



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Academics

Alike or different?

Here's a simple activity that helps children learn how things are alike and how they're different.

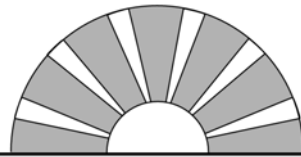
These skills are put to use when children begin to look at and understand the differences in numbers and letters.

Start with an empty egg carton and an assortment of buttons. Glue one button in each section of the egg carton. Be sure there are plenty of buttons to fill in each section.

The child's job is to sort the buttons into each section, based on the button's characteristics. That is, children have to match up the button with the sample glued in that particular section of the carton.

Some buttons will have two holes, three holes, or four. Others can be sorted by color—red, blue, and black—or by shape—round, square, oblong. □

A safety note: activities with small pieces—like buttons—are not recommended for children under two.



Child's Day

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Behavior

Helping children explore their feelings

Sometimes when a child is upset, there's a specific cause. For example, he might feel hurt because someone said something unkind to him.

Other times it may be hard to pinpoint the reason for his unhappiness. For example, he might feel a little blue without knowing why when his older brother starts school.

Still other times, a child may be a little whiny, clingy, or cranky for no apparent reason. He may be tired, hungry, sick, or just going through too many changes in his life right now. Anything that drains energy can make you feel low.

Whatever the problem is, you can help a child feel better by helping him explore his feelings and talk about them.

If you can determine what the problem is, you can start the conversation by trying to put what you think are your child's feelings into words: "Your feelings are hurt because Dana called you a baby."

If you have only a general idea of the problem, try something like: "It's tough for you to

go to childcare by yourself when Tommy goes to school, huh?"

When you don't really know what the problem is, try something like: "You seem a little sad (mad, upset) today. Can I help? Want to talk about it?"

You may get some resistance at first, but be patient and don't push him to talk if he's not ready to talk. Just let him know that you're willing to listen if he wants to share his feelings with you.

Once he has started talking, say back to him what you think he's said. "So, it sounds like you miss Tommy and wish you could go to school with him."

Try to resist giving advice or telling him how he should feel. Just listen, accept what he says, and help him express what's on his mind by showing him that you understand and care.

Many times that understanding and care—and quiet talk with him—will help your child feel much better. □

Learning and talking

It is in the course of daily living—dressing, eating, walking, playing, or riding in the car—that new concepts are learned. This is because knowledge comes naturally when the learning involves action.

Let's consider, for example, the concept "together." There are many opportunities each day to teach this concept. When washing hands, you might say, "Bring your hands *together*" as you show your child how to lather up with soap.

A few minutes later you might again introduce the concept of "together" as you demonstrate the action when dressing: "Bring the snaps *together* so that they will close."

You can also illustrate the concept of "together" as you gather toys like nesting eggs and

building blocks, saying: "Let's gather *together* all the toys that look like this one."

The outdoors—backyard, park, curbstome garden—provide occasions for parents to point out the way trees, grass, shrubs or fences look. Talk about their location, shape, size, and color.

When practical, encourage your preschooler to experiment—"Can you close your arms around this tree trunk? Is it possible to do the same thing to other trees, to larger trees?"

Such an experiment will demonstrate words that compare—one tree is "thicker" than another. Comparative words like "more," "less," "lighter," "darker," "shorter," "longer," are essential to learn so that later he can arrange objects in some kind of order.

It is good to use the hands, arms, and eyes together when making comparisons.

With experiences of this sort, your child will become competent to make the same comparisons, and be equally accurate, using only his eyes.

Little words like "under," "in," "on," and "over," convey a precise meaning which is often lost on a young child. Provoke curiosity and ask questions that require the use of prepositions. "Can you see the bug *on* the flower?"

With an incorrect answer you can casually provide the proper information., "Look hard, see the bug? It is *on* the flower. We wouldn't see it if it was *in* the flower. And we couldn't see it if it was *under* the flower." □

Games & Activities

Bring a favorite storybook to life

Most children have a favorite storybook they want to hear read over and over. To add some variety, try adapting the favorite story at your house into a mini-play.

Here's how to do it:

Start by assigning parts to players. (You can always use friends and playmates if you need extras.) Then put together simple costumes, if appropriate, and hunt

for props (or make some) to help make the story seem real.

Each character should be responsible for his or her own dialogue. For little ones, that may mean telling the story in their own way to get the point across.

Keep the action as simple or as complicated as the kids can handle. You may want to practice one or two times to smooth out the rough spots. But be sure

to let the kids do as much of the planning and problem solving as they can.

Sometimes the play becomes so much fun that others will want to join in—as additional characters or as the audience.

If the experience proves to be a good one, you can look for additional storybooks that can be acted out. □

A treasure box

Giving Baby her own “treasure box” is an excellent idea. Start with a cardboard box about 16 inches high or tall enough so that she can just reach over the side when she is sitting or kneeling beside it.

Fill the box half full with folded newspapers so she cannot tip the box over by pulling on one side. Then put four or five toys or small objects on top of the papers in the box. At least some of the objects should be new to her. All of the objects should be safe for her to play with so that they have no loose or small parts.

Before long, Baby will find the box and look over its side to discover the contents. If she has to stretch to reach the objects, they will be more valued prizes.

This container will be her fun box, a magic source of new things to play with. When you get new toys, put them in the box so that she will “discover” them. The toys you use, however, don’t all have to be new. Rotate the toys she likes to play with so that there are always some familiar and favorite playthings to find in the box.

It is better to use few objects at a time and change them more often than to load her up with a confusing variety of things all at once. With fewer objects, you will increase her attention span and get more mileage out of a toy.

If you think this teaches a baby to get into things, you’re right. She can learn so much about her world by being curious and by having her curiosity rewarded. It is your job now to see that things within her reach contain nothing that might be harmful. □

Easing the ‘blues’

Almost everyone experiences emotional highs and lows at some time in their lives. Those lows, commonly referred to as the “blues,” are a normal part of being human. Whenever we are confronted by stress, frustration, anxiety, or discomfort, our emotional energy and vitality can drop.

The good news is that just as circumstances make us feel down, how we respond to those circumstances can help us get back up. And we don’t have to resort to costly medical drugs or expensive psychotherapy in order to battle the blues. Here are some natural ways to ease the blues.

- **Confide in a friend.** “When you think only about your problems, it’s likely that you’ll end up obsessing about them—and feeling even more stressed,” says Elliott Dacher, MD, who practices internal medicine and conducts healing and wellness seminars nationwide. “Spend time with a trusted friend, sharing your innermost fears, your sadness over the loss of a loved one, or your feelings of anger or bitterness over a problem at work,” he advises. “Research shows that something as simple as social support greatly enhances one’s health.”

- **Socialize.** “One of the biggest mistakes we make when feeling blue is to isolate ourselves, which can make a bad mood even worse,” says Martin Groder, MD, a Chapel Hill, NC, psychiatrist.

“Force yourself to call someone or even throw a simple party—take-out pizza will do—and invite some people you

haven’t seen for a while,” he recommends.

- **Accept life’s disappointments.** Life brings everyone some disheartening and discouraging times. Rather than allow those events to frustrate you, simply accept the inevitable fact that there will be difficulties and discouragements. Recognize that such experiences are simply the price of being alive. Tell yourself, “This, too, shall pass.”

- **Recite affirmations.** To affirm means simply to “make firm.” An affirmation is a strong, positive sentence that something is already in existence.

Reciting affirmations is a way of “making firm” a condition that you wish to experience. Some mood-elevating affirmations include sentences such as these:

- I am a radiant man/woman, filled with joy and peace.
- I am greatly blessed.
- Perfect wisdom is in my heart.
- All things are working together for good in my life. □

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