Growing Together

Newsletter for parents of preschool children

Toys

Many toys are good for all ages

All children, regardless of age, need playthings to build physical, mental, language, emotional and social skills.

Some toys will appeal to children of all ages. These include musicrelated items, plush toys, and books.

For children two and up, a well-rounded toy selection should also include playthings from each of the following groups:

- Pretend/dress-up play
- Arts and crafts
- Blocks
- Science and nature exploration play
 - Outdoor toys for active play
- Puzzles, games, and construction toys.
- Don't forget cardboard boxes and other boxes of all sizes. Check the recycling for safe items to use in creating something original.

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Parenting

Simplifying your life

More and more people are coming to the conclusion that the American Dream is not simply about a larger house, expensive cars and exotic vacations.

It's also about peace of mind and being part of a community.

Here are some suggestions for living more simply:

• Don't buy what you don't need. Although this sounds relatively easy to do, most of us have a habit of cluttering up our homes with things we "simply can't do without."

Before making your next purchase, ask yourself three important questions:

- (1) Is this an item I will use regularly?
- (2) Have I had a need in the past for this item?
- (3) Will this purchase enhance my life now?
- Stop chasing the almighty dollar. Disqualify yourself from the rat race by living with less to enjoy life more.

A bigger house, a new car, the latest fashionable clothing create tremendous stress to generate a larger and larger income but do not lead to happiness and fulfillment.

• Pick a month and designate it as your "poor" month. During those 30 days, buy only the absolute basics and do not use credit cards. Keep all transactions cash only.

This tightening of your financial belt accomplished three goals.

First, you will see how easy it is to reduce and simplify.

Second, you will save money which can be banked, applied to other debts, or donated to a worthwhile charity.

Third, you will be sensitized to how freely and carelessly money is spent and purchases made.

After living through one poor" month, you will be more financially cautious and sensitive in the following months.

As you begin to cultivate a simpler lifestyle, don't become discouraged.

Remember that developing the simple-living mid-set doesn't happen overnight. For most people it's done one step at a time.

As you take each step, you gain more confidence and discover new ways of doing things.

Learning to love math

I hate math. I have always hated math. I manage to do enough to figure out my bank balance and calculate how to cut a recipe in half, but the finer points of advanced math remain beyond my grasp.

When it came to the sciences that required some tricky math, I managed to memorize my way through, but I am the first to admit that abstract mathematical thinking is not my strong suit.

Having lived without this skill for my whole life, what's the problem with the attitude conveyed in my first sentence? The problem is that such an assertion from parents could well sour the thinking of the kids around us.

Researchers say that even mathphobic parents can raise kids who enjoy and excel in math.

Be aware that requires stopping the negative talk about math and mixing math games, questions, and observations into daily life, in the same way that they do reading and spelling.

Current research continues to indicate the importance of math to children's success.

A recent study indicates that math skills when children enter kindergarten are even stronger predictors of later school success than reading skills or even the ability to pay attention.

And yet the most recent results in international student assessment show that American students continue to lag behind global peers, performing below average when compared with children in more than thirty other industrialized nations.

So, besides avoiding the negative personal attitudes about math, there are many simple things that parents can do in the early years to foster understanding about numbers and spatial relationships.

• Very young children can learn to recite numbers by rote.

Many a four-year-old can rattle off a string of numbers all the way up to fifty, but is flummoxed when asked to put a cookie for each of her friends on the plate.

- Table setting helps with this one-to-one correspondence, needing a placemat, spoon, fork, and knife for each member of the family.
- Helping children make connections between numbers and sets of objects—like giving five Cheerios for the number 5 is far more meaningful in establishing math concepts.
- How about saving an egg carton, marking a different numeral in each of the cups, and asking your youngster to put the corresponding number of Cheerios in each cup. That's a fun, math-rich snack!
- Simple block-building games, encouraging children to replicate your stack of blocks, can teach spatial skills.

Learning spatial relationships (like bigger and smaller or light and heavy) is linked to math skills.

- Think about all the items in your kitchen cabinets that could support this kind of learning play, like nesting measuring cups or different sizes of packages.
- Help your kids find the patterns that are embedded in picture books, like the red-stripe, green-stripe, bluestripe on the snake. Patterns are basic to math concepts.
- Make a game of finding geometric shapes around the house or when out in the car.
- Here's a fun outdoor game full of math. Draw a number line with chalk on the sidewalk and ask your

child to hop to the number 4, and then to hop to the number that is two more, and then to the one that is three less, and so on.

Before long, you'll forget that you hate math, and your youngster will be well on the way to math proficiency!

Social Skills

Raising kids who care and share

In their most formative early years, children learn right from wrong primarily by observing their parents. Youngsters are observant; they pick up the real message and values and are much more concerned with what you do than with what you say.

Obviously, if you want your children to practice honesty, be honest yourself. If you want your children to be truthful, then don't tell lies yourself. And if you want children to share and act compassionately, be a compassionate, sharing person yourself.

The opportunities for children to show sharing and caring are ample and easy to find. Children can be encouraged to:

- Take food to the home of a sick friend.
- Write a brief note of consolation to a sick classmate or friend.
- Donate a part of her or his allowance to a charitable institution.
- Volunteer some time to an organization which helps the needy.
- Assist an elderly person with shopping, gardening, or simple chores around the house.

Raising responsible kids

Children need adults to care for them. In the beginning, a parent must do everything for them. But as they grow, adults need to teach them, and then let go so they can grow.

Allowing children to try, perhaps to fail, and then try again is one way to help them grow. Here are some others:

• Experiment a little. Much of a child's self-esteem comes from his belief that a parent values his ideas and goals.

Allow your child to experiment—with blocks, playthings, arts and crafts, recyclables—even if it means making a mess every now and then.

Little fingers learn to manipulate items, turning whims into reality. What a great start for creativity and an I-can-do-it attitude!

• Answer questions. Children who can do many tasks well usually understand the workings of the tools they use. Someone has answered their questions along the way.

Be a person who answers a child's countless questions. Explain, explain, explain, explain. If he knows how the toilet works, for instance, he'll be more likely to use it correctly.

• Let him try. As you work with your child on a task, stop and ask yourself, "Could he try this?" For instance, as you wrap a gift for a friend's party, allow your child to choose the gift tag, peel off the price label or hold the paper down as you tape.

Monitor yourself. Could your child be helping here instead of just watching you do it?

• **Don't interfere.** When your child is trying to plant seeds in the back yard and all appears to be disaster, don't take over the project. More

important than perfectly planted seeds is the feeling of accomplishment of having done a task on his own.

You can encourage success if you make a plan with him ahead of time, and explain the steps needed.

• Admit mistakes. When a parent admits his or her own failures, a child realizes that everyone struggles to do things correctly.

Adults know failure is a part of success. Teach your child to overcome frustration by acknowledging setbacks as you encounter them.

"Uh, oh. I put three cups of sugar in this cake. That's too much sugar." Now you have a chance to show calm in the face of adversity.

Show him how you try to solve the problem by talking about your problem-solving technique: "Maybe I should just increase the recipe."

While children mature at different rates, most are helped (or hampered) by what parents do and say.

By our very words and actions we may encourage or discourage our children to take on increasing responsibilities.

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Written by a very wise grandmother; From the publishers of **Growing Child** and **Growing Together**

Telling a fib to gain attention

Sometimes children lie to gain attention from adults. This sometimes happens in times of transition, such as when a family moves, a child starts school, or a new baby arrives in the home.

At such times, a young child may feel neglected. She may, for example, deliberately pour the entire bottle of bath bubble down the drain and then deny she did it.

What to do? If you already know about or have witnessed the child misbehaving, it is best to avoid setting her up for "defensive lying" by asking: "Did you do that?" Chances are she will deny it or, worse yet, blame her baby brother for doing it.

Children generally respond more positively when parents confront them directly with what they already know: "I saw you doing that. It wasn't nice thing to do."

This doesn't mean parents don't love the child—it means they don't like the behavior.

To prevent a child's misbehavior or lying as a way to gain attention, it will help if parents can spend a little more time with the child who feels left out, especially during times of transition.

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