



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

Stop-and-go dance game

This game requires lots of space for free movement.

Have everyone spread out, at least an arm's length from one another.

One adult stays by your music source and uses the volume to signal the starting and stopping of the dance.

When you turn the volume up, the children dance as fast and with as much action as they can.

When you turn the music down, everyone must immediately sit down.

One variation is to freeze in place when the music stops instead of sitting down. Then, when the music starts again, dancing is resumed.

Use different types of music to encourage a variety of dancing—waltzes, rhythmic Latin tunes, rock-n-roll, country-western and so on.

Turn the music up ... dance ... Turn the music down ... stop or freeze, and so on. Add your own rules and dance a different way. □

Parenting

Providing emotional support

Beyond satisfying toddler's basic physical needs, such as good nutrition and providing a healthy, safe environment, her most important need as a toddler is for a dependable, affectionate relationship with at least one significant adult in her life.

This relationship provides her with the essential element of stability she needs as she moves onward toward higher stages of intellectual, emotional and social development.



It is the secure anchor she needs as she experiences waves of sometimes baffling new experiences.

When Toddler can count on the faithful love of someone special—whether in success or in failure, in

accomplishment or adversity—her feelings of trust and positive self-esteem are nourished and developed.

On the other hand, children who fail to develop this important bond become apprehensive and mistrustful of themselves and others.

One of the great challenges of good parenting is letting your child know she is loved without being either overly protective of her or overly intrusive in her own private world.

It involves being sensitive and responsive to her inner emotional needs, rather than imposing affection on her in ways she does not want.

This demands insight, flexibility and self-control on the part of the parent and, at times may, seem almost impossible to accomplish.

Let's face it: It's impossible to be a perfect parent all the time. A more realistic goal is just to strive to be a good parent most—or at least, part—of the time.

Striving to be a good parent involves trying to find a balance—a happy medium—between letting your child go in order to experience independence and holding on to her with affection whenever she needs your emotional support. □

Remember, we've talked about this

I met a neighbor's visiting granddaughter out walking her dog. The puppy jumped up on me, and Katie said to her, with elaborate patience, "Now, remember, we've talked about this!"

It was hard not to smile at the exact intonation she duplicated from hearing those same words from a parent.

And isn't that just our problem! We talk about something and explain to our youngsters just why they should not engage in a particular activity.

Then later we talk some more. And we keep on talking, eventually becoming exasperated with the children's failure to heed our perfectly logical and beautifully expressed guidelines.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, it depends on the children's age, of course.

There are certain times in the first two or three years that we should depend far less on talk and more on action.

That's the time to redirect children's actions and behaviors to more suitable activities, and realize that their self-control is so weak or non-existent that they need us to help them change behaviors. And this can be done best without much in the way of lecture or commentary.

Learning to be exquisitely brief is a parental art. So the parent of the toddler who is involved in a fracas with another child over a beach shovel simply moves the toddler, hands her another implement, and says, "Gently, Becky. Let's dig here. Sophie wants to dig there."

Even later, when children are coming to understand a bit more about limits and expectations, most parents undoubtedly talk too much.

I hear parents reason, justify, explain, repeat, nag, and just keep on going long past the point of reasonable expectation that they still have the child's attention.

Every child is born with invisible earflaps that are lowered when an individual's self-esteem is under attack.

And after all, that is what is happening when parents keep talking too much, since the implication is that children are just too plain dumb to get it, and therefore parents have to keep talking.

When I used to teach student teachers of preschoolers, a tool that we used was to set up a tape recorder and just let it run.

When the students later played back their words, they were usually astonished to hear themselves speak.

Often both their tones and words seemed like an affront to respect of the children, rather than the well-meaning guidance they had intended.

I remember one student teacher's comments: "It sounds like I don't think they understand anything at all. I'm talking way too much."

While it may not be practical to tape yourself on a regular basis, it can be useful to consider how much you are talking, and how your child is receiving your words.

It is useful to consider what is the minimum amount of information that would be helpful, both for your child's learning and for your own sanity.

Giving instruction and setting limits are areas where truly less is often more.

So remember, parents, we've talked about this. □

Give children words

The ability to understand words, both written and spoken, is highly valued in our culture. We need to be able to speak and to read to succeed in almost everything we try to do in life.

Since children learn new words by hearing them and by seeing them, parents and caregivers can do much to add to children's vocabularies.

For very young children, this can be done by naming objects that they see and come in contact with every day. Identifying and naming objects does sound a lot like talking to oneself, but it is a worthwhile endeavor.

For example, "This is your *shoe*, and I'm going to put it on your *foot*." "Let's put these *blocks* away in this *can*."

Children need to hear the same words over and over, and this can seem tiresome until you get into the habit of maintaining a one-sided running conversation!

When children begin to talk, they may not pronounce words correctly. Instead of always correcting them, you can simply repeat the word in a sentence, using the correct pronunciation. Once you learn how to talk, it's hard to remember how hard it was in the beginning.

Older children love to hear big words, even though they might not understand what they mean. So, don't be afraid to introduce new and fascination-sounding words in your conversation. "This sandwich isn't just big, it's *stupendous*!" "This ball will roll faster as it gains *momentum*."

Teaching children to be curious about their world—and the words that tell them about their world—can start them on a journey of discovery of their own. □

Disobedience: What not to do

Every parent faces a disobedient child, but a parent's reaction can set the tone for dealing with misbehavior.

"Most of the time children won't want to or can't tell why they've misbehaved," said Peter Stavinoha, a psychologist at Children's Medical Center of Dallas.

"The importance of the situation lies with how the parent reacts."

He suggests three simple guidelines that can help parents effectively deal with disobedient children.

First: Don't lecture. Lecturing a young child gives opportunity for arguments or repeat occurrences.

Children often won't or can't talk about their unacceptable behavior. However, a swift, meaningful consequence makes for clearer learning.

Second: Don't use excessive warnings. Multiple warnings of consequences build delay in a child's response.

If a child is given repeated warnings, she learns that she doesn't have

to act right away. The warning of negative consequences should hold firm on a second command.

Finally: Don't dole out long-term punishment. Make the punishment immediate because if it drags on for a long time, the child may not correlate the punishment with a specific incident.

Also, if a child misbehaves while being punished for one reason, finding a second punishment gets more difficult for the parent. □

Science & Nature

How much does it weigh?

Let's conduct some experiments about how much things weigh.

You'll need a kitchen or bathroom scale on a table along with several interesting objects to weigh: a shoe, toy car, doll, apple, cup, a book, uncooked pasta, and anything else that looks interesting.

1. First, have each person guess how much an object weighs. Then put it on a scale and see what its true weight really is.

2. Next, compare the weights of different objects. Which is heavier: the doll or the shoe? The toy car or the apple? Weigh the objects again to show the difference.

3. If you're using a bathroom scale, put it on the floor and weigh each person who's participating.

Then line up by weight—the lightest to the heaviest. Make some more comparisons: Is the heaviest person the tallest?

4. Which weighs more—big objects or little objects?

Try to think up some "stumpers" such as a jar of peanut butter vs. a sack of potato chips. Or a package of marshmallows vs. a can of soup.

5. Solve this problem: How can you measure the weight of your pet if it won't stand still on the scale? (It's not higher math but is a good problem for older kids to solve.)

If you have more than one pet, which one weighs the most?

6. Liquids have weight, too. Everybody guess how much a gallon of water weighs, then weigh one gallon and find out.

The participants in this exercise will probably have quite a few ideas of their own about what weighs what.

Think up additional problems to solve that match the kids interests and skill levels. □

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>Draw a picture of yourself in this box.</p>	<p>1 Play "Follow the Leader!" Take turns being the leader.</p>	<p>2 Make a mark in this space for every day it rains this month.</p>	<p>3 What games can you play outside today?</p> 	<p>4 MARCH around the house three times</p>	<p>5 Think of five words that rhyme with "six."</p>	
<p>6 Go golfing! Tip a large can or wastebasket on its side. Using a wooden spoon and a ball, gently hit the ball into the can. Fore!</p>	<p>7 Can you whistle a tune? Play a harmonica? Play a kazoo?</p> 	<p>8 Recite the days of the week — backwards: Saturday, Friday, Th</p>	<p>9 Find five rocks. Line them up by size. Or try a tongue twister: Find and line five fine rocks.</p>	<p>10 Count four things: 4 eggs 4 windows 4 noses 4 buildings</p>	<p>11 Look at an ABC book. Trace the letters with your finger.</p> 	<p>12 Go for a walk. Take some gloves and a bag to pick up litter.</p>
<p>13 Today's snack: Banana slices with yogurt for dipping.</p>	<p>14 Give Baby some plastic bowls to stack, roll, slide.</p>	<p>15 Count your toys as you put them away.</p>	<p>16 Eat some fresh fruit.</p> 	<p>17 St. Patrick's Day Wear something green.</p>	<p>18 Pop some corn and have a movie night at home.</p>	<p>19 Visit a pet store and look at all the different kinds and colors of fish!</p>
<p>20 If the sun is shining, take a walk in the park. If it's raining, read a good book at home.</p>	<p>21 Cut up different shapes from construction paper. See what pictures you can make by pasting the shapes on another piece of paper.</p>	<p>22 Take turns telling about something that made you laugh. Ha!</p>	<p>23 Where do bananas grow? Look it up.</p>	<p>24 Play a naming game with the baby: my nose; your nose; my ear; your ear; my foot; your foot!</p>	<p>25 What's the difference between a trout and a shark?</p>	<p>26 Have some friends over for a sleep-over.</p> 
<p>27 Help pick up and put away items in your house</p>	<p>28 Using play dough, make: A long, skinny snake A birthday cake A round ball A cup</p>	<p>29 Do you have a museum in your community? Check to see if there are special programs for children.</p>	<p>30 Discover four new things to do with a paper towel tube.</p>	<p>31 Cinnamon toast for breakfast.</p>	