

Growing Together

parents of preschool children

Behavior

Does your child have an imaginary friend?

If your child has limited access to friends, don't be surprised if he or she creates imaginary companions.

Some parents fear children will blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality if they acknowledge or participate with these invisible companions. But these fears are needless.

With few exceptions, preschoolers drop their imaginary pals between the ages of three and a half and four.

If your child creates an invisible friend, listen to the conversation your child carries on with the imaginary companion—it will provide you with valuable information about your child's thoughts and feelings.

Talk to your child's invisible friend as if it's an important member of the family. This can provide playful conversations and help you develop a good friendship with your own child.

Best friends are important, even when they're imaginary.

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Social Skills

Respecting the rights of others

Young children need to learn a balance between standing up for their own rights and needs and being concerned for others.

You can help your child learn to respect others' feelings, needs, and rights without sacrificing his own.

The place to start is with your relationship with him. Do you sometimes keep your feelings to yourself when your child has done something that annoyed you or made you angry because you don't want to hurt his feelings?

Do you hesitate to say no when he asks you to do or get something for him, even though you really don't want to do what he's asked?

This kind of well-meaning sacrifice of your own needs to meet those of your child is unfair to both you and him.

You don't give him a chance to learn to respect your needs when you don't let him know what they are.

Being either overly demanding of other people or overly sacrificing of one's own needs usually creates problems in relationships.

The continuous sacrifice of your own needs creates negative feelings. These feelings don't go away just because you don't want to express them.

They may boil beneath the surface, causing you to resent the things you used to do for your child with pleasure.

Or they may eventually explode in anger over an apparently unimportant matter. Either way they will interfere with your relationship.

It's important that you treat your child in ways that encourage him to express his needs and feelings.

Listen to his requests and take time to explain the reason why it may not be possible to grant them. Your attention shows him you respect his needs and feelings.

It's equally important that you be honest with him about your own needs. In the same way, let him know that sometimes your needs come first.

This kind of interaction works well when you treat your child – and his feelings, needs and rights — in the same way you would like to be treated. \Box



Listen to the children

No doubt we've all had one of those days when we're convinced that we should have remained childless. We longingly consider some sit-com parent who manages to laugh off the craziness, and think, "Why couldn't I be that kind of mother/father?" But in the long haul, there are deeper things that good parents do.

Ellen Galinsky, in her book Ask the Children: What America's Children Really Think about Working Parents, recognized eight critical parenting skills that were identified by conversations with children themselves.

These are the things that children identify as important to their healthy and happy growth, no matter what the circumstances of family life.

1. Making the child feel loved and important. When children talk about their parents, this is the outstanding characteristic that matters.

Consider the ways, both big and small, that parents show their children how important they are, from remembering to get that favorite shirt washed to spending fifteen minutes focused on playing with her alone. Loved children feel cherished.

2. Responding to the child's cues and clues. Children tell us who they are and what they need if we just take the time to read their often obscure or nonverbal messages.

When parents respond with sensitivity to their cues and clues, children feel respected and supported.

- 3. Accepting the child for who she or he is, but expecting success. It is important to link these two ideas. Each child has unique strengths and areas of weakness, and optimum development needs support, encouragement, and clear goals. Children thrive on positive expectations.
 - 4. Promoting strong values. In

this rather complex and often confusing world, children benefit from hearing their parents' views on the big ideas of what is important, and seeing their examples of how to live with integrity.

- **5.** Using constructive discipline. Children need both clear limits for behavior, and helpful teaching as they make mistakes. Discipline that teaches helps children see the sense in acting in desirable ways and eventually to develop self- control.
- **6. Providing routines and rituals** to make life predictable and create positive neural patterns in developing brains.

The reliable, repetitive sequence of daily events, and the security and rhythm of family traditions and practices combine to develop confident children.

7. Being involved in the child's education. From preschool on, children thrive when their parents become involved with their teachers and schools.

Not only do involved parents reinforce new learnings, but this is another way for parents to indicate children's importance and expectations for success.

8. Being there for the child. Whether parents empathize over skinned knees or hurt feelings, children come to know that their parents are available for help, advice, comfort, attention, and predictability.

Galinsky began her interviews with children in an effort to try to help working parents learn how to balance their obligations to family and employers.

The children's responses tell us what we have always known: no matter what other commitments parents

have, children's healthy development depends on the relationship and communication with their parents.

In our complex modern world where many parents feel torn between competing demands, it is important to remember what is most important to the children.

P.S. You can read more about Ellen Galinsky's conversations with children in Ask the Children: What America's Children Really Think About Working Parents.

Discipline

Learning from mistakes

A child who is constantly called names and criticized for doing the wrong thing will have difficulty acquiring self-confidence in her ability to act correctly.

In fact, she may misbehave simply to get attention.

Children need to learn that making mistakes is a natural part of living and learning. It happens to everyone.

When a child does something wrong, a parent can explain why it was wrong and suggest some alternative behaviors.

If the mistake was unintentional, it is important to let the child know that everyone makes mistakes and that mistakes should not prevent trying again.

An even better example is for parents and other adults to apologize when they've made a mistake or done the wrong thing. It happens to everyone.

Things to do on a rainy/snowy day

• Spaghetti sculpture. Put an old sheet or tablecloth on the floor. Give the child a fistful of uncooked long spaghetti or other pasta shapes. The spaghetti can be used to make geometric designs and shapes.

When the play is over, the spaghetti/pasta can be retrieved and saved for another day. The sheet or tablecloth makes clean-up of small pieces easier.

- Post Office. Save old envelopes and anything that can be used for pretend stamps such as stickers from product or sales offers. Let the child stamp her own envelopes or make sticker trains, sticker animals, or sticker designs.
- **Ghost puppets.** Make ghost puppets from a square scrap of cloth, a handkerchief or a paper towel.

Crumple a piece of tissue into a small ball for the head. Put it in the middle of the square and tie it with a string, yarn, or thread. Draw a face with markers, watercolors, or a pen.

Make the spook a home from a box or grocery bag with holes cut out for doors and windows.

• **Texture book.** Give each child a crayon and eight or ten pieces of scrap paper. Show them how to make imprints of texture by laying the paper over a surface and rubbing with the crayon.

Indoors try linoleum, leaves of a plant, a placemat, edging or wallboard, garage floor. Outdoors suggest tree bark, sidewalk, bike tire, screen.

Staple the pages together into a book and use it as a recall game later as children name the object that produced the imprint.

Observing, thinking, and speaking

Here are some suggestions for activities to help a young child learn to observe more accurately, to think more clearly, and to speak more effectively.

- 1. Activities which encourage accuracy in observation. "What will happen if we drop this ball on the floor"? "What will happen if we set the little truck on the top of this slope?"
- 2. Activities which require organization. "How many things can you name that fly?" "Things that walk?" "Things that are green?" "Things that have four legs?"



- 3. Activities which encourage sensitivity to the environment. "Can you act like one of these: A dog? A bunny? A lion?" "Pretend you're a bus driver (doctor, farmer, firefighter). What would you be doing today?"
- 4. Activities that call for a theory. "What would happen if we mixed this green paint with this yellow paint?" "If we let all the water out of this bathtub, where would this little boat go?"
- 5. Activities which provoke creative imagination. Begin a story and invite your child to make up an ending. Or ask: "What are some of the things we could make from this ball of clay?"
- 6. Activities to promote flexibility. Give your child some shapes

(triangles, rectangles, semicircles, etc.) that you have cut out of paper and ask her to make as many things as she can out of them.

Give her some wooden blocks to make a road, a tower, and a bridge. Help her cut up different pictures from magazines and paste them into designs.

We've listed just a few ideas. You can make up new ones of your own to help your child observe, think and speak.

These kinds of activities encourage active learning—good preparation for school later on.

FREE

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

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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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ST. Mary		8				
Jan		E STATE OF THE STA	DAY!	Kazoo Band! Get some folks to join you.		You'll probably need help with this one.
}		المن	Plan ahead:	Put tissue paper over a comb to start your own	What words rhyme with DO?	Why is a car without a top called a "convertible"?
		3	31	30	29	28
			Enjoy some.		A = ape B = bird C = camel D = dolphin	
Show the baby how a small stuffed animal can sing and dance.	Sing a song at bathtime	Count all the blue towels in the house today.	"Chocolate Covered Raisins Day."	What things come in twos: socks, gloves?	Name an animal for each letter of the alphabet:	Where can you see a "working" train?
27	26	25	24	23	22	21
	And a smile					- CA15-
Take a hike.	Draw a picture of a BIG happy monster. Give the monster a name.	Make your bed.	St. Patrick's Day.	"Everything You Do Is Right" Day.	Can you make a toy from an empty cardboard box?.	Name some animals that might live on a farm.
20	19	18	17	16	15	14
				Norman, Naomi, Nell, Nick		Get busy looking it up.
Have a home "fire drill."	Sing a Marching Song and do a bit of marching yourself.	Check dental records. When were the last check-	Draw a picture of YOURSELF!	Think of all the names that begin with the letter "N":	Cheese & crackers & fruit for a snack.	Where does cotton come from? What does it look like? What it is used for?
13	12	111	10	9	∞	7
	Summer? Fall? Winter?					
Find five things that roll.	What season is it now:	Play "Guess Who I Am?" using animal sounds.	Play someone's favorite game.	Count all the mittens and gloves in the house.	Donut Day!	
6	5	4	3	2	1	
Saturday	Friday	Thursday	Wednesday	Tuesday	Monday	Sunday