Conferences:**  
early release at 12:00 noon

31: **Have a safe & fun Halloween!**

## November

2: **Parent-Teacher Conferences** - cont'd  
early release at 12:00 noon

3: **General Election Day** - school closed

4-6: **Parent-Teacher Conferences** - cont'd  
early release at 12:00 noon

11: **Veterans' Day** - no school

26-27: **Thanksgiving Break** -  
school closed



## December

18: end of Quarter 2 / Semester 1

21-31: **Winter Break**

### 3 Things Great Parents Do (That You Can Do Too!)

A new parenting book offers 75 doable strategies for a happier family life. These are three of the mom goals that resonated with me.

Every so often, a book comes out that truly shares our big-picture attitude about raising kids. *What Great Parents Do: 75 Simple Strategies for Raising Fantastic Kids*, by psychologist Erica Reischer, Ph.D., is packed with smart reminders about parenting priorities and how to actually do what you want to do. Here are a just few of her ideas that rang true for me.

#### Stick to the ABCs of Great Parenting

A stands for Acceptance of your child, B stands for setting Boundaries, and C stands for Consistency. I particularly like the analogy of gravity that Dr. Reischer uses to describe the importance of being consistent with our kids about our expectations and how we respond to their behavior: "If, when you dropped something, it occasionally (or even once) did not fall down, you might keep dropping things to see if and when it would happen again. Kids whose parents are inconsistent will generally keep testing their parents' limits and boundaries, since it's part of learning how Mom and Dad work." That makes sense.

#### Give Kids the Benefit of the Doubt

I could have used this advice last night as I tried to stay positive when my daughter quickly got overwhelmed by her summer math homework. Dr. Reischer doesn't mean you should let your kid get away with something anytime she offers an excuse, but to remind yourself that your child is "a work in progress with the intent to do better."

#### Teach Your Child the 3 Ps

Rather than just telling your child that she can do anything (whether it's frustrating homework or growing up to be president), stay calm and to remind her that handling the tough stuff requires practice, patience, and perseverance.

That's true for being a mom or dad, too. No one is perfect but that doesn't mean you're not already a great parent.

Diane Debrovner is the deputy editor of Parents and the mother of two girls. <https://www.parents.com/parents-magazine/parents-perspective/3-things-great-parents-do-that-you-can-do-too/>



## Meditations for Parents Who Do Too Much

by Jonathan and Wendy



©1993 Fireside/Parside Books  
(simon & schuster)

*Living at risk is jumping off a cliff and building your wings on the way down.*  
-- Ray Bradbury

There is great risk in overseeing the development of any child. We tend to overparent if we try too hard to control.

So we must see that all of us are parenting without a net, and the risks we take can end up as rewards sometimes and mistakes other times. Parenting is, in many ways, like being an inventor -- and every day we face risks and confrontations, but we never stop learning.

.....  
*We need to leave room in our lives to make mistakes, be more flexible, and not be afraid to invent parenting methods as we go.*

### "Ho'olaulima i Moanalua"

is a bi-monthly publication of Moanalua Elementary's



phone: (808) 305-1210

e-mail:  
mes\_pcnc@yahoo.com  
mes.surfriders@gmail.com

MES webpage:  
moanaluaelementary.org  
PCNC link  
on [Parents] tab

Parent Facilitator & Editor:  
Susie Okumura



====>> continued from page 3

Olds that they would feel good about themselves if they told the truth decreased the chances they would tell a lie.) At all ages, look for opportunities to make your child feel good about being trustworthy.

### *Teach tact*

Kids learn early — from their parents — how to lie for the sake of politeness or to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. “Thanks, this book looks great,” instead of, “I already have this book!” or “I can’t play because I’m busy,” instead of “I don’t like playing with you!” Researchers call these kinds of lies “prosocial” because they smooth our interactions with others. But being honest does not have to equal being rude or hurtful. The key, says Talwar, is to balance honesty with consideration for the other person’s feelings. “We want to teach our children to be honest but we want to teach them to be kind as well. We need to teach honesty in a way that potentially helps others rather than potentially hurts others,” says Talwar. In the case of the book, this might mean saying it’s an author they like, or expressing appreciation for the thought that went into choosing it.

### *Don’t reward the lie*

When your child lies, there’s a reason — they’re seeking something. And if they get it, that can reinforce lying as an effective strategy. So if you notice that your younger child always fabricates a story about getting hurt at school as soon as your older child starts telling you about their day, it might be an attention-seeking behavior. “When a child lies, figure out what dynamic may be going on,” suggests Crossman. “Are there ways you can ignore the lie so they don’t get the reward? Can they get what they’re wanting in some other way?”

### *Catch them being honest*

We often catch kids in lies, says Talwar, but if we want to teach them to value honesty, we need to look for opportunities to acknowledge when they tell the truth, especially in situations where it might have been easier for them to lie. When your child tells you the truth about something they’ve done, take a moment to show that you appreciate their honesty by saying, “I’m really glad you told me the truth.”

### *Discipline calmly*

In environments where punishments are doled out harshly and arbitrarily, research shows that kids learn to lie earlier and more skillfully than their counterparts in less punitive environments. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t discipline. But in an atmosphere with a punitive, authoritarian approach to discipline, developing the ability to lie can be seen as a protective measure. “One thing parents can do is simply not have a great big emotional reaction. The more explosive the parent gets, the

more frightened the child gets, and the more likely they are to lie. Simply remaining calm and sticking to the facts you’ve observed is one way to get kids to tell the truth,” says Stavinoha.

### *Have a conversation, not a lecture*

The more open and conversational the relationship between parent and teen, the more effective, says Dr. John Duffy, clinical psychologist and author of the best-selling *The Available Parent: Radical Optimism for Raising Teens and Tweens*. “That means more discussing and less lecturing.” When clashes happen, waiting for the situation to abate and approaching your teenager calmly is always going to yield a more positive outcome, he says. And when it comes to raising truthful teens, he recommends discussing issues of honesty and lying openly with your child. “Something along the lines of, ‘We want you to feel free to be honest with us, regardless of what you have to say.’ Teens respond well to this type of communication, but parents have to be prepared for the honesty!”

### *Set clear rules*

Ninety-eight percent of teenagers worldwide lie to their parents. That’s the conclusion of Dr. Nancy Darling, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology at Oberlin College, who has researched teens and honesty for two decades. Darling says setting clear rules is important for cultivating an honest relationship with teens — and that being strict is okay. However, she says, it’s essential that parents pair this with being emotionally warm and open and accepting, so teens don’t think they will be harshly and unjustly punished. “If you balance these two aspects of parenting clearly, your teenagers will be more likely to ask for your permission and more likely to confess if they have broken a rule. They need to respect you and believe you will be warm, accepting, and non-punitive,” she says. “If kids think you have the right to set rules, if they respect you, they are more likely to be truthful — but they’ll still want to argue with you about what is safe and what they should be allowed to do.”

### *Give them space*

Respecting teens’ natural desire for privacy can encourage more honesty, Darling says. “You don’t want to be intrusive, you don’t want to get into their business more than you need to,” she cautions. “Ask for only the information you need. If you do that, they will probably provide additional information.” For example, you need to know your teen was safely at a friend’s house on Friday night; you don’t need to know what they talked about. Prying too deeply is asking for teens to push back by putting up barriers or lying, Darling says. So keep it on a need-to-know basis, and if they still clam up, just explain, “You don’t want me to butt into your business, and I don’t want to butt into your business but I have to know because ...” and tell them why you need an honest answer.



# Successful Year of Learning

- wherever it's taking place! -

*There's no doubt about it—school looks different this year. But whether it takes place in a classroom or via an app, here are expert tips to help you make the most of it no matter what.*

By Gail O'Connor - August 14, 2020 <https://www.parents.com/kids/education/back-to-school/smart-ways-to-get-set-for-school-according-to-teachers/>

*You already know that getting involved in your kid's schooling can make a big difference, affecting everything from self-esteem to test scores. And while you may not have much of a choice about your level of participation this year, you're committed to doing whatever it takes to give them the best experience possible. So we turned to teachers and educators across the country for their advice on how parents can best bolster learning, no matter where it takes place.*

## **Hold One Another Accountable**

“Kick off the year with a contract that lists some goals for students (homework, opening up about worries, asking questions) as well as parents (checking homework, sending forms back on time, giving breaks as needed). You can create it on colorful construction paper. If your little scholar isn't reading yet, draw pictures of your different duties and responsibilities. It will help ensure that students open up about their school struggles as they pop up.” —Cindi Rivera, associate executive director at an elementary school; Las Vegas

## **Put Knowledge Into Action**

“You can lecture all day, but kids are more likely to retain information if they can see and touch what you're talking about. One of the best things families can do is go on a field trip. It can be as simple as a nature walk in your neighborhood. Discuss the places, people, and animals you see, and point things out in English and then Spanish [or whatever second language you speak at home]. You can say, ‘That's a tree, en español árbol,’ which indicates to younger kids that you're transitioning to another language. These types of activities are great for developing conversational skills and bilingual vocabulary.” —Glendalis Moran, foreign-language elementary-school teacher; Long Island, New York

“Research shows that reading is key to school success. A fun way to introduce sequencing—the idea that all stories have a beginning, middle, and end—is through cooking. Whether you're making arroz con pollo or a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich, ask your kid to write down the steps using the words first, next, then, and last. Not only does it support writing structure and mechanics, but it gives children a better understanding of why ordering events is necessary. Bonus: It will also help students follow steps in long division, addition, and subtraction.” —Grace Maldonado-Wohlfahrt, fourth-grade teacher; Long Island, New York

## **Focus on Basics**

“Singing with your child is always a good idea. Kids with a sense of rhythm tend to become stronger readers because they can pick up on word patterns.” —Nina Ferman, kindergarten teacher; Pacoima, California

“It's important to give children the opportunity to learn math as early as possible. Use your environment. Kids can sort stuffed animals by size, practice counting with items like beans, and look for shapes everywhere—from octagons in street signs to squares in floor tiles.” —Coco Salazar, kindergarten teacher; Pacoima, California

## **Sneak Studying Into Screen Time**

“Have kids watch their favorite shows in español with the English subtitles turned on, or vice versa. You can also mute the volume and turn on subtitles, too. It's a great way to teach younger kids Spanish and encourage reading at the same time.” —Glendalis Moran

## **Build Confidence**

“Don't be afraid to tell your kid, ‘I'm your No. 1 fan!’ Even when they're little, children [of color] can pick up on the fact that [they] aren't given the same opportunities as the majority of the population. So it's up to parents and educators to lift them up. Celebrate victories, even if it's simply mastering a tricky spelling word. When students have a strong support system, they'll realize that any goals are attainable.” —Olivia Bueno, third-grade teacher; Gilroy, California

## **Prioritize Well-Being**

“Some parents don't take advantage of school counseling because mental health can be a taboo topic in their culture. But try to think of the school counselor as a bridge builder. If your child is having trouble adjusting to school in these challenging times or has issues with peers, the counselor can collaborate with other staff to help children thrive.” —Lezya Weglarz, school counselor; San Marcos, California



# Does My Child Still Need to Learn Handwriting?



This entry was posted on June 2, 2015 by Miriam Homer.  
<https://demmelearning.com/learning-blog/does-my-child-still-need-to-learn-handwriting/>



Now that much of our written communication takes place with keyboards and touch screens, is handwriting still relevant? Why can't young children move directly to keyboard skills as they learn to recognize letters? These questions have become increasingly important as many schools de-emphasize handwriting. Recent studies provide some interesting insights into the importance of handwriting, as well as suggestions for teaching it effectively.

## **What is handwriting?**

Handwriting is defined as the physical process of writing letters and words. To avoid confusion, the process of putting together words and sentences to convey information or record ideas will be called simply writing in this post. Handwriting may be done in manuscript (print) or in cursive. Since young children usually learn to print first, most of the research mentioned in this post refers to manuscript, rather than cursive.

A number of recent studies have shown that handwriting has important benefits for young children. These studies fall into two general categories: scans of brain activity and long-term evaluation of reading and writing skills. In one brain scan study, it was discovered that drawing a letter freehand produced increased activity in the same areas of the brain that are activated when adults read or write. The scans showed much weaker brain activity when letters were traced or typed. Tests of adults showed that the physical act of writing by hand activated the region of the brain that filters and focuses information differently than typing on a keyboard. In fact, printing, cursive, and typing all produce different patterns in the brain.

Researchers also looked at how children's skills in reading and writing developed over time. They discovered that children who had learned handwriting also learned to read more quickly and were better at remembering information and coming up with new ideas to write about. The concentration and muscle skills required for handwriting laid a solid foundation for more advanced skills and affected the child's success in many different subjects.

## **How can I help my child develop good handwriting?**

Many parents are convinced that handwriting is important but find it difficult to teach effectively. The first step to consider is readiness. Young children develop large muscle skills first, learning to sit and walk while still grasping most toys with a fist grip. Handwriting requires a rather sophisticated three-finger grip that does not

come automatically. Before attempting to teach handwriting, encourage play activities that develop these fine-motor skills, especially those that require grasping small objects with a pincer grip. Examples are dressing dolls or stuffed animals, building with blocks and construction sets, and sorting small objects. Dr. Marianne Gibbs, an expert in teaching pre-handwriting skills, suggests storing small objects in a plastic bag with a sliding tab for opening and closing the top. Using the tab requires the same three-finger grip recommended for holding a pencil.

When children are ready to write letters and words, continue to provide plenty of support. Using short crayons, pencils, and pieces of chalk encourages a three-finger grip instead of a fist grip. Fine motor skills continue to develop for several years, so keep practice sessions short. Some older students may have developed an unconventional pencil grip. As long as they can write comfortably, there is no need to make them change. As handwriting gradually becomes more automatic, your child will be able to concentrate on the ideas he wants to record, rather than the process of handwriting itself.

## **Is it important to learn cursive as well as printing?**

Schools have increasingly dropped the teaching of cursive, even though studies show that writing in cursive develops connections between the left and right sides of the brain and helps students think of words as whole units. Some educators believe that using cursive is particularly beneficial for dyslexic students. A child who is comfortable with using a pencil should be able to learn cursive handwriting as well as print, although educators differ as to when it should be taught. Several programs for teaching cursive are available, so, if you decide to teach cursive, you may want to do some research to see which program is best for you and your child.

Clearly, keyboarding is an important skill for our children to learn, but it should not replace handwriting, which research has shown to be a critical tool for developing fluency in reading, writing, and thinking. Teaching manuscript or cursive handwriting does not need to be a stressful experience. Begin by helping the young child develop the appropriate fine motor skills, provide plenty of support for early writers, and gradually increase the time spent on task as the child matures. The result will be a solid foundation for further learning and a skill that your child can use with satisfaction for the rest of his or her life.

