



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Health & Safety

Healthy handwashing

If you have not done so already, now is a good time to help your child develop healthy handwashing habits.

Proper handwashing can prevent the spread of many communicable diseases.

Water alone, however, won't kill germs. Soap is needed, too.

Drying the hands with a disposable paper towel will help stop the spread of germs.

Here are some appropriate occasions for your child to practice handwashing:

- When she comes into the house after playing outdoors.
- After using the toilet.
- After petting an animal.
- Before eating food.

Good habits—learned early—can last a lifetime.

So, help your child develop the good habit of washing her hands. □

Language

Meaning what you say— saying what you mean

How does a child perceive what is said? An adult usually knows that people don't mean it when they say, "I could just kill him for doing that."

But children—especially young children—often have not had enough experience to know that what someone says is not always to be taken literally.



Young children also tend to take things at face value and to be concrete and specific in their way of looking at things.

A good example is the old story about the boy who asked where he came from. His mother went into a long explanation of the birds and bees. Then the child said, "Gee whiz, Joey said he came from Philadelphia."

Another example is the child who came home from a birthday party in tears because the hostess showed him to his seat and asked him to "sit here for the present." But as he told his mother, she never did give him a present!

So, what does a child understand when he hears, "Stop that or I'll break your arm." Or "When I get you home, I'll pull your nose off?"

How can we be sure that child won't believe the threat and believe the adult will break his arm?

There is another side of the story. When the threat is **not** carried out and the child does **not** have his nose pulled off, he begins to learn that nothing happens because of his problem behavior.

So, take a minute to listen to what you say to your child. It may not be what you mean to say at all. □

Telling children about death

All children are faced with death sometime. All too often parents tend to ignore or dismiss children's questions regarding death. Here are some guidelines for talking with children about this part of life.

- Tell the truth by explaining at a level the child will understand.
- Answer a question with a question when you aren't sure what the child wants to know. For example, when she asks, "What will happen to me when you die?" you can counter with, "What do you think will happen?" This lets the child tell you her concerns.
- Use your knowledge of nature to talk about the cycle involving life and death. Gardening and pet care both offer opportunities to observe and discuss quite naturally the issues of growth, sickness, aging, accidents and death.
- Allow children to openly mourn the loss of a pet and have a funeral and burial if they want to.

In the case of losing a loved one:

- Do not exclude children from the funeral ceremony or visit to the funeral home. However painful, the child must realize the dead person is not going to return.

If the child is old enough and wants to attend, the ceremony may be a source of comfort. Explaining beforehand what will happen will make the experience less frightening.

- Keep the memories of the dead person alive with pictures and other mementos. They serve as a source of comfort.

- If necessary explain the cause of death at a level the child can understand. Sometimes children think they were responsible by being naughty or thinking mean thoughts. □

"What is discipline?"

Parents frequently ask, "What does 'discipline' mean", or "when do I start disciplining?"

The time to start disciplining a child is as soon as she can understand why you are doing it and learn from the experience. The earliest age is about 1-1/2 years old, although some children may be nearer two years old before they really respond.

Discipline is a word that is often associated with a child's bad behavior. It usually involves punishing the child for the behavior with the hope that she will not do it again.

A good example of such behavior would be if your child ran into a busy street each time you let her out of the house. Since the results of being hit by a vehicle are quite serious, this kind of action has to be stopped.

There is, however, another form of discipline that parents can teach their children. It involves training a child to control her behavior, desires, and emotions in order to reach a certain goal. That goal might include good grades in school, success in sports, arts, music or a craft.

Self-discipline becomes even more important when a child becomes a young adult. It is the disciplined teenager who can successfully resist the attraction of alcohol, drugs, or skipping school.

How do you teach this second form of discipline?

- Start as early as you do with the first type.
- Encourage your child not to give up on a task just because it's hard or long.
- Show by example that practice and work pays off with increased rewards.

These rewards have to be readily seen at first in the form of praise, a favorite treat, extra allowance, etc. Later the reward of "doing well" is all that is needed.

So, remember both types of discipline—the first type that keeps your child safe and out of trouble, and the second type that teaches her how to live successfully.

Both are equally important; both require you as a parent, to teach them. □

Behavior

Parents can be cranky, too!

Even the best parents have days when they're ready to give up. But instead of trying to be perfect, allow yourself to step off the pedestal once in a while.

Sensitivity, warmth, and enthusiasm are all admirable, desirable qualities for parents. But parents are also human beings, and human beings are subject to fatigue, illness, and emotional stress.

While it is never acceptable to become abusive with your child, it is okay to be cranky or maybe just worn out. Parenting is a demanding job. And just like any other job, you'll have good days . . . and not-so-good days.

So, don't be hard on yourself when your child gets on your nerves. Give yourself a break. Be cranky if that's what works today. Tomorrow is another day. □

The importance of make-believe

Matthew grabs a big cardboard box and decides to go to the “store.”

He pushes the box around the living room, looking for the “groceries” his family needs—a plastic cup, a newspaper, a toy—and drops them into the box.

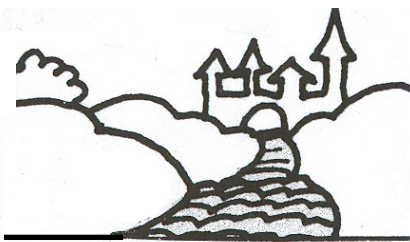
He pretends to pay for his purchases and then proudly tells his parent, “I bought our food!”

Make-believe is a necessary facet of a child’s play. Pretending gives him the chance to:

- Imitate adults to help him understand his environment;
- Re-enact familiar situations, both good and bad, as a way of dealing with emotions;
- Develop his imagination by creating fantasies; and
- Learn about himself as an individual and how he fits into society.

When your child pretends, he isn’t receiving outside commands or controls—he’s **IN** control! So, he can take his every-day, routine world and turn it into a magic place.

Your child will start by imitating you around the house, and will progress through the years to more “dramatic acting”—possibly even becoming the commander of a vital space mission to Mars! □



The very best gift of all

Marion is a mother, a nurse, and an aunt who knows all about kids. When she was about to visit her sister’s family, she wanted to bring along a small gift for her niece.

So, for Susan, who is 2-1/2 years old, Marion bought a gift-wrapped tin of plastic bandages in several sizes. Her husband thought the gift was weird, cheap, and inappropriate, and he said so. Marion merely smiled.

Marion’s sister and brother-in-law raised their eyebrows almost simultaneously when they saw their Susan unwrap the unusual gift.

Susan, however, was utterly delighted. First, she looked all over her own body for some place she could use a bandage on. She found a small scratch, and it seemed to qualify.

Then she put two on her doll. After that, she sorted out the big bandages, the middle-sized ones, and the little ones. And she asked Aunt Marion what kind of cuts, scratches, bruises or sore spots each one ought to be saved for.

Over the next few days, the bandages obviously were her favorite playthings.

What Aunt Marion had known was that at 2-1/2, Susan’s play would probably include lots of simple pretending based on the real and simple events of her own life.

So, the bandages were a smash of a gift because they helped Susan to pretend to do something important that grownups do. And every bandage—big, medium, or small—became a source of fun and a learning experience.

That’s the very best gift of all. □

Quiet-together activities

Want to spend some quiet, quality time with your child? Here’s a short list of things that cost next to nothing:

- Prepare a small picnic lunch and eat it together, anyplace in the house except the kitchen or dining room, (obviously not the bathroom) or eat outside in a shady place.
- Both of you make a clay figure of a make-believe animal. Give it a name and some magic powers.
- Look through a magazine and count the number of dogs (or cats or bugs) you can find.
- Play “I wish I was ...” and explain why. Example: “I wish I was a kangaroo because then I could jump around a lot.”
- Take a walk and carry a sack (and a glove or two) for picking up litter. Take turns making up a make-believe story as you go along.
- Teach your child a song from your childhood or a folk tune like “Home on the Range” or “Oh, Susannah.”
- Draw a picture of each other.
- Color together in a coloring book.
- Share a popsicle. □

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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</p> <p>Hum your favorite song.</p> 	<p>2</p> <p>Labor Day. Who is honored today? Look it up.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Can you sing a song all by yourself?</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Answer this question: "What do I like about me?"</p> 	<p>5</p> <p>Eat a prune or two.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Ask a friend or two to lunch.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Eat a crunchy apple.</p> 
<p>8</p> <p>Grandparents Day. Make a greeting card to send to your grandparents</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Draw a rainbow.</p> 	<p>10</p> <p>Think of two words that rhyme with "funny."</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Patriot Day. What's a patriot? (No football answers apply.)</p> 	<p>12</p> <p>Work a puzzle with someone.</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Read all about hedgehogs.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Play an old-fashioned game.</p> 
<p>15</p> <p>Today is Sunday. What's tomorrow?</p> <p>Hint: Rhymes with Sunday.</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Draw a picture of a tree beside a house.</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Make faces in the mirror</p> 	<p>18</p> <p>How many noses in your house? Are you sure? Count again.</p> <p>14</p>	<p>19</p> <p>What color are your shoes today?</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Go on a rhyme hunt: floor - door clock - block dish - fish shoe - moo</p> 	<p>21</p> <p>Batman Day.</p>
<p>22</p> <p>Sit outside and read a book.</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Watch the clouds today. What shapes do you see?</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Go someplace using a different route.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Help empty wastebaskets.</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Pretend you are a happy puppy!</p> 	<p>27</p> <p>Learn a new card game.</p>	<p>28</p> <p>A good time to roast a hot dog! Don't forget s'mores.</p>
<p>29</p> <p>Get together some neighbors and kids and toss around a Frisbee or two.</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Where is Niagara Falls? Look it up.</p> 	<p>Summer Ends ...</p>	