



# Growing Together

Newsletter for  
parents of preschool children

Behavior

## When kids fail

Most children can handle success—but how can parents help their children handle failure?

First, your child needs to know that you're on her side, that you accept her for what she is, win or lose. Your comments should reflect on what she's done, not on what she "is."

Second, don't be kind by being dishonest. Your child knows when she hasn't done well, when she has "failed." When you acknowledge that you know this too, but that it isn't the end of the world, your child has confidence in you to reflect an honest value to her.

Finally, let your child know every day and in many ways that you love her. A child needs a lot of hugging, even at times when her behavior is definitely "unhuggable."

As children try to find their place in the world, they look to their parents for guidance and support. Make sure you give your child the room she needs to learn and make mistakes, but also make sure she knows you're on her side—win or lose. □

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Parenting

## Handling anger

How do you handle your anger? Everyone is born with the capacity to feel anger. Our culture may tell us that decent people don't display their anger.

Consequently we work hard to conceal our feelings. But we can't conceal the bodily changes that occur: blood pressure rises; heartbeat increases; blood vessels expand; and the result is a massive explosion of energy!

How we handle that explosion is often related to how we were raised. Some families practice physical punishment. Other families tend toward verbal punishment such as name-calling or sarcasm.

Still other families suppress and repress their anger. It is still there, however, in the form of headaches, asthma attacks, itching, or perhaps insomnia.

What's the best way to deal with one's anger?

**1. Acknowledge that anger exists.** It is a human characteristic. It's all right to be angry with your child and your child can be angry with you.

**2. Agree that it is not acceptable behavior to injure someone as a result of anger.** Anger is an emotion. Aggression is not an emotion. It is an action.

**2. Talk about the anger.** It's okay to admit how angry you are. Tell your child, "I'm angry when I see those crayon marks on the wall. I have to clean up that mess." Or, "I know it makes you angry when I have to do this," as you deprive the child of a treat.

**4. Emphasize your own feelings rather than attacking your child.** To do this, use the statements that begin with the words: "I feel as if ..." or "I feel upset when ..." Don't use words that attack and hurt someone such as, "You always ..." or "You never ..." or "You are a ..."

**5. Avoid anger-producing situations.** Sometimes we ask questions that we should know will produce the opposite of our wishes, such as, "Do you want to go to bed now?"

We could anticipate that the answer would be "No!" So, to avoid getting angry at our child's negativism, we could use a statement ("It's time to go to bed") instead of a question.

**6. Look for strategies together.** Encourage your child to generate ideas to solve a problem.

If he or she is involved in developing solutions to a problem, the solution will more likely be successful. □

## Helping brothers and sisters get along

How your child gets along with his brothers and sisters can make the difference in whether your family life is orderly (relatively speaking) or chaotic. Here are some tips for peace on the home front:

- **Try not to compare one child with another.** They are different people. Each has his or her own ways of reacting, special strengths and weaknesses, and rates of growth and development.

- **Notice the things that make each child unique,** and encourage each child to develop special talents.

Accept your children's differences and you will help them accept themselves and each other.

- **Try to spend time each day alone with each child.** This "special time" should be the child's to use as she wishes.

You can offer a story, a game, or simply your presence, and let her choose what you will do.

These special times help you know and enjoy each child more and help them feel special to you so they can stop competing so much for your attention.

- **Try to provide cooperative activities.** For example, when you go to the supermarket, have one child spot an item you need and then have the other child get it and put it in the cart.

In addition, try to compliment each child any time you see them working or playing together well: "Tom, thank you for helping Bobby get dressed. You're really a big help to me." □

## Dress and dance

How would a clown dance to rock 'n roll music?

What does a favorite warrior character do when the band plays a waltz?

Here's a good way to find out: dress up and dance.

First, have each child select a favorite role—clown, cowboy or cowgirl, pirate, Olympic athlete, superhero, fairy godmother, etc.

Next, help each one to put together a costume to represent that role.

The costume can be as simple as a hat or more elaborate with a dress, cape, gloves, boots and accessories.

Then turn on some favorite music.

The idea is that each person dances as he or she believes his or her character would dance.

Vary the music as much as you can so that more than one kind is represented—march, polka, slow dance, rock 'n roll, waltz.

This kind of activity calls for some imagination in putting together a costume and interpreting the role into dance moves.

As you're putting together an outfit, talk about how and why the character would dress and act.

The kids will want to trade costumes and keep dancing, but stop after a few costume changes to leave some ideas for next time.

Secret tip: Want to make the affair really entertaining? Design a costume for yourself and a few favorite adults and join the dance yourself!

Nothing tickles kids more than parents and other adults joining in the fun. □

## Learning math concepts can be fun

Children begin to learn math concepts long before they go to school—by determining the difference between these things and those things, for instance, or sorting objects which belong together, or ordering objects in space.

An example of how children order things in space is when your preschooler helps put away the pots and pans in the kitchen.

At first he may push them into the cupboard any old way. But when he does this, the door won't close. You might suggest: "Why not try putting the cookie sheets in first? I always put them on the bottom."

When the child does that, or uses another tip you've given him about pots and pans, the door will close. And he has expanded his knowledge of order—of how parts fit together.

Children also learn math concepts by cooking. Sugar, flour, and eggs can be measured, mixed, sifted, and stirred.

There are all sorts of abstract mathematical concepts in the kitchen—heavy, light, long, short, more, less, a little bit, a lot, spoonful, cupful and so on. □



## The Big Ten

Guiding children to learn appropriate behavior is one of the most vital things we do as parents.

There is a lot to consider, but reflecting about the whole subject of discipline, I realized it could probably be condensed to 10 reminders.

**1. Know what you want to accomplish.** Reflect on the kind of person you want your child to become by adulthood, and make decisions based on those goals.

Keeping the big picture in mind prevents falling into the trap of quick fixes, such as discipline that stops the behavior temporarily, without children understanding the reason behind the limits.

**2. Remember that when kids misbehave, it is not personal—they are not doing it just to drive you crazy.** They are either developmentally unable to act as you would like, or they have not yet learned the lessons you want to teach. Take time to figure out the reason instead of just getting upset.

**3. Consider whether you sound like your mother (or father).** This is not necessarily a bad thing.

But merely repeating the discipline practices from your childhood without thinking about whether they are appropriate to your goals can be counter-productive.

Bad memories are strong, so figure out what is motivating your guidance pattern.

**4. See life from the child's viewpoint.** When you consider things from a child's perspective, you can often prevent problems from occurring; an example would be that too-long wait with nothing to do at the restaurant.

In addition, understanding how children think helps parents teach in a way that helps children see the sense in behaving in particular ways.

**5. Remember that discipline has a different meaning than punishment.** Discipline means teaching; punishing means stopping in negative, often hurtful ways.

Children don't learn new and better behaviors when they are punished, they merely learn to stop that behavior temporarily, and not get caught the next time.



**6. Too many rules mean lots of rule-breaking—and parental policing.** Instead, remember the big ideas for setting limits—kids need to learn to keep themselves safe, to respect the property and rights of others, and to take responsibility for their actions.

These are the principles that should guide our actions and their decisions.

**7. Change your focus from the negative to the positive.** When you

catch kids being good and pay attention to that behavior, you reinforce that behavior.

Reinforced behavior is strengthened. Ignoring behaviors you don't want, or quickly redirecting them without too much attention to the negative, causes undesirable behavior to disappear.

**8. Keep your cool.** When kids are yelled at, all learning goes out the window, as they concentrate on feeling ashamed and fearful.

This is not easy to do, but when parents take time to calm themselves, they are far more effective in their guidance.

**9. Be strong in your beliefs.** Caving in to toddler outbursts or the emotional blackmail of older children is not good for them now or in the future. Kids feel safer with authoritative parents.

**10. Admit your mistakes.** Nobody's perfect. Sometimes all these reminders will go out the window, as you and the kids have a really bad day.

The life lesson of having a parent apologize and try harder is lasting: we do our best. □

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>3</p> <p>Play "Follow the Leader" outside.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Have you looked at the bottom of your feet lately? Please do so now.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Put on some sunglasses and have your picture taken.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Old pans, brooms, pots, etc. can be new toys for kids.</p> <p>Be sure they're safe to play with.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Make a drawing in the dirt or sand with a stick.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Invite some of your child's friends for a mini-picnic.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Dress up in mom's and dad's old clothes.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>Play with a toy that connects together.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Do you have the phone number of the local poison control center posted by your telephone?</p>	<p>12</p> <p>This is a great time to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables.</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Remember to STOP! Look both ways before crossing the street.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Put a straw in an orange and drink the juice.</p>	<p>15</p> <p>Count your teeth.</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Test different objects to see if they'll float: soap rock toothbrush, cup, tissue, pencil, egg.</p>
<p>17</p> <p>Eat lunch outside today!</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Play with an inflatable beach ball.</p>	<p>19</p> <p>Make an obstacle course outdoor with boxes, lawn chairs, hose, bricks, anything safe to jump over or run around.</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Collect some rocks and sort them by size.</p> <p>small medium large</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Play a new game outside with friends. (Okay, parents can play, too.)</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Look in the mirror at your eyebrows. Can you make them go up and down?</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Attend a neighborhood softball game.</p>
<p>24</p> <p>What can you make with a leftover cardboard box?</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Make up a song about your family.</p> <p>"My family's fun, when we play in the sun ..."</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Make some real lemonade, with lemons, water and ice cubes.</p>	<p>27</p> <p>If you were going to write or tell a story, what would it be about?</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Go outside and look for things that are <i>tiny</i>.</p>	<p>29</p> <p>Family movie night: In your home or at the theater.</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Help water plants.</p>