

## Let's Hear it for Hats!

It's getting warmer outside - our subfreezing Wisconsin winter is passing into beautiful Spring days of sunshine and balmy temperatures. Neighbors I haven't seen for months have emerged from their winter dens. And children are everywhere - on bikes and skateboards, toddling after Mom, being pushed along in strollers.

But there aren't enough hats to be seen. I am a children-need-to-wear-hats freak. Unabashably and unashamedly so. Young children need hats - shall I say that again - perhaps louder? **YOUNG CHILDREN NEED TO WEAR HATS!** They need them in the winter and they need them in the Spring and Fall. And though they may not need their felted woolen wonders imported from Denmark (where hat wearing by children is a national institution) in the Summer, they still need hats. Why? Why the mania for hats? What new and wonderful Waldorf peculiarity have we here?

One issue is that young children do not have a fully developed sense for temperature - their own and that around them - until they are about 8 or 9 years old (yet another hallmark of the nine year change). Until then they are dependent on us to help them dress appropriately. And before someone gives up reading this in disgust, let me assure you all that as the mother of two hat-hating boys, I know that this is not easy. Ripping off the hat was an early acquired motor skill in both my sons - and many an outing was cut short because "if your hat isn't on, we can't stay at the park."

Warmth is one of the most important of the senses and one of the most critical gifts we

can give our children is to ensure that they have sufficient warmth - both in terms of physical temperature and inner soul warmth (and of course, there is an important connection between the two). Many anthroposophical doctors speak in terms of a child's body needing to be warm enough to properly receive the soul - and see a connection between insufficient warmth in some (not all!!) children and development of challenges in the autism spectrum.

An enormous amount of warmth leaves via the head - joggers know that and skiers know that and so though they may be scantily dressed as they grit their teeth and pursue their sport on frigid days, they will invariably wear hats. And yet on chilly days one can so often see hatted mothers carrying unhatted babies and children along! Why?!

So my advice is that no child under one year should never be without a hat. The little silk/cotton blend hats are probably the best as silk is sensitive to temperature needs, keeping the child warm but not too warm. After a year, no hat inside is fine - but until that second birthday, the child should have a hat on most of the time - if not all - when out doors. After that, one can use one's judgment - but err in favor of the child wearing a hat! And that means when the sun is strong - heads are incredibly delicate and a young child's hair is no protection against the strong rays of the sun - even on cool days.