



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Academics

A start on telling time

When your child is hungry and impatient with the speed of mealtime preparations, point to the large hand of the clock and say to her:

“We will have dinner when this big hand gets to the top (or bottom) of the clock.”

Point to where the hand will be as you say this.

Then make every effort to meet this prediction accurately.

If she is not familiar with the clock, you will have to explain that the hand does move, but too slowly for her to see it.

Don't try to teach her hours and minutes at first. This is difficult even for some first graders to understand, though by kindergarten many children will understand the concepts of hours.

Yes, all kinds of timekeepers will be available for children as they grow up.

This is a good place to start now. □

Parenting

Cultivate more joy in your life

Parenting is just one part of being a person. Parents, too, need to find ways to free their spirit to appreciate all that life has to offer.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Develop a short memory. Practice the fine art of developing a short memory when it comes to hurts, wounds and wrongs that have been inflicted on you.

Doing so will help you let go of yesterday's pain and free you from the burden of anger and resentment. “Good to forgive; best to forget!” observed poet Robert Browning.

2. Look for humor in daily events. Joy is the feeling of smiling inside, so laugh a little more. Laughter lightens life and animates the spirit.

Billy Graham recommends it: “A keen sense of humor helps us to overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and outlast the unbearable.”

3. Encourage someone who is discouraged. Deliberately seek out someone who needs your words of encouragement and praise.

There is great wisdom in this statement made by Sir James Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*: “Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.”

4. Make peace with your life. “Take what is given and make it over your way,” advised Robert Frost. “My aim in life has always been to hold my own with whatever is going on. Not against, with.”

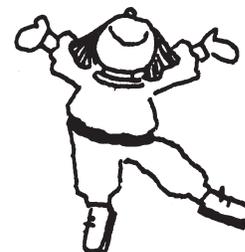
No one has a life that is trouble-free. A parent can fail us, a friend can betray us, a marriage partner may be a source of disappointment, and a child can rebel and engage in self-destructive behavior.

Let go of regrets. Embrace the joy of the present. Anticipate the beauty of the future.

5. Count your blessings. Sure, there's a lot wrong in the world today and sometimes in our lives. But there is also a lot which is right and good as well.

Get out pencil and paper. Give yourself five minutes to write down as many blessings as you can recall. Add them up.

Keep the sheet around and review it from time to time. Make additions. It's bound to elevate your mood! □



Five things to say today

A friend recently sent me a link to an article concerning five important things to communicate to your children each day.

I'm not planning to give you yet another thing to add to your to-do list, knowing it is long enough already.

I'm just hoping that this little conversation will remind you of what is most important in your parenting relationship.

The parenting expert who made the list suggested that the time when parents are tucking kids in might be the time to say these.

Certainly making a meaningful connection before bed may help wipe away some of the stresses and busyness of the day.

I would also suggest that taking times through the day—when driving in the car or working together in the kitchen—helps both parents and kids focus on what is central in their life together.

What was great today? A key to happiness is paying attention to the things for which we are grateful.

In my family, we propose toasts before dinner, naming the events, people or experiences that have been an important part of our days.

This allows us to share, to rejoice, and to talk further, but also focuses the children on their lives, in an intentional way.

Reflection is a capacity that can be thus taught early—as Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

What are you looking forward to? These anticipations are also toasted frequently. Looking forward to positive things helps make children

hopeful and optimistic, warding off depression and unhappiness.

Being excited about coming events is an important part of the preparation process, and also allows parents to share in their children's lives in an unobtrusive way.

Is there anything you want to talk about? Respecting children's right to privacy while being supportive is a tricky balance for parents to keep.

This open-ended question allows children to consider what they want to share.

This is a good bedtime question, because then children know they have your full attention, and may lead to conversations about worries and other emotions that you might not otherwise know about.

Remember, when kids are sharing, parents do well to be quite neutral in their responses, rather than jumping in with platitudes or solutions.

I'm sorry. While this may not need to be a part of conversation every day, we all know that there are lots of times when we don't act at our best as parents or as people.

Taking the lead on repairing relationships is one of the best examples a parent can give.

Clearing the air before children go to sleep helps all of us, as well as teaching kids important lessons about being human and what it means to love and forgive.

Knowing we can all start again fresh in the morning is a wonderful feeling.

I love you. Don't let this become an automatic sign-off. Instead, consider what you really feel and say it in a heartfelt and meaningful way. What a great close to a day! □

Games & Activities

Warmer or colder?

Here's a fun game for kids and adults. It can be played indoors or outdoors and helps teach discrimination skills.

Select an item in the room (or outside) that will be “it.” Tell your child to start moving around the room (or the yard).

When your child gets close to the object, you say, “You're getting warmer,” and vice-versa when the child moves away from the object—“You're getting colder.”

Dramatize the game by exaggerating: “Now you're getting really warm, now you're hot!”

Eventually the child can narrow down the choices by asking, “Is this it?” until the object is identified.

Take a turn yourself with the child selecting the object. □

A more independent youngster

Around a child's second birthday, one can observe a shift from a dependent toddler to a more independent preschool youngster. Since this phase continues for several months, it is worth discussing in more detail.

Parents who have an understanding of the changes that occur in their child will be better prepared to handle the behavior that they may see.

This change to a more independent youngster is brought about by several changes, such as: (1) increase movement skills; (2) improved language ability, and (3) newly emerging social skills.

Youngster's movement skills now let her explore new territories. Just being able to climb stairs one at a time allows her to experience the delight of discovering things on her own.

At the same time, her improved language ability provides her with new opportunities to express her own thoughts and to talk more with other people.

As Youngster begins to play with other children her age—at first alongside them in “parallel” play and later in face-to-face play—her newly emerging social skills also help her to make the transition from dependence to independence.

Often a child's striving for independence can be very trying for parents. She may insist on doing things for herself—like dressing—even though the adults in her life are quite sure they can do the same things for her more efficiently and neatly.

It is also hard on parents when Youngster constantly seems to want to “test the limits.” It is often at this stage that she may suddenly decide to give up her afternoon nap—just when parents most need a midday break.

It is obvious that some adjustments in family living need to be made to take into consideration these developmental changes in behavior.

Go along with her where you can. Encourage independence by giving her choices when possible: “Do you want to wear the red shirt or the blue one?”

In some cases you must insist on your decision as an adult and a parent. Explain why your decision must be followed, but be prepared to insist, even if the result is fireworks.

Children don't stay two years old forever, and this, too, will pass. In the meantime, your child learns that independence is fine, but it does have limits. □

Discipline

Learning from mistakes

No matter how hard they try, sometimes children make mistakes.

Whether your child has done a good job or has failed, try to focus on what it is she has done rather than on her personally.

For example, if she remembers to wipe her feet before coming into the house, thank her for wiping her feet rather than simply telling her she's a “good girl.”

Telling her she's a “good girl” doesn't help build her self-confidence. It makes her dependent on your judgment—and she may not know what being a “good girl” actually means.

The other side of this example is that if she were to forget to wipe her feet, tell her you're upset when she does that because then you have to clean it up.

This statement focuses on what she **did**, not what she **is** or **is not**.

Don't tell her she's a “dumb, sloppy person.” Such generalized blame and criticism only causes feelings of guilt. It destroys self-confidence and doesn't teach better behavior.

If you learn to say what you mean and mean what you say, you'll help your child learn from her mistakes and at the same time, feel good about herself rather than feeling she's a bad person for making mistakes. Helping your child feel good about herself is one of the most important jobs you have as a parent.

Don't worry if you sometimes do things that you don't feel are helpful in building your child's self-confidence. What's important is the overall consistency of your behavior.

Teach her to accept and learn from her mistakes; to strive to be the best she can be, and to expect to be successful in whatever she seeks to achieve. □

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Articles in **Growing Together** refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns “he” and “she” are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

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Sunday

Monday

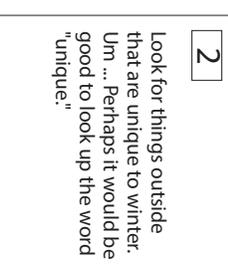
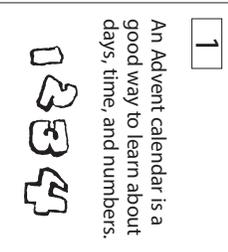
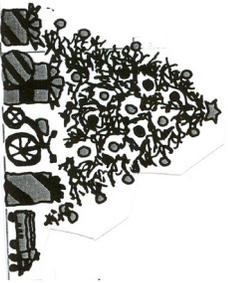
Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday



3
Fried mush for breakfast. Oh, come on, you can put some syrup on it!

4
Do you know what latkes are? Find out and make some for dinner.

5
Wait Disney's birthday. Do you know the name of his mouse friend?

6
Find five things in your house that are red.

7
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
Hanukkah begins today..

8
Roll a pine cone in peanut butter and put it out for the birds.

9
Donate toys, clothes, or canned goods to a local charity.

10
Can you see any icicles outside? What are they made of?

11
What is mistletoe? Look it up.

12
Take a family walk when it's snowing.

13
Make a gift for a friend.

14
Read "The Polar Express."

15
Sing some carols with joy!

16
Draw a picture of snow falling on your home.

17
Help bake and decorate some cookies.

18
Will you need a hat, scarf and mittens outside today?

19
How many verses of "Jingle Bells" can you sing?

20
Wear something red today.

21
First day of winter.

22
Warm up some apple cider for a special treat!

23
How about a fruit or vegetable pizza?

24
Christmas Eve

25
Christmas Day.

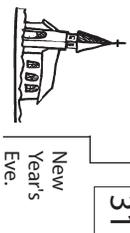
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27
Have you ever been sledding or ice skating?

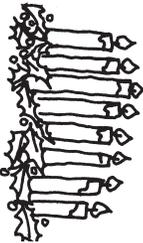
28
Catch a ray of sunlight in a mirror a reflect it on a wall.

29
How about a favorite movie and some popcorn? And maybe an apple?

30
What can you make outside in the winter?



New Year's Eve.



Kwanzaa begins!

