

# Healthy Learning

By Karl David Johnson M.A.

Waldorf schools around the world stand for the healthy development of children. In our modern times, this is no easy task. Modern society has become fast-paced and less focused on the well-being of children. Yet Waldorf schools, like your beautiful school here in the Sonoran desert, can consciously create pockets of health for the children in a Waldorf school community. When parents focus on their own child's health and work to build a unified network of support for the children in partnership with the teachers, the well-being of the children in a school is quite noticeable. And importantly, being a school, a child's learning process is enhanced through healthy development. The following steps support children and adolescents, (and, indeed, parents!) in their health and lay the foundation for rich, optimized learning:

**1. Rest, Rhythm and Routines** - The importance of regularity of sleep and also mealtimes and daily routines serves as an essential basis of a child's well-being. The child and the adolescent who experience predictable rhythms in their lives gain a touchstone of strength and confidence in our fast-paced world.

**2. Healthy Movement** - Movement is key for a healthy life. It's not only health-giving in terms of exercise, it's also the basis of a joyful life. When happy or at play, we want to jump, run and frolic – just like the children naturally do! Yet ironically, children these days spend many immobile hours in the car. Move and play with your children so that they are always stretching into a new level of movement development, for, as research increasingly shows, it is really coordinated movement that organizes the brain.

**3. "Nimble Fingers..."** - Likewise, "the brain discovers what the hand explores". Give your child lots of opportunities to develop ever-more nuanced dexterity in the hand through finger plays, crafts, and arts such as painting, drawing, modeling, and playing musical instruments.

**4. Take a Walk!** - Time in *Nature* is one of the most health-giving activities in which we can engage. The rich complexity of the natural world feeds us and soothes rough edges when life gets too frenetic. A walk in the desert or by a canyon stream nourishes our senses and our souls, and, for children, there is no better place to grow up in than Nature. "Nature is the Mother of enrichment" and the more time in Nature the better. Nature calms children and opens their hearts and minds to the joy of discovery.

**5. Healthy Food/ Pure Water** - The importance of food can't be overemphasized – especially for the developing child. Fresh, whole foods that are organic or biodynamic are essential for a healthy body and for a clear mind. Avoid dyes, preservatives and chemical additives by buying locally grown food, or even better, grow your own! Ingredients labeling now makes it much easier to discern healthy from unhealthy and to make good choices for our families. And abundant, pure water is always important, but especially so in this desert environment.

**6. Less Screens - More Contactfulness -!** The time you spend playing with your children or being out in Nature will enrich them far more than any video, computer program or video game ever can. You will have fun, but more importantly, being with *you* is how they learn to become human. Human literacy before smart phone or computer literacy! Teach them what you love and *how* to love....through your own pulsing, living human heart.

These steps, and more, can begin to form the basis of healthy development for your child – from the earliest years right up through adolescence. And when like-minded and like-hearted parents and teachers partner together for the health of a community of children, then the community here at the Tucson Waldorf School, as in Waldorf communities around the world, is safeguarding the foundations of an enhanced learning process for the next generation - even as we speed into the uncertainties of this fast-paced century.

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