



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Developmental

Teaching by demonstrating

When giving children difficult or unfamiliar instructions, it's easier for them to follow if you demonstrate.

Words often aren't enough for children to take on a new action. They need to be shown as well as told. As you're demonstrating, talk about what you're doing.

If this activity is complicated, they'll need to be shown slowly, in small steps and given a chance to practice until they can do it.

Ask if they'd like to see you do it again. And again.

This is good for specific learning activities (dressing) as well as for things you ask your children to do around the house (emptying wastebaskets, putting away laundry, setting the table, dusting furniture).

Be sure to keep in mind the child's age and ability to complete a specific task before beginning as well as considering appropriate safety precautions. □

Behavior

It's okay to cry

Few things are more distressing than seeing a child hurt or crying.

The natural response for parents and other adults is to hug the child and say, "Hush. Don't cry. Everything will be all right."

Yet this can be exactly the wrong response because these words don't allow children to possess their own emotions.

The message they hear is, "Stop now. There's nothing to cry about."

This may make the little one cry even more since his or her inner self needs to prove that there IS something to cry about.

One mom suggested a better reaction in such a situation. Say to the child, "It's okay to cry. I know it hurts (or that you feel badly). Cry until it stops hurting." She said she found this reply worked better.

When her children were given "permission" to cry, it was often all that was needed to stop the flow of tears.

And even if it didn't, the children felt they had a right to their own emotions, had the freedom to release them, and were consoled.

In helping a child deal with a hurt, the importance of having a right to his or her own feelings cannot be overstressed.

Even the youngest children pick up unspoken ideas from parents and other adults.

When they sense that what they are feeling needs to be suppressed or kept inside, the message is also given that these emotions and feelings are unacceptable and unimportant.

Phrases from the past, such as "crying is for babies" and "be a big boy" are, unfortunately, still used, and not only do they show little empathy for the child's problem, they also do nothing to encourage his or her self-esteem.

If children are to grow up seeing themselves as worthwhile people, they need to know at an early age that feelings are neither good nor bad, they just **are**, as a result of something that's happened. What is necessary is to express them and deal with them.

So, when your little one is crying, whether it's because she fell as she was learning to walk or because he wasn't chosen to play in a game, stop for a moment before you begin to offer comfort.

Then remember that the best way we can help these children handle their emotions is to surround them with love and acceptance, and to say, "It's okay to cry until it stops hurting." □

The middle ground

In parenting and in education, we have seen huge pendulum swings in past generations.

When my boys were in elementary school, the trend towards “open education” was in full swing.

Walls and requirements came tumbling down, in obedience to ideas for better educating the whole child.

While the outcomes were entirely satisfactory for my kids, for many others there was a huge sigh of relief when the walls went back up and the pendulum swung to more traditional methods.

Similarly in parenting, from the coldly strict warning of John Watson against parents showing too much love and affection, swinging to the *laissez faire* parenting of a later generation, and pushing back to what we now call the uber-parenting of the helicopter generation, parents have grounded their actions on widely different beliefs.

Perhaps it is time to call a halt to these wildly swinging gyrations, and advocate for some kind of rational middle ground, avoiding being pushed into extreme actions or obsessive focus.

As I see it, there are two main components to parenting roles, both focused on the needs of developing children.

Let’s simplify them as protection and preparation. And by the way, they are not an either-or, but rather a both-and.

Protection is a real need for helpless infants, exploring toddlers, and exuberant preschoolers.

This extends into the years of school and adolescence as well as kids

encounter more opportunities and temptations for dangerous behaviors.

We are all agreed that adults have the knowledge, the big picture of cause and effect, and the responsibility to be sure their growing children come to no harm.

But when I speak of middle ground, I urge you to find a balance here.

Research shows that, despite having sterilized our playgrounds to the point of plastic boredom, playground accidents still abound.

Let me suggest that one reason for this is that children have not developed the necessary sense of what they can and cannot yet do with their bodies, so cautioned and removed are they from actual experiences with balance and climbing.

Similarly, with social protection. When parents are at risk of police involvement when they try to let older children walk to school or the park unaccompanied by adults, many children have never had the exhilarating experience of setting off on their own to visit a friend.

The problem with complete protection is that children develop a sense of their own incompetence, and don’t develop the skills needed to make good judgments to protect themselves in the future in physical or social situations.

All kids need both physical and social challenges to grow. The challenge for parents is to find a healthy middle ground that both protects and supports growth.



Preparation refers to getting ready for kids to someday—before you can believe it—be on their own in the world.

This does not, however, refer to spending much of the time in the early years building a resume that will look good for admission to Harvard, or even the best preschool.

If kids spent less time in the structured activities of all the must-do lessons, they would have more time for the challenging play that gives them those opportunities for physical and social learning, and without the constant guidance and too close supervision of adults—see above discussion on protection!

So here’s the challenge for your thinking today: Consider how to find ways to protect and prepare your children so that you are meeting their developmental needs, and not just your own needs of feeling that you are fulfilling the parenting duties dictated by the most recent pendulum swing.

Remember, good parenting means working yourself out of a job. □

Share your knowledge

Most adults, even those raised with a restricted access to nature, know something about nature.

It may be a simple story about why or how something works in nature that you've retained from your high school biology or nature class or working toward a Scouting badge.

It may be a lesson or story told to you by a relative or friend when you were younger. Or it may be a folk tale such as the legend of Johnny Appleseed. Whatever it is, share it with your child.

As adults we tend to believe that we can't instruct children unless we are an "expert" on the subject. But the stories children love most are those they hear from their parents and grandparents.

So, go ahead. Tell your youngster about fireflies trying to attract a mate by blinking their lights. Help them learn to pick out the particular call of a local bird, or hear the nighttime croak of a frog or the buzz of a cricket.

Talk about the little acorns that could grow up to be a great oak tree.

Go to the library, check out a book and amaze the kids—and yourself—with simple explanations of where rain comes from or how birds construct a nest. And where **does** fog come from?

You can choose any idea from the zillions of topics available. Put together your own experiment and learn as you go, along with the kids.

Not only are you learning something yourself, you're imparting knowledge, presenting a positive role model of teaching, and perhaps, introducing a budding scientist to the fascinating world of nature.

Oh, and you're both also having a good time and enjoying each other's company. □

Reading begins at home

Did you know that 50 percent of intellectual development takes place between birth and four years of age?

That means that parents are important teachers. You provide the foundation of your child's learning skills right within your own home.

You can shape the course of your child's educational future by the quality of learning experiences you provide before she or he ever goes to school.

Here are five watchwords designed to help you make the most of your child's early learning experiences:

Listen: Listen to your child. Pay attention to what he or she is saying. Call attention to sounds. "What's that?"

Listening and attaching meaning to sounds are essential skills that must be acquired before a child can read or succeed in a classroom environment.

Speak: Talk with your child. Direct conversation to him or her from infancy. Help your child learn to distinguish sounds and imitate them.

Take a walk together. Talk about the things you see and hear. Help your child classify objects as you see them: foods, plants, farm animals, birds, and cars.

Sing to your child. This teaches enjoyment of music and rhythm.

Read: Read to your child every day. Make reading seem enjoyable. Then it will be a skill he or she will want to acquire.

Let the child choose a favorite book or story to read. When you read stories, stop in the middle and ask your child what will happen next.

Talk about the pictures. Have your child point to objects in the pictures.

Take your child to the library. Let him or her see all the different kinds of books there. Buy books that "belong" to your child. Provide a place for your child's books at home.

Remember, if the child sees you reading, then reading becomes something useful in his or her mind.

Move: Help your child roll over, crawl, stand and walk. This develops muscle control.

Let your child explore. Provide safe play objects such as boxes of different sizes, blocks, scraps of cloth with different textures, plastic spoons and pans.

Interact: Help your child learn that he or she is a part of a family group. Include your child in planning family activities. Give encouragement and praise when it is merited.

Guard: Control your child's television viewing and media access.

Search our better TV programs for children and share them with your child. Talk about the programs you watch. Correct any misconceptions that may have developed from them. □

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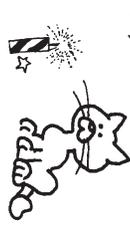
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Articles in **Growing Together** refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns "he" and "she" are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>7</p> <p>Draw a picture of an interesting bug.</p> 	<p>1</p> <p>New Year's Day</p> 	<p>2</p> <p>Happy-New-Year-for-Cats Day.</p> 	<p>3</p> <p>When it's cold outside, what should you put on before going outside: Coat? Bathing suit? Hat? Gloves? Sandals? Scarf?</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Birth date of Louis Braille. Look him up and see what he did.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Sing a song about snow.</p> 	<p>6</p> <p>Turn off the lights and "draw" on the wall with a flashlight.</p>
<p>14</p> <p>National Hugging Day.</p> <p>Get busy.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Find five things that will roll.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Talk about what you did today.</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Give away three hugs today.</p> 	<p>11</p> <p>How cold/warm it is today? How can you find out?</p>	<p>12</p> <p>Sing "Mares Eat Oats." If nobody knows the song, ask Grandma or Grandpa.</p> 	<p>13</p> <p>Pretend it's summer! Spread a blanket on the floor and have an indoor picnic!</p> 
<p>21</p> <p>Make a snow-man. If you don't have any snow, draw a picture of one* standing on his/her head..</p> 	<p>15</p> <p>Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Learn how to do the "Hokey Pokey!"</p> 	<p>17</p> <p>A. A. Milne's birthday. Celebrate by reading a chapter from Winnie-the-Pooh.</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Everybody draw a picture of themselves.</p> 	<p>19</p> <p>Echo the sounds the baby makes.</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Is there an ice rink nearby where you can go skating?</p>
<p>28</p> <p>Bake something today: bread, a cake, a pie ... try something new! Scones?</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Safety note: Don't put anything in your ear smaller than your elbow. Wait: Can you stick your elbow in your ear? Now, don't hurt yourself!</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Draw a picture of a snow family.</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Keep a running list of all the books you've read.</p> 	<p>25</p> <p>Oldest person and youngest person spend some quiet time together.</p>	<p>26</p> <p>How old are you?</p> <p>years _____</p> <p>months _____</p> <p>days _____</p>	<p>27</p> <p>Order out dinner. No food to fix, no dishes to wash. Enjoy some root beer.</p> 
<p>29</p> <p>Plant seeds in an egg carton with dirt. Try orange, grape or apple seeds. Water regularly and gently.</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Draw a picture of what the weather was like in January in this space.</p> 					