



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Toys & Play

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 music-related items, plush toys and books.

For children two years and up, a well-rounded toy selection should also include playthings from 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. □

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Parenting

Being a good parent

Nobody ever said that parenting would be easy. Being a **good** parent is even more difficult!

Here are six guidelines to help you put into practice some principles of good parenting that you probably already know but for which you may need an occasional reminder:

1. Be consistent in your enforcement of rules. Be certain that your rules have these characteristics: They must be clearly defined, reasonable and enforceable.

Rules in the home help children feel more secure and comfortable when they are faced later in life with rules in school and community.

A seven-year study done by the National Institute of Mental Health indicates that self-confident children who succeeded in their undertakings usually came from homes in which there were rules that were reasonable, consistent, and enforced with affection.

2. Permit children to make mistakes and even fail sometimes. Children learn by doing, rather than by passively absorbing the experiences of others. Making mistakes is one basis for future independence, self-direction, and intelligent decision-making.

When children know that they can anticipate consequences, they are

being helped to develop an understanding of cause-effect relationships.

4. Resist the temptation to over-organize. Don't over-structure a child's whole day with lessons, sports, and other activities. Children need time to be leisurely and to enjoy unstructured play.

5. Maintain a sense of humor. When something interferes with the daily routine, try to see a funny side of the situation.

For example, when there are toys, clothes, or other things left about randomly, gather them into a locked box and charge a "fee" (such as a kiss on your cheek) for later retrieval of an item.

If the bathroom becomes a mess, then draw a sad face on the mirror. Ah, but when things look improved, don't forget to reinforce with a happy smile!

6. Take care of yourself. It's important for parents to take care of their own health and psychological needs. A parent who is over-worked or over-stressed will less likely be able to implement these recommendations.

Thus, taking care of oneself—with adequate rest, leisure time, and proper nutrition—is also an important part of being a good parent. □

Remember who's in charge

Sometimes parents have to make decisions that their children don't agree with. And sometimes parents then begin to wonder if they have made the right decision after all.

You can explain to children why you make the decisions you do. They may not agree with your decision, but you are giving them the knowledge they will need eventually to make good decisions on their own.

When you explain your decisions, do so briefly, and don't get drawn into debates or extended justification.

For example, you can explain, "When you play hard, you need rest so that you can play some more later." Leave it at that. Period.

Don't say, "Well, last time you didn't ..." or "If you don't take a nap, you won't be able to ..." or "A parent knows what's best for you."

With every moment of extended deliberation, uncertainty grows for parents and children.

Remember who's in charge. Parents have the role of guide and decision-maker because of their vastly greater experience and knowledge.

It is enormously reassuring to children to be able to believe that their parents are dependable and reliable. □



Teaching a child manners

Good-mannered people are pleasant to be around, both in public and private. Simple courtesies—saying please, thank you, excuse me—help make our world a little more personal, a little more gentle.

However, the key to good manners is attitude. It is a respect for the rights, ideas and feelings of others, even those with whom we disagree.

When can you start teaching a child manners? The earlier the better. Training in table manners can begin as soon as the child in the high chair starts to use a spoon and cup.

Of course, parents need to be reasonable. The baby may use his spoon to deposit vegetables on the floor.

The toddler may be so hungry that "please" is just too long to wait.

The four-year-old may have an attack of shyness and refuse to be coaxed out from behind your knees to "say hello to Mrs. Jones." At times like these, your own good manners tell you not to push.

Start with the basics. Choose the manners that are most important to you personally and concentrate on those.

If you start teaching them purposefully and systematically in the preschool years, they should be habitual by the time a child enters school.

Here are some examples:

- Respect other people's property and privacy.
- Behave well at the table.
- Avoid being rowdy in public.
- Don't interrupt or contradict someone in conversation.
- Don't demand one's own way all the time.

How do you go about teaching manners? Manners are taught by example, instruction, reminding and correcting.

• **Example.** The very best place to start teaching manners is in the home. When parents are respectful to each other and to their children, they are setting an example that speaks much louder than words.

• **Instruction.** As important as a good model is, it is not enough. Children do not automatically pick up the nuances of civilized behavior. Examples must be backed by explanation and instruction. Children need to be told **exactly** what is expected of them.

• **Reminders.** One instruction is not enough. Reminders are necessary—over and over again. Friendly reminders work better than hostile ones.

• **Be liberal with praise.** This is an effective way to encourage good manners.

Children learn good manners in much the same way they learn to share and to take turns. These, too, are ways of expressing the same attitudes of caring and consideration. □

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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
	<p>1 How could you warm someone's heart?</p> 	<p>2 Go for a hike.</p>	<p>3 Send a note and a photograph to an elderly friend.</p>	<p>4 Independence Day!</p> 	<p>5 Set the table for dinner.</p>	<p>6 Go out for a root beer!</p> 
<p>7 One word: POPCORN! Do it.</p>	<p>8 Take someone's dog for a walk.</p>	<p>9 Adopt a stray.</p> 	<p>10 Play Hopscotch outside! Look it up.</p>	<p>11 Track a trip to someplace on a map. Example: From your house to the Statue of Liberty, or to the Golden Gate Bridge.</p>	<p>12 Play: "SPY something red..."</p> 	<p>13 See if you can make a teepee: three long sticks and one (or two) sheets.</p>
<p>14 Three words: ICE CREAM CONE! Get going.</p> 	<p>15 What do you do with a hammock?</p>	<p>16 Reach up toward the ceiling—reach and stretch as far as you can—four times.</p>	<p>17 Make a short list of things you'd like to do today. Choose one and do it!</p>	<p>18 Read about the Morse Code. ... - - - - . Then send a message to someone with a flashlight.</p>	<p>19 Read a "George and Martha" children's book.</p>	<p>20 Visit a farm.</p> 
<p>21 Go outside and look for butterflies. (Hint: They really like flowers.)</p>	<p>22 Count your toes.</p>	<p>23 Share an apple with someone.</p> 	<p>24 Nobody talks for 15 minutes.</p>	<p>25 Make a purple cow: put grape juice, vanilla yogurt and ice cubes in the blender.</p>	<p>26 Play Hide and Seek with the whole family ... include the neighbors!</p>	<p>27 Sleep late.</p>
<p>28 Beatrix Potter's birthday. Read "Peter Rabbit" or another of her books.</p> 	<p>29 Skip rope.</p>	<p>30 Explore a junk shop.</p>	<p>31 Learn how to yodel. Look it up.</p> 			