



# CONNECTIONS

## LOCAL EFAP NEWS

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### Feature of the Month

#### EFAP/North

1095 Cassells Street

North Bay, ON

PIB 4B1

Phone: 494-8086

1-800-266-3506

Fax: 494-1042

E-mail: [efapnorth@vianet.ca](mailto:efapnorth@vianet.ca)

[www.efapnorth.com](http://www.efapnorth.com)

For more information and to  
submit articles contact

Debbie Maltby,

Administrative Assistant

at EFAP/North

### The Powerful Connection Between Feeling and Learning

If we stop and think about it, most of us are aware that feelings—pleasant or unpleasant—have an impact on our ability to learn. What's curious is how often we ignore this fact in relation to our children.

There's no area of child development as misunderstood by parents as the vital connection between emotional and intellectual development. In fact, feeling, thinking, learning and remembering are so tightly woven that they are, for all practical purposes, inseparable.

#### ***And now we can prove it***

These connections are what the brave new world of scientific research has shown us. We now know that during the toddler period (18-36 months) the central nervous system undergoes specialized and accelerated growth in the part of the brain most closely connected to feeling and mood. Learning and feel-

ing become yoked in an incredibly powerful way that was previously not possible because the wiring simply didn't exist at birth. This means that toddlers, unlike infants, have the mental hardwiring to enhance their understanding of the world, just as they are ready to strike off down the road on their own—a few feet at a time.

#### ***How does it work?***

For the young child in particular, experiences are more easily understood and filed away if they are connected to the emotions contained in that event, pleasurable or not. Thunderstorms are terrifying if you are alone, wet or hungry. Thunderstorms are okay if you are snuggled on your dad's chest, and he tells you what's happening and how safe you both are, and that the noise, lightning and water will not "get you". Either way, you will remember thunderstorms! The same is true for remembering dogs, grandmothers, songs, pictures, books, butterflies and so forth.



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### ***Kids' appetite for the novel***

The way children accumulate these images over time is what makes this period of life so interesting. Children delight in repetition—why they demand the same favorite game, song or story over and over. However, once they are comfortable and satisfied with a learning experience, something unexpected happens: they start to demand new or different. This appetite for the novel is a critical intersection between emotion and thinking. Even though children love repetition, they are also natural seekers of a new challenge. Why? Because the experience of exploring and conquering “the new” makes children feel so good.

### ***Emotional development is the key***

Emotional development goes right to the heart of the adult that all parents want their children become—interested and adventuresome, trusting and cooperative, confident and secure, able to solve problems and enjoy life to the fullest. In their efforts to stimulate children’s thinking, parents may focus on skill-pushing memory activities and programs. But emotion and feeling, both the parents’ and the child’s, are really what drive learning most efficiently. Children learn better if they are interested in what they’re learning and enjoying what they are doing. One well-documented trait of kids who do well in school is that they love to learn.

### ***Practical steps to take***

**Talk with your child** from the moment he/she is born. Chat about what the two of you are doing. Children become part of the conversation sooner if you express to them what you love about being a parent.

**Encourage curiosity** and be aware that repetition is good for your child, boring though it might be for you. When the brain’s synaptic connections are repeatedly activated by the same stimulation, they survive to become permanent neural pathways that enhance learning.

**Nothing beats reading.** Children don’t learn interactive, conversational language from TV because it does not respond to them. Language and eventually reading are learned from being actively engaged in speaking and reading with others—hearing parents and caregivers talk to each other and waiting for the child to respond.

**Children learn best** in the context of their daily lives and when the amount and kind of stimulation fits their temperament, level of development, interests, mood and preferences. Pressure to perform or conform to unrealistically high expectations can lead to stress that can sabotage learning through burnout and confusion.

Simply being nearby and available while children play on their own is important, as is your willingness to interact with them. So get down on the floor and stay awhile. It may be hard for busy parents to find the time, but it’s worth it.

*-Adapted from Dr. Pruett’s book Me, Myself and I:  
How Children Build Their Sense of Self*

### The Members Page



YMCA

We build strong kids,  
strong families, strong communities.

## YMCA of North Bay Strong Kids Campaign

Our 2007 YMCA Strong Kids Campaign is currently underway!

At the YMCA, we believe that everyone should be able to participate in recreation programs regardless of their ability to pay the fees.

The YMCA is open to everyone - all ages, backgrounds, abilities and financial circumstances.

Last year the YMCA of North Bay sponsored over 900 members. Membership sponsorship makes up approximately 17% of our total membership. Last year the YMCA of North Bay contributed over \$158,000 in membership sponsorship and \$6,100 in Child Care day camp sponsorship.

This year the YMCA Strong Kids Campaign is a collaboration among 27 YMCA associations across Ontario that will raise awareness of the YMCA's charitable purpose and increase opportunities for children, youth and families to benefit from YMCA programs.

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## Q and A

Dear EFAP/North,

My wife and I have been married for 6 years. Lately, I have been having thoughts of breaking it off. I'm not sure where these thoughts are coming from and everything seems so confusing. It is to a point where I am having difficulties sleeping and it is causing me some problems staying focused at work.

Signed,

Divorce – right or wrong?

Dear Right or wrong,

Every marriage reaches a point where one partner or the other has thoughts of breaking off the relationship. In many cases these are fleeting thoughts born of anger, frustration, or a wish to escape the realities of responsibility. In approximately 50% of marriages, however, these thoughts turn into action.

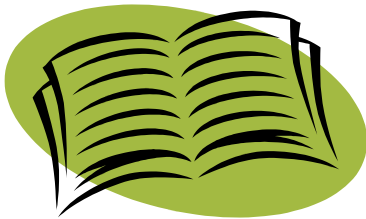
Some troubled marriages should and can be saved. It is clear that others should be ended. There is no right or wrong in the act of divorce, but there is a need for you and your spouse to understand that divorce is as complex a problem as either of you is likely to face in your lifetime. As with marriage, divorce should not be entered into lightly so before acting on your thoughts consult with one of our counsellors to try to sort through the confusion.

Sincerely,

EFAP/North

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## Book of the Month



**Making Divorce Easier on Your Child**

*50 Effective Ways to Help Children Adjust*

Nicholas Long, Ph.D., and Rex Forehand, Ph.D.

Authors of *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child*

Contemporary Books, 2002 ISBN 0-8092-9419-2

*Making Divorce Easier on Your Child* is filled with practical, sensitive, and highly effective ways to help children cope and adjust both during and after this major change in their lives. Most important, this information will enable you, as a parent, to minimize the negative effects of divorce on your children.

You will find a range of easy-to-follow techniques and priceless wisdom including:

Fifty proven strategies for helping your children become well-adjusted despite your divorce

The latest scientific findings made available and accessible to parents

How to know when to seek professional help for your children

The majority of issues faced by divorcing or divorced parents are difficult but not hopeless. This book can make the adjustment less painful for all involved.

