



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Music

Learn rhythm by keeping the beat

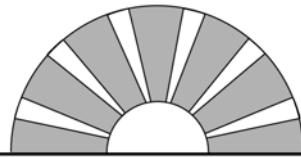
Rhythm is a vital part of music. Learning to keep a beat and feel a rhythm pays off not only in immediate musical satisfaction but also in physical coordination that will help out with athletics and dancing later on.

Reciting nursery rhymes, listening to poetry, and clapping to a song beat are all beginning ways of teaching rhythm.

Rhythm instruments, beginning with the easy-to-put-together kitchen band of pots, pans and wooden spoons, are fun and creative outlets for children.

During playtime, marching, skipping or dancing to music are great ways to teach rhythm. For a fun evening, turn on the music and dance with the kids to old favorite tunes.

Kids love the attention that comes with matching the rhythm and dancing together, and you'll all like the relaxation that follows a fun, shared activity. □



Child's Day

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Nutrition

Kids and food: 10 tips for parents

"No one's perfect, and parents will find that raising healthy and active children involves lots of compromise. But there are definitely things parents can do to encourage better nutrition and more activity for their kids.

"Even small changes can add up to have a positive impact on both short-term and long-term health," says pediatrician Mary L. Gavin, MD, author of **Fit Kids: A Practical Guide to Raising Healthy and Active Children from Birth to Teens**.

When it comes to how parents can help their kids eat healthier, **Fit Kids** offers these 10 tips:

1. Parents control the supply lines: You decide which foods to buy and when to serve them.

2. Kids decide if and what to eat: From the foods you offer, kids get to choose what they eat and whether to eat at all.

3. Quit the "clean plate club": Let your children stop eating when they feel they've had enough.

4. Start them young: Food preferences are developed early in life, so offer a variety of foods.

5. Rewrite the kids' menu:

Who says kids only want to eat hot dogs, pizza, burgers, and macaroni and cheese? Your children might surprise you with their willingness to experiment with new foods.

6. Drink calories count: Soda and other sweetened drinks add extra calories and get in the way of good nutrition.

7. Put sweets in their place. Occasional sweets are fine, but don't turn dessert into the main reason for eating dinner.

8. Food is not love: Find better ways to say, "I love you."

9. Kids do as you do: Be a role model and eat healthy yourself.

10. Turn off the TV: You'll also turn off the advertising and mindless snacking.

Turning the tables by getting kids involved in the selection of menus and the preparation of meals will do more than just expand your child's repertoire of foods. A child who is at home in the kitchen feels empowered about food and gains firsthand knowledge of nutrition. □

Here we go again!

Fortunately, we don't keep count. If we did, the numbers would be staggering. In the last year alone, you may have played 267 games of **Candyland** and read *Curious George* no less than 392 times.

Just when you think you will scream at the sight of the man with the yellow hat, here comes your child asking you to read it again. In self-defense, you have bought new games and books, but no, at storytime, out come the tattered favorites anyway.

There is actually a developmental purpose to all this repetition. One of the important components of self-confidence is a sense of mastery, a certainty that a skill is truly one's own.

Most of us can summon a childhood memory of that delicious feeling when a new ability finally clicked and off we went, whether it was on a bike (at last without training wheels!), zooming on roller skates, or dog paddling through the water.

Many first accomplishments are physical—walking, jumping, or skipping. I remember watching a toddler who had just figured out how to walk backwards. Back and forth across the kitchen floor he went, all morning long. Anyone watching would have been astonished at his single-minded focus in repeating the action.

Similarly, I watched a child on the playground who had finally gotten up the courage to climb the ladder of the tall slide and fling herself down the slide. No sooner had she reached the bottom than she was back around climbing again, over and over.

Having learned how to play **Candyland**—understanding the rules and requirements—brings a fulfilling sense of mastery just like those feelings of accomplishment. That sense of achievement translates into confidence to eventually try a new challenge.

I recall a child in a preschool class who began each day of the

entire school year by taking the same puzzle off the shelf and putting it together. That finished, he evidently felt reassured to move on to another activity, but the repetition seemed necessary to reassure him of what he could do.

Not only is there an awareness of accomplishment and mastery with such repetition, but also recent research on brain development suggests that repeated activities strengthen the neural connections in the brain. The brain of the young child actually develops billions more neurons than are found in the brains of adolescents and adults. Those nerve pathways that are made stronger by repeated use become thicker and survive the later pruning.

Perhaps the child's drive to repeat is related to innate wisdom for optimum development. When children repeat actions and activities, they reassure themselves that there are familiar and known events in their lives. How reassuring it is to know how the story goes, and what will happen on the next page.

Literacy specialists tell us that predictable books are an introduction to the process of decoding that is required in reading. There's certainly nothing more predictable than knowing the words that describe the next trouble that *Curious George* will encounter. Obviously we want to encourage children to sample new experiences and books as well. This consideration of repetition is just meant to give parents an appreciation of the benefits of "here we go again." □

Games & Activities

Solving problems

Here's a bit of fun that also helps children learn how to solve problems by listening carefully.

First, set the alarm of an old alarm clock to just a few minutes ahead of now. Then hide it—in a closet, a low cupboard, in a boot, in the clothes hamper, under a chair or pillow, in the refrigerator. Then, wait until it RINGS!

When your child finds it, show her how to turn it off so she can do it next time. For an on-going game on a rainy day, several kids can take turns hiding the clock. □

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 class.

It may be a lesson or story told to you by a relative or friend when you were small. 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." But the stories children love most are those they hear from parents, and their most favorite activities are those that they participate in with their parents.

So, go ahead. Tell your youngster about fireflies trying to attract a mate by blinking their lights. Or talk about the little acorns that could grow up to be great big trees.

Go to the library, check out a book and amaze the kids—and yourself—with a simple explanation of where rain comes from, or how birds make a nest. Or choose another 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. □

Wait until they're ready

As children grow, parents are delighted in their accomplishments. We encourage their growth and development and look forward to each new stage.

But often as we begin to expect more from them, we may begin to push. Most of us will probably become aware of this at toilet-training time.

Experts advise waiting until a child is about two and a half to start the training, but sometimes parents decide the time has come sooner, whether the child is ready or not.

If he is not ready, however, what should be a positive learning experience turns into a power struggle and a very stressful time for the child as well as the parents.

It's important to remember that not all children advance at the same rate. In order for children to successfully accomplish new tasks, they must be both emotionally and physically mature enough to handle them.

In the long run, waiting means less stress for everyone and success for the child in a short amount of time—whether the task is toilet training or learning to ride a bicycle. □



Helping siblings avoid squabbles

To prevent small disagreements between brothers, sisters, or brothers and sisters from escalating into major engagements, set limits that you think are fair for each of your children. Let them know what the limits are and what the consequences of breaking them will be.

Then try to stick to these rules as well as you can. Change the rules with your children's knowledge, when they no longer seem appropriate.

This kind of "planning ahead" can avoid many fights and jealousies over such things as who goes to bed at what time and who gets to do what.

You will probably still get some protests of "It's not fair that I can't stay up as long as she does," and so on. But it is fair for children of different ages to have different limits, privileges, and responsibilities.

When they know what to expect, each child can look forward to growing into new privileges. □

\$200

Reward



for referrals!

Ask for details!