



# LONG ISLAND INSTITUTE FOR GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH **HUH?!?**

*a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups*

Volume 8, Number 2/3.

Special Double Issue

Spring/Summer 2003

## From the Editor

This special double-issue of *HUH?!?* features group work with young children and the people who care for and about them. The articles and vignettes are written entirely by staff from The Marks Family Right From the Start 0-3<sup>+</sup> Center, the early childhood branch of North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center.

You will be introduced to a number of groups including groups for children in changing families, children with special needs, children's room librarians, mothers with postpartum depression, head start teachers and students, professional trainees, and more. You will hear from children, ages 4 to 7, on their experiences being part of a group in a mental health center.

Although this is not the first issue of the newsletter in which stories about younger children have appeared, it is the first issue dedicated entirely to working with this population. It should be a no-brainer that group work and young children go together, especially given the significance of early attachment and social stimulation on the growth

of a baby's brain and the baby's physical and emotional development.

The Marks Family Right From the Start 0-3<sup>+</sup> Center (RFTS) is a comprehensive early childhood center helping parents raise babies and young children who are emotionally and intellectually healthy. In addition to individual assessment and therapeutic assessment of special problems, RFTS has a training center for child care workers, nannies, grandparents, and other caregivers. RFTS offers parent support and education groups, as well as formal courses on child development and treatment of young children. A parent-run "warm line" responds to questions quickly by telephone.

The staff of RFTS would love to hear from you to exchange ideas and thoughts. If you'd like more information about any of the programs or if you would like to subscribe to their award-winning, internationally subscribed *Parent and preschooler Newsletter*, please write to The Marks Family Right from the Start 0-3<sup>+</sup> Center; 80 North Service Rd.-LIE; Manhasset, NY 11030-

4019 or call 516-484-3174.

Many thanks to the dedicated, talented, and creative staff of RFTS for contributing to this special double-issue of *HUH?!?* And, a special thanks to

Nicole Mogavero for all of her hard work in helping to organize this issue of the newsletter.

## Children's Voices and Reflections About Group Work

An important part of group work is evaluation. And, an important part of evaluation is finding out what the group members themselves think, even when they are as young as four years old. Following are what some of the young members of groups in The Marks Family Right From the Start 0-3<sup>+</sup> Center had to say about their group experiences.

- I feel sad when we draw our sad feelings. *Marissa, 4 years old*
- We talk about our feelings. It makes us feel happier. *Andrea, 6 years old*
- We get to draw our happy, sad, and mad feelings. *Alice, 7 years old*
- I like to play and learn. We learn about our feelings about ourselves, our friends, our moms and our dads. *Briney, 6 years old*
- We can tell them, they can get it out and it makes us feel better. *Michelle, 7 years old*
- What I like about group is my friends. I talk about my feelings about me and my family. *Omar, 7 years old*
- What I like is when me and my friends get together. I talk about my family and I like it. *Salina, 7 years old*
- What I like most about group is when I played. *Arthur, 6 years old*
- I like when everyone cleaned up together. *Janice, 5 years old*
- I liked when we make our friendship t-shirts. *Matthew, 5 years old*
- What I like about group is playing with the trucks. *Mario, 5 years old*
- I liked when we played. *Marc, 6 years old*
- I liked when we made t-shirts. *Tamica, 6 years old*



## "How Do You Run a Group with Such Young Children?"

"How do you run a group with such young children?" "Seven five year olds in one room! What am I getting myself into?" An hour is a long time!" "How is this different than a classroom or a play date?"

These were some of the questions and concerns that confronted us as we ventured into the unknown territory of group work with young children. Through failure and success we have begun to develop a basic groundwork that works.

The first step is careful pre-group planning. Thoughtful and careful planning is necessary for success. We use the planning model developed by Roselle Kurland. Good planning begins by identifying what needs and wants can be addressed in a new group. This can be best accomplished by scheduling pre-group meetings with prospective group members and their parents.

Pre-group contact allows of us to screen the young child in order to determine if they are appropriate for the group. We are also able to assess the young child's strengths and difficulties and their similarities and differences in regard to the other potential group members. Preliminary meetings offer the young child an opportunity to make a connection with at least

one of the group workers and to prepare for the group by hearing what to expect.

The next step is to formulate goals for the group. Goals, or group purpose, serve as a compass for group members and workers providing a sense of direction along the way. Nuts-and-bolts decisions like what content or means the group will use to reach its goals and where the group should meet and for how long are also an important part of the planning process.

Our *changing families group* is composed of children from our Center who are being seen for issues surrounding separating and divorcing parents. Although these children, ages 4-7, exhibit a variety of mood and behavioral concerns, they share the need to identify and cope with the feelings generated by their changing families. The purpose we arrived at for this group is *to increase and enhance the expression of feelings regarding the changes that are occurring in their families*. In composing the group we are careful to try to make sure that each group includes children with similarities and differences. One time we had a group with a majority of "hyperactive" 5-year-old boys. Needless to say, that group was a learning experience for us!

In working with young children's groups, we have found that co-leading groups of 8-12 children works best. As our relationship has matured the co-leading becomes easier. We are vigilant about planning before and debriefing after each meeting.

Our groups are closed and short term time-limited. We schedule our groups for two rounds. For example, one group meets for approximately 8 sessions. We follow that 8-session group with a two-week break. After the break, we have a second closed, time-limited group with the same children for 8 sessions. In the second round the purpose changes to *developing socially appropriate coping mechanisms for their feelings and life circumstances*.

The structure we use is dividing the group into four 15-minute segments. The first 15 minutes are spent on free play. This enables us to assess the children's interactions and conversations and it gives them a chance to connect to one another in a fun way. The second 15 minutes are used to conduct a purposeful activity that relates to the group purpose. Next we process the activity together as a group for 15 minutes. Finally, the last 15 minutes are spent eating snack, which gives

the children some time to play casually or talk as they relax and get ready to say goodbye. This structure has been very effective for the young children in our groups. It is a good fit with their attention span.

In our groups the content we use is always an activity. Why? Because activities, according to Sandra Brandler and Camille Roman, help young children to express themselves, promote sharing and working together, learn coping skills, help to tackle resistance, help with the expression of difficult feelings in a socially appropriate fashion, increase frustration tolerance, allow for individuals to reach into different parts of themselves, and help develop verbal expression. (See "Get yer ice-cold lemonade!" in this issue, for an example of an activity we use in our social skills group).

If you would like for young children's groups to be successful be sure to involve parents! At our Center, it is our practice to run a parent group at the same time as the young children's group. This allows for parents' needs to be addressed in their own group and reduces their dependence on the children's group workers.

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Of course the group workers from both children and parent groups need to establish a good working relationship and the children's group workers must make themselves available to the parents as needed.

The young children also like the idea of their parents being in a group. As they observe that their group facilitator is their special person who keeps their group and their feelings safe. Finally, it helps to schedule parents meeting to allow the parents to have a chance to ask questions and express their concerns as well as discuss their child's progress and future treatment recommendations.

Working with young children in groups is one of the favorite things we do at the Center. It is definitely a lot of hard work, but it is a lot of fun! *Nicole Mogavero, CSW and Jennifer Conklin, CSW are psychiatric social workers for RFTS.*



### Watch for Coming Issues

- ⇒ Group Work in the Wilderness
- ⇒ Group Work in Schools

## Support and Education in Early Childhood Training Group

Over the past 13 years I developed and taught a 15-hour workshop series called the "Multi-Dimensional Child." During the past 2 years I designed and facilitated a more ambitious 60-hour program for clinicians entitled, "The Treatment of Young Children." This training program focuses on attachment theory, parental emotional health, risk and protective factors for children, play therapy, and therapeutic use of self.

Once you have a group of people sitting together in a class or workshop, talking about kids and families, they inevitably talk about their kids and families. When we talk about mothers and fathers, we seem to be thinking and talking about our mothers and fathers. When we talk about children, we just start talking about our own children. In our work it is not unusual for professional context to stimulate a personal feeling or memory. In such a learning environment intimacies are shared, often with laughter, and sometimes tears. Successes and failures are poured over. Sometimes support is sought, but not always. But the purpose of the training group is not to bring us closer – it is to make us smarter. Yet in a training environment that evokes such personal feelings, I sometimes wonder if we can have one without the other.

The fact that training happens in a group, one where members sign on with dramatically different levels of experience but with a common agenda, has special meaning. It is as if the training experience itself models the very importance of family, group, and peer relationships. Children grow in the context of their environment. Life in a training group reminds us of that in every meeting if we care to pay attention. The content learned in the *training class* are about the importance of successful early attachment, the impact of being heard well and accurately by caregivers. The lessons learned in the *training group* are not that different. Participants learn that as practitioners they thrive in healthy and safe environments. As the training group evolves, participants need to listen more critically, both to the content and to each other. They learn to hear their own voices more clearly and accurately, a skill that will help them as they listen to the moms and dad and kids who they see in their offices and during home visits.

In each class I think of myself as teacher and group worker. As each class becomes a group, it displays its own flavor and culture. Some of that is displayed around dinner rituals as we eat together. Friendships develop, absences are a cause for worry, and parting is more difficult as we get closer in our work together. As each class/group develops and builds knowledge, skill, insight, and confidence in its members, it always does the same for me.

*Sandra Wolkoff, CSW, is director of the Marks Family right from the Start 0-3+ Center.* The training programs cited above are offered under the banners of the Lindner Early Childhood Training Institute and the Garfunkel Child and Family Training Institute. Both the Multidimensional Child and Treatment of Young Children are certificate programs developed to offer training in child development and family life issues. For more information on these programs call 484-3174 or email: [swolkoff@northshorechildguidance.org](mailto:swolkoff@northshorechildguidance.org)

## Mission Statement: Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children & Youth

The Mission of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth is: To promote and enhance effective group work practice with children and youth through advocacy, education, and collegial support. **HUH?!?** is the Institute's quarterly newsletter dedicated to providing information, inspiration and support for anyone working with young people in group settings.

**Chairpersons:** Joanne Ditchik-Stutz (Nassau); Cynthia Scott (Suffolk)

**Steering Committee:** Jean L. Bacon; Roseline Felix; Toni Kolb; Michelle Laser; Stacey Levin; Nicole Mogavero; Maureen O'Connor; Debra Pearl; Andrew Peters; Aimee Reifer; Carol Sutker

**Project Coordinator:** Andrew Malekoff

## Group Work and Maternal Depression:

*"Well, yeah, I had a little postpartum..."*

As a group worker with the Maternal Depression Outreach Project, I have been entrusted with the "hidden feelings" and suffering of women who experience postpartum and maternal depression. One group member noted with irony, that although 80% of women experience some type of mood disturbance after giving birth, there is a tremendous sense of shame in disclosing the experience of postpartum depression. As a result, many mothers live with secrecy and feelings of guilt. Another group member observed that even when women do talk about postpartum depression they avoid actually saying the word "depression." The common phrase is "...well, yeah, I had a little postpartum..."

The group that began meeting several months ago provided the mothers with a chance to talk about mothering and maternal depression in a genuine way. In speaking the truth of their experiences, they have begun to discover and explore ways of reclaiming and creating new and vital self-images.

▪ *"I can't get anything done:" Unexpected feelings of motherhood.*

During the first meeting members were invited to join in dyads to identify any unexpected feelings related to motherhood. When the group reconvened, many

commonly shared experiences were revealed. These included: anxiety about life, didn't fall in love with babies instantaneously, embarrassment over "negative" feelings, fathers' fear and frustration in response to mothers' feelings, depressed and overwhelmed, sleep deprivation, permanence of motherhood, intensity of love for children, guilt related to choice not to work outside of the home, money worries, "I can't get anything done," not feeling qualified for mom job, "I can't handle it," overwhelming responsibilities and irrevocable loss of freedom, raw with emotion, changes in body, jealous of spouse, and loneliness.

The group then moved on to contrast this list with what had been expected: valuing of mothering, easy to "have it all" and balance caring for children with work outside of the home, ready support of significant others and especially around emotional needs, expectation of joy and immediate connection with the baby, everything on schedule, having time for self, and adequate time for household tasks.

Group members noted the disparity between expectations and realities of motherhood. One of the women remarked that the disparity characterizes the core

experience of postpartum depression.

▪ *"How did I get here?:" Significance of loss.*

The significance of loss, and its relationship to mothering and depression, was a unifying dynamic for the mothers in the group. The losses they reported included: a loss of ideals associated with mothering and being mothered, relational losses in connection with partners, friends and family, loss of freedom and power, loss of self direction, and loss of pre-pregnancy body. The losses represent a collective succession of disappointments and betrayals that lead to feelings of incompetence and failure.

The women described themselves as "weak" and "lazy." In one early group meeting the entire session was devoted to grappling with the question, "Why am I such a loser?" Depression fueled negative perceptions of self, drained positive self-regard, and reinforced feelings of failure and incompetence.

Early on one group member, perhaps voicing the sentiments of the others, asked, "How did I get here?" Weeks later she arrived at a sad realization when she told the group, "I'm trying to get back to the way things were, and I can't even use my energy to move forward." Caught in a depression's downward spiral, loss of identity and

disconnection from self and others led the women to isolation that only served to compound depression, disconnection, and detachment. As one member shared, "I don't feel like I want to talk to people when I feel like that."

Anger is another powerful emotion that the women talked about. As one aptly put it, "I have a lot of anger at mothering."

▪ *"Everything is coming together:" Group as a pathway to recovery.*

Over time the women moved from sharing fantasies of escape and respite, to dreams and possibilities for reinventing themselves. One member talked about a growing sense of hope and a beginning vision of a new direction for her life.

"We all have completely different stories, but we're all in the same place." Being in the "same boat" is indeed one of the curative factors of group work as this member remarked. Another talked about feeling like "less of a loser" because women that she has come to value and respect have shared the common experience of maternal depression. "No one has helped me as much as being here," said another who added, "Everything is coming together."

*Livia A. Police, CSW is a psychiatric social worker for RFTS.*

## Group Work and Developmental Delays in Children ... "But I only have two legs!"

Rewind several years... I am meeting with a group of 6 energetic 7- 8 year olds with Asperger Syndrome gathered to learn social skills, the major difficulty in people with this disorder. As we begin, they are all pushing back on their old, half round, blue chairs.

Thinking I have all my bases covered regarding their innate need for concreteness, I called out "keep all four legs on the floor!" In unison, they cried out, "But we only have two!" So began my journey into the world of group work with children with developmental delays.

I would soon learn that this is a very challenging field where it is critical to understand that these children process incoming information differently than most other children. They also lack the ability to generalize social rules. Group work with children with Asperger Syndrome calls for taking a special path.

For me the path has proven to be fun, exciting, and very rewarding. It requires creativity, much of which comes from the children themselves. The "filter" that prevents most people from saying out loud what they think is not functioning properly in children with serious developmental delays. As a result, they might blurt out all kinds of things without the benefit of good

self-screening. Quite often these groups resemble the television program, "Kids Say The Darndest Things."

The groups that I work with make good use of activities such as performing puppet shows to practice good communication, creating original games to practice appropriately expressing emotions (e.g., "The island of anger management"), and building cardboard cities with empty boxes to practice cooperation. More traditional activities such as role play and brainstorming are used to learn problem solving skills. All of these activities provide group members with opportunities to learn and practice good communication and social interaction and, to have a lot a fun along the way.

Although developmental delays are not curable, they are manageable. Through group involvement children with developmental delays learn social skills that help them to manage daily life. Equally important, they learn how to play and get along with other people.

*Elizabeth Goulding-Tag, CSW* is the coordinator of the Family Support Program for Developmental Disabilities at RFTS.

## On Being a Good Partner in Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded program that provides medical, dental, nutritional, social, educational, and mental health services to low income children between the ages of 3 and 5 and their families. Many children are affected by their parents' struggle to maintain adequate housing and food. Children come to Head Start with real worries. They are likely to show signs of emotional distress and behavioral problems. Children with depression, aggressive behavior, and social isolation are being identified in Head Start more than ever before.

In addition to working with parent groups to learn child development and coping skills to support healthy emotional development, I also participate in a variety of staff/administrative meetings aimed at reviewing policy, procedures, and program structure and content.

Adding a mental health perspective to staff meetings has proven to be invaluable. For example, helping staff to understand the emotional impact on children during vacations from school and graduations is critical in creating strategies for smooth transitions.

Another important transition for children and families (and staff) is the beginning of the school year. At the start of the school year I initiate an in-

service training program that helps staff prepare for issues that accompany the children's arrival. We review separation difficulties for children and parents, adjustment to classroom routine, and appropriate developmental expectations.

Weekly groups with teachers focused on their day-to-day concerns arising from their work with young children helps to provide continuity in the classroom and mutual support among the staff. These groups are usually open-ended, with no fixed agenda. Themes emerge from the day-to-day interaction with the children. These meetings help to reinforce teachers' strengths and support a system of mutual aid where they come to count on one another, and not only the expert consultant

In my role as mental health consultant I see myself as a partner with teachers. I join in classroom activities such as free play, circle time discussion, story telling, and puppet play. Together, teacher and mental health consultant, we work in partnership to provide students and parents a model of good communication and problem solving that is crucial to forging a healthy learning and childcare environment.

*Linda Silversmith, CSW* is a mental health consultant for RFTS.

LEMONADE 25¢

*"Get yer ice-cold lemonade!"*

The use of activities helps children practice everyday social skills needed to form friendships. During a recent summer social skills group we decided to bring the children outdoors to do just that! Reflecting on our childhood, we could never forget the feeling of selling lemonade with our friends. The concept of a lemonade stand captures summer fun and friendship in its entirety. In our group we instructed the children to

create a sign together, advertising their lemonade stand. While the younger children decorated their sign with colorful pictures, others wrote out, "Lemonade Stand - 25 cents a cup." The children were excited about making their refreshing drink together and practiced taking turns taste-testing and deciding on the finished product. During our preparation, the children voted on how much they should charge patrons for their summer thirst-quencher. The week prior, we reminded parents

and fellow clinicians to bring a little extra change with them on that particular humid day. The children anxiously awaited their first customers and upon arrival greeted them with bright smiles and friendly hellos. Each group member practiced working in teams and taking turns rotating jobs. As one child held a cup, they gave their friend the signal to start pouring. Other children helped to collect money and hand out napkins. When all was said and done, the children raised a large sum of



money for a job well done! As a group, the children decided to purchase special snacks for their parents with the money they had earned. From start to finish, the summer-time lemonade stand helped the children practice the skills of communication, negotiation, turn taking, cooperation, and the use of good manners.

*Jennifer Conklin, CSW and Nicole Mogavero, CSW*

## Subscribe to HUH?!?

With our winter-2003 issue, *HUH?!?* celebrated the beginning of its eighth year of publication. The staff is gratified by the success of this important resource for group work. To support the growth and longevity of the newsletter, please remember to subscribe, renew your present subscription, or send a gift subscription.

Send your check for \$10 payable to: Long Island Institute for Group Work; NSC&FGC; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215. Remember to send your name and address and the name and address for any gift recipients - we will send an acknowledgement card in your name.

So...here's to the next eight years and more!

## Group Work Amid the Bookshelves...

I frequently talk to groups of people about children: how they grow, what they need, and the things that get in their way as they journey toward becoming 'big'. A good group helps people who have a stake in young children to normalize their experience and grow as parents or professionals.

One of my roles is to help front line professionals learn about child development. In this capacity I am working with a number of libraries and their children's room librarians. Naturally we started by talking about books. I asked the group member librarians what they read to different age groups. This helped them to tune in to children's development in a familiar way. They eagerly shared stories and responses from the children regarding different books. My job is to help them explore and understand developmental issues the children are experiencing.

The children's room librarians feel proud about their work. Participation in a group enables them to add conceptual knowledge to their intuitive understanding. In a recent meeting one wondered aloud, "Why are three-year olds always going to the bathroom?" Before anyone could answer she caught herself and said, "I get it, they are all three-years old and for them toilet issues are a big deal!"

Through participation in a supportive group children's room librarians have an opportunity explore how the public views them. Being in a group also helps to affirm their important contribution to the healthy cognitive and emotional development of young children.

*Tina Rotstein, CSW*; In addition to spending time in the library, Ms. Rotstein facilitates parent workshops and provides training and consultation for early childhood educators for RFTS.

## Little Kids in Little Groups

Listen

Little voices talking, laughing,  
negotiating the day

Listen

Little sighs softly, gently, singing  
life's tiny song

Look

Here is a slight child, a small face  
looking at inconsequence and  
dreaming

Look

A little hand in a little hand, two  
friends walking together and not  
seeing anything except each other

Wait

The school bus honks and little feet  
clamber aboard, growing up,  
with each step

Wait

Little children

In little groups

Tell us everything about the essence of  
existence

If we just

Listen...

Look...

Wait...

For little kids in little groups  
to lead the way.

*Jane E. Meckwood-Yazdpour* is  
the Public Information Officer  
at NSC&FGC

## Four Lessons I've Learned by Working with Single Mothers Groups

- 1. Being in the same boat is comforting.** There's nothing more difficult when you're in a challenging situation (e.g., contemplating separation or recently separated) than speaking with others who've been in your shoes and are now doing better. Feeling vulnerable and uncertain, many women in my groups often doubt their abilities in a variety of situations.
- 2. Maintaining a sense of humor is essential.** Group discussions often focus on troubling situations like ex-spouses lavishing children with expensive gifts or ex-in-laws rewashing kids' clothing because, "Your mom doesn't know how to do laundry." Often it is laughter that allows for serious discussions to unfold concerning tough financial situations, worries about visitation, and navigating the complex legal system.
- 3. Enjoying oneself is okay.** It is okay for a mom to enjoy herself when the kids are with someone else (even their dad). Women raise this issue in groups, often with great trepidation. It comes as a relief to learn that others miss their kids when they're gone, yet still look forward to weekends when they can sleep late, quietly read a book, or even go out on a date.
- 4. Work towards a civil relationship ex-spouses.** It is important for a single mom to learn to have a civil relationship with their ex. Often family and friends share single moms' anger, unable to view the situation objectively. A good group can help to address such feelings so that it doesn't become a forever problem that spills over on the children.

My work with single mothers groups over the course of many years has helped me gain an understanding and respect for their courage and resilience.

*Judy Inguagiato, CSW*, is coordinator of RFTS.

## About....

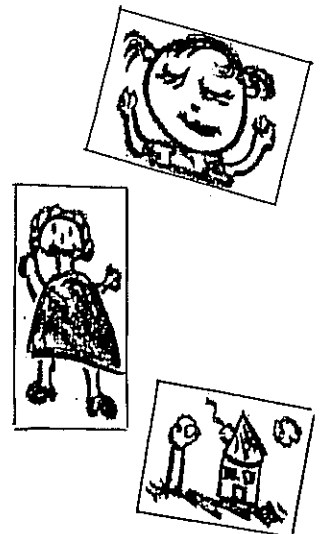
### *The Parent & preschooler Newsletter*

The *Parent & preschooler Newsletter* is a trusted source of information helping parents and professionals as they care for young children. This internationally acclaimed, award-winning newsletter features articles by child psychologists, social workers, educators, and recognized experts in their special fields.

North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center is the publisher of the newsletter. The Center has been the leading children's mental health center on Long Island for half a century. Serving children, youth, and families, NSC&FGC offers a wide variety of mental health services.

*Parent & preschooler Newsletter* is part of the Marks Family Right from the Start 0-3+ Center, an early childhood program which is designed to provide the earliest intervention and support to families and their babies. As part of the educational component of RFTS, *Parent & preschooler* offers a broad spectrum of topics as well as regular columns and features. Available in both an English and English/Spanish Editions, *Parent & preschooler Newsletter* is a "must" addition to the reading list of parents, educators, professionals, and caregivers.

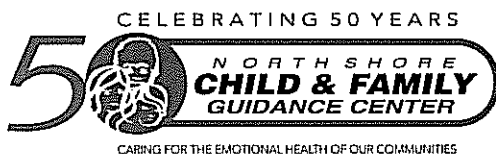
For subscription information call: 1-800-595-9365 or (516) 626-1971 Ext. 314.





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## ❖ EVENTS & RESOURCES ❖

### Special Certificate Program: TREATMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN - A Certificate Program for Professionals

Practitioners who work with young children need expertise on the dynamics and relationships between children and their environment. The Garfunkel Child & Family Training Institute is offering a one year - 60 hour - training and supervision course focused on practice with children under ten. This practice-based course will cover classic and current research in the field of child development, looking at the many factors that influence emotional health and development. The course will begin October 29, 2003 and will be held on Wednesday evenings from 6 to 9 PM at the Marks Family Right from the Start 0-3+ Center; 80 North Service road-LIE; Manhasset, NY 11030-4019. The cost is \$1,200 (payment plans are available) - registration is limited - submit curriculum vita with registration - EU's are available for social workers (other disciplines are pending) - some scholarships and work placements may be available - contact **Sandy Wolkoff, CSW at (516) 484-3174** with questions or for registration information.

**HJH???** is the quarterly newsletter of the Long Island Institute for Group Work With Children and Youth, a program of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center; 480 Old Westbury Road; Roslyn Hgts., NY 11577-2215; Phone: (516) 626-1971 •• Fax: 626-8043. **Executive Director/CEO:** Marion S. Levino, ACSW; **Associate Director/NSC&FGC** and **Newsletter Editor:** Andrew Malekoff, ACSW, CASAC. **Newsletter Design and Layout:** Jane E. Mackwood-Yazdpour, BS. **Participating Agencies:** Coalition on Child Abuse & Neglect, Garden City; Youth Directions and Alternatives, E.Northport; Herricks School District, Albertson; Sanctuary Project, Huntington; Plainedge School District; L.I.Crisis Center, Baltimore; L.I. Center for Social Therapy, Floral Park; SUNY Stony Brook; Temple Sinai of Roslyn; Huntington Youth Bureau, Huntington; South Huntington School District, South Huntington, NY. © Copyright April 1, 2003/USA.

## TIPS for ...

## Group Work with Young Children

- ▶ Never force a child to participate in an activity. Be encouraging and supportive. Extend help or offer a peer to assist.
- ▶ Encourage children to use the bathroom prior to the group. Don't forget to go yourself!
- ▶ One day, use snack time as a learning lesson. Inform the children that you don't have enough snack for everyone and ask him or her what should be done. (Prepare a snack that is easily divisible).
- ▶ Continue to review the purpose of your group and ask the children, "Who remembers why we come and play together?"
- ▶ Assist children in developing their own group rules. Don't forget to ask them what should happen if a rule is broken.
- ▶ Catch kids being good and use stickers or other rewards to reinforce positive behaviors (e.g., following clean up rules, practicing good listening, being kind to their friends).
- ▶ Rather than constantly offering suggestions, ask other members for help. (e.g. "What can Marc do the next time someone gets into his space?" "What does everyone think about Marie's name calling?" "How does that make everyone feel?")
- ▶ Prompt children prior to a transition ("We have five more minutes of free play and then it will be time to clean up.")

*Jennifer Conklin, CSW and Nicole Mogavero, CSW*