



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Toys & Play

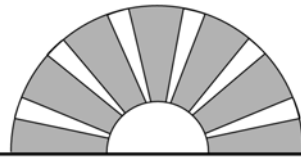
Sand and water are good playthings

Children learn important concepts from unstructured play with natural materials, such as sand and water. Such materials are particularly valuable in play learning because they have no form of their own but assume the form of the container, which holds them.

What are children learning when they play with sand and water? As they fill pails with sand, they learn about adding small quantities to make a large quantity. They have no difficulty lifting a small shovelful of sand, but wait until they try to lift the full pail!

When sand is wet, it feels, looks and acts in different ways. If a child stirs a little sand in a lot of water, they will mix, but when he stops stirring, the sand will settle to the bottom.

Even though it may be a long time before a child understands why this happens, experience will teach him that it does happen again and again. This knowledge becomes the foundation on which later learning can be built. □



Child's Day

Preschool · Kindergarten · Child Development Center

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Parenting

Making the transition from work to home

Whether you work at home or out of the home, the time period between 4:30 and 6:30 can be demanding. Here are a few reasons why:

- Parents and children are shifting from the busy day to the slower pace of dinner and family time.
- Children and parents may be physically tired and hungry.
- Parents are letting go of the workplace role and taking on the role of mommy or daddy.

Here are some suggestions to help make this time period move more smoothly for everyone:

- Take time to change clothes as soon as you get home. Save some particularly comfortable slacks or sweatpants and roomy shirts for that time only.
- Save errands for one afternoon or weekend morning. Don't wear yourself out by fighting rush hour traffic any more than you have to.
- Ask everyone to help with evening chores. Four-year-olds can pick up newspapers and magazines and put them away. Five-year-olds can set the table.

Seven-year-olds can feed pets.

- Don't turn on the television. The noise and distraction only add stress.
- Ignore the urge to clean the moment you arrive at home. An immaculate home is almost a lost cause when you have small children, so don't get crazy over it.
- Keep back-up meal items in the pantry so you can avoid a 5 o'clock trip to the grocery.
- Offer the family a light, nutritious snack during the transition time. Cheese and crackers, a dish of grapes or a breadstick can soothe hunger pangs.
- Take time for the small things. Relax for at least 15 minutes before you begin chores and meal preparation. Sit on the porch for a few minutes and chat about the day. Notice your 3-year-old's finger-painted picture. Walk to the bird feeder to see how much food the birds ate today. Rock the baby.

Transition time can be hectic ... or helpful. Why not think up some useful ideas of your own to make that time period one of the best in your day! □

Avoiding medication mistakes

Giving medicine to children should be a simple thing to do. But sometimes mistakes can be dangerous, especially with over-the-counter medications.

Here are some precautions to follow when giving medications:

1. Follow directions.

If medicine is supposed to be given three times a day, give it three times a day, not twice today and three tomorrow and once the next day.

If your doctor says to give your child all of the antibiotic, do it. Don't discontinue the medication when the child appears to be getting better.

2. Don't share medication.

Don't give your 3-year-old the medicine that was prescribed for her 8-year-old brother. Don't give your children medicine left over from your illness.

3. Give the correct dosage.

The only way to do this is with a calibrated spoon or syringe available from your drugstore. A household spoon will not give an accurate measurement for medicine.

Don't try to convert from teaspoons to ounces or vice versa unless you are absolutely sure you are correct.

Don't give a very sick child a double dose in hopes she will get well faster.

Don't give over-the-counter medicine longer than the rec-

ommended number of days and read dosage directions carefully.

4. Don't combine medications.

Never try combining two or more medications, even over-the-counter ones, without consulting your doctor or pharmacist. Drug interactions can be deadly.

5. Be safe.

Always use the child-resistant bottle cap and put all medications out of the reach of children.

Never let a child take his or her own medication without supervision.

6. If in doubt, DON'T.

Never give a medication if there is any doubt in your mind about its safety.

Never give medicine that looks old, discolored, or crumbly.

Never mix medicine with food or drink unless your doctor gives such instructions.

Read the labels of all medications and ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions—before you medicate. □

The 'when/then' rule

Most parents would agree that they get tired of saying "no" to their children. Some days it seems like all they say is "no."

And sometimes it seems like children know that if they keep asking, eventually parents will get tired of saying "no" and will change to, "Oh, I suppose so," just to end the confrontation.

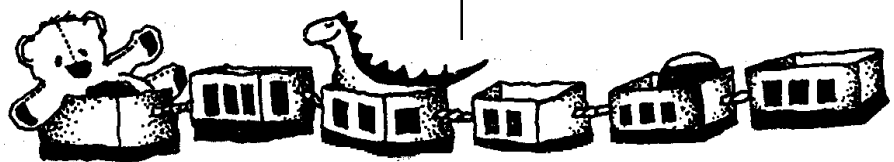
There is an alternative, and you can use it as a rule. If you've been trying to get your child to pick up his toys, and he wants to watch a video instead, for example, the rule works like this: "**When** you've picked up your toys, **then** you can watch the video"

Or, "**When** you've picked up your clothes, **then** you can go play with Jim."

Be sure to keep the sequence in the right order because younger children may misunderstand if the statement is backwards.

Children can understand how when/then statements work, and this kind of training helps them learn to take responsibility for their own actions.

And parents can avoid repeating the word "no." □



Childhood is a journey

I'm not sure where the quote comes from, but it is one of my favorites: *Childhood is a journey, not a race.* I see this watching my sixteen-month-old granddaughter set out on her morning walk with her mother.

Past being contented any longer in the stroller, she fairly vibrates with impatient anticipation as she is readied with shoes and sunscreen.

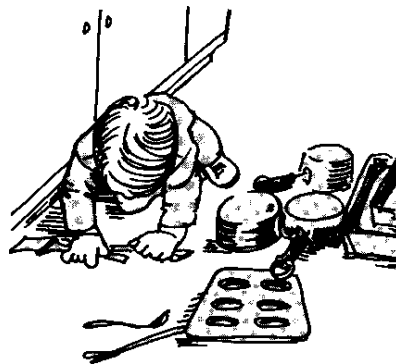
Once she is out the door, she sets a pace that allows her to examine each stone and stick. She stops completely as she notices several ants on the road.

A couple of steps later, she turns and goes back to see what is making the interesting chipping sound, and the chase after the chipmunk takes her in the opposite direction altogether. Fortunate in having a mother who enjoys such meanderings, the walk sometimes goes nowhere specific, complete without a destination.

The aspects of a race dominate too many childhoods today. Perhaps eager to ensure that their children will measure up in an increasingly competitive society, many parents focus on checking off each successive milestone, without appreciating the steps along the way.

They check out the timing of the events, and compare them with those of other children, as if somehow this comparison will indicate the superiority of their child or

their own efforts at parenting. (When did your child get his first tooth? How old was Sarah when she was potty-trained? I can't wait till Daniel is out of diapers.) The image of a race suggests that there are winners and there are losers.



When progress does not appear at the looked-for rate, parents succumb to the products offered by toy manufacturers, computer programmers, and lesson purveyors, hoping that these enhancements will ensure faster advancement.

The dizzying array of items designed to help children get on to the next landmark is evidence of our societal preoccupation with the race. The very term "preschool years" suggests that the important stuff is what comes later, in school, rather than appreciating the present. And to what end? Does it really matter whether your child gets into college in 2019 rather than 2020?

There are a couple of ideas to consider regarding this rushing through childhood. One is the notion that children's individual timetables

are in fact mostly determined genetically, and won't be much affected by pressures or products to learn sooner. The only thing that could be affected is their self-esteem, as they feel that they are failing to meet the expected mark.

A second, compelling thought is how much can be lost by just accelerating by. This is the only childhood they will ever have. Bypassing the blurred landscape so quickly does not allow children to experience things firsthand, to make sense of things in their own way, to lay solid foundations of understanding and confidence and pleasure that will underlie all later encounters with the world.

Going at a child's pace, rather than forcing some faster rate, supports children to find their own place in their world, rather than being sorted according to who is first. Considering childhood as a journey helps us find our proper role of companion and sometimes guide along the way, enjoying the landscape together, rather than hurrying on to the next station. □

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