



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Language

Listen and label

Here's a language game that calls for some listening skills.

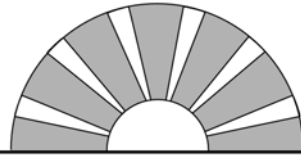
First, use a tape recorder to tape familiar sounds in your home and neighborhood.

This can include household equipment such as a mixer, electric razor, can opener, alarm clock, doorbell—and familiar voices such as the dog barking, cat meowing, or bird singing.

The object is for Youngster to listen and name what she hears.

It's even more fun if she accompanies you when you make the tape. This way you can give her the names of the objects you're recording.

If you don't have a tape recorder, Youngster can help you find some objects that make sounds. Then, sitting behind her so that the objects are not visible, you can make noises with the objects and she can guess what they are. □



Child's Day

Preschool · Kindergarten · Child Development Center

2525 Wallingwood Drive # 100 • Austin, Texas 78746
Phone: (512) 327-3274 • FAX (512) 327-3281

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Developmental

Encourage a positive self-concept

Self-concept is the way we think about ourselves and the feelings we have about ourselves. These thoughts can be positive or they can be negative.

As adults we can control and influence our feelings about ourselves. We can accept or reject others' opinions. We can monitor the events in our lives that cause us to feel one way or the other about ourselves.

A young child's self-concept, though, is determined mostly by the "messages" he receives from others, particularly his parents.

Sometimes the message the child receives is not what parents really intend. For example, a parent may insist on doing everything for the child, even the simplest things that the child could do for himself.

The parent thinks he/she is sending the message: "I'm doing all of these things for you because I love you."

But the subconscious, non-verbal message the child may be receiving is: "Always rely on Mom or Dad to do everything for you because you're dumb and helpless."

To understand a child's self-

concept, you have to try to see the world from his perspective. For example, a one-year-old is very occupied with learning to do things himself. It is this continued striving that pushes him to try new challenges, such as learning to feed himself with a spoon.

These challenges—and successes—lead him from one stage of development to the next.

The day a child grabs the spoon and tries to feed himself is a day to rejoice!

His best efforts to balance food on a spoon are certainly not the neatest or most efficient way to get the food to his mouth. But to the child, the feelings of accomplishment and self-worth are much more important than neatness and efficiency.

Whatever age the child, watch for the things he can do for himself and encourage him to do them, even though he can't do them perfectly.

The more he learns to do for himself, the more positive his self-concept will be. □

Treating children with respect

For the most part, adults usually speak to each other in a courteous way. If an adult does command another adult, it is usually because he or she feels superior in some way.

When we speak to children, we often forget to use courteous words, and we command them as though they were inferior. For example, a busy parent might say, "Pick up all those toys!" instead of "Would you pick up those toys, please?"

Children need to be shown respect in the way that we talk to them so that they develop self-respect. Instead of making demands, we can solicit the cooperation by asking courteously. If they do not cooperate, then consequences can follow.

For example, a parent who is late says to her 5-year-old: Please put your jacket on quickly. Then, when we are driving, I will play a guessing game with you."

Positive communication gives us the chance to show our caring and respect for children. It gives us the chance to teach them courteous and creative language as well.

We are all role models for children—either our own or someone else's. They watch and listen to the way the adults around them speak to them—and to each other. Make sure the role you project is a courteous, respectful one—for your kids' sake. □

Growing up is hard to do

As a child grows up during the preschool years, he may seem unpredictable and hard to understand. He may get very excited about an activity only to leave it suddenly without explanation.

Sometimes you may have to tell him the same thing a hundred times. Still he forgets to do what you've asked.

He can be adorable one minute and whiny or pouting the next. And he may—for no apparent reason—begin to be afraid of all sorts of things that never bothered him before.

In other words, your child is experiencing some rough spots which are normal on his journey to growing up.

Your preschooler is no longer a baby. You have expectations of

him taking some responsibilities for himself. This is good. Most of the time he probably is proud to be able to do things for himself.

But there are times when he wishes someone else would take care of his responsibilities. This shows up, particularly, if there's a younger child in the family from whom less is expected.

Try to understand how your child feels. And let him know you understand his feelings. "You don't want to put away your toys now. You're tired, and you wish I'd do it for you. Let's pick them up together."

By putting yourself in your child's shoes, you can help him get through the occasional rough spots in his life. □

Behavior

Good moods, bad moods

Preschoolers can sometimes be moody when things don't go their way. A child's mood can change quickly from joy to anger, for example, if someone doesn't pay attention to him or if he can't make a toy work the way he wants it to work.

Often you may not even know why he's upset. He may have some idea inside his head of what he expects. When his expectations aren't met, he might pout or stomp about without ever letting you know why.

Try to put yourself in his shoes. See if you can figure out the problem. "I'll bet you're mad because you got tired of waiting for me to get off the phone."

Be sympathetic, even if you think his reason for being in a bad mood is not important. If he feels you understand, he'll get over his moodiness more quickly. □

Swallowing objects

All children put things into their mouths that don't belong there.

This starts as a learning process when the infant "mouths" an object to learn how it is shaped, how it tastes and feels. Exploration progresses to finger and thumb sucking for satisfaction and comfort.

During these developmental stages, various objects are swallowed, such as coins or buttons.

Sometimes the objects swallowed are more unusual—plastic toys, marbles, or pins. Most of these objects, as bad as they sound, pass through the stomach and bowel with no difficulty.

Rarely, they become stuck somewhere within the gastrointestinal tract and have to be surgically removed. (This is usually suspected when the child does not pass the object in the stool in two or three days and has severe abdominal pain or swelling.)

A more common and serious emergency results when a swallowed object causes choking.

Prevention is the first line of defense. As a general rule, children under age 4 should not be given any hard-to-chew foods such as carrots, celery, grapes, hot dogs, peanuts, popcorn, or hard candy.

All children should learn the following safety rules:

1. Don't put any objects other than food or drinks into the mouth.
2. Don't talk or laugh with food or liquid in the mouth.
3. Don't throw food into the air and catch it in the mouth. □

Outdoor activities for energetic kids

Sometimes the best way to work off excess energy is to take to the outdoors. Here are some simple outdoor activities that will entertain and exercise kids at the same time. Pick and choose those that are appropriate for your child/children, or gather a group of kids and participate yourself.

As with all activities that include children, safety considerations come first. Be ready to intervene if children attempt actions beyond their abilities. Adjust the activities as needed for the number of children and their ages.

1. **Ball Roll.** Each person has a ball to roll from point A to point B. Decide whether the ball should be rolled or kicked. Or do both.

2. **Balance Beam.** Find a crack in the sidewalk, a driveway edge, a log or a plank. Walk along the crack or plank, carefully balancing to keep from falling over. Older kids will want more of a challenge, so be sure to monitor their balancing.

3. **Target Throw.** Mark off a court and place a target at one end and a safety line at the other. Kids can take turns tossing beanbags or balls at the target. Each person must remain behind the safety line at all times. Kids may want to make up their own rules.

4. **Simon Says.** An old but still popular game. The leader indicates movements of the players by making statements like, "Simon says take three giant steps." Statements that don't include the words "Simon says" are ignored. Players attempt to reach

a goal first. Other actions include "baby steps," "kangaroo hops," "snake slithers," and "backward steps." You can make up more of your own, the sillier the better.

5. **Motion Obstacle Course.** Make up your own stations on an obstacle course that includes actions. For example, at station one, the player must turn around three times, then move on to the next station. At station two, do three sit-ups. At station three, jog in place for one minute, and so on.

Kids can help monitor the stations while waiting for their turn. For variation, you can use a stopwatch and record individual times or divide up into teams. Teams can participate in a relay, passing an object to the next person at each stop after completing the required action.

To keep these games lively, introduce variations when the action slows down. Take your clues from what the kids are doing and talking about as they play—they are the source of the best ideas! □

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