



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Academics

Number of the day

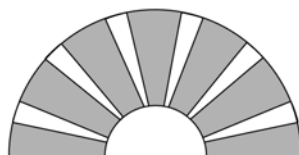
Here's a fun way to introduce the idea that numbers stand for a quantity. It can be an introduction to numbers for young children and practice for older learners.

To start, pick a number for the day—let's say it's three. So, for today, look for the number three in headlines, books, articles, signs, and so forth. Point these out to your child and tell her: "There's a three."

During the day look for natural places where the number will occur: three buttons on a blouse or shirt; three birds sitting on a wire; three people at a bus stop. Point out these groups wherever you see them.

Don't expect perfection, and don't hold a quiz at the end of the day. Just enjoy this little game of looking, listening, matching, and counting, wherever you are.

In a few days, pick another number and start over. It's the way kids learn. □



Child's Day

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Music

Soothing away a jangled day

Most people like and respond to music—it is one of the most natural things in the world.

All cultures—primitive and advanced—sing, dance, and play instruments. But no one knows exactly why music makes us smile, or why it calms children. It just does.

To relax both you and your children, soft, gentle music usually works best.

One little suggestion that sometimes works at naptime is to tell kids that they don't have to go to sleep but they do need to be quiet and listen to the music.

At other times, music can be a source of great fun with simple games you make up yourself. Kids will love it if you participate too.

Here are a few not-so-common ideas to get started:

- **Roll around the clock.** Put on a song with a good, strong beat and get down on the floor and roll. It sounds silly and it's even sillier to see a bunch of kids and adults rolling around on the floor. Some people have even been known to laugh out loud!

- **March to the beat.** Give everybody a hat and a noise-maker (make your own from simple, safe kitchen items) and march in time to the music. This is an excellent experience for learning about rhythm and matching movement with sound.

- **Line dancing.** Hold hands and teach little ones a few simple steps you can all do together. If you know the words to the song, sing along. Kids LOVE to sing and dance with mom or dad!

- **Remember the Bunny Hop?** If you do, teach it to the kids. (If you don't, ask your mom or dad how it goes and ask them to teach all of you.) This is great fun and a good way to get rid of that extra energy (theirs, not yours).

- **Make up your own dance—and give it a name.** Kids love it when adults act silly—so put together some simple movements that kids can follow as you lead and then name your dance: The Smith Shuffle; the Garrison Gumpalump; the Friday Flop-along. Dance to a tune everybody knows—and if you're really creative, make up your own words as well! □

How to handle too much advice

Raising a child is difficult enough with so many decisions to be made at every stage of life. And it's natural to want to take advice from others who are more experienced.

Advice from parents, grandparents, close friends and other interested people can be very helpful, enabling parents to make an informed choice about what to do. But problems can arise when there is too much advice from too many sources.

Here are some ideas to remember which may help when you are faced with conflicting advice on how to raise your child.

- **There is more than one "right way" to bring up a child.**

True, there are certain universal rules about parenting that apply to every parent. For example, the need to encourage your child to fulfill his potential or the need to stimulate her interest in books by reading to her from an early age.

But there are several ways to approach any task, and the same holds true about ways to parent a child. For your family, your way may be the best.

- **What suits one child might not suit another child, even though both are from the same family.**

Suppose your sister-in-law solved the problem of her son's disruptive behavior by threatening an early bedtime. This doesn't mean the same threat will have the same effect on your son.

There are individual differences between children, whether

or not they are from different families. What works for one child will not necessarily work for another. And you are the best decision-makers about what works best for your family.

- **Parenting habits come in and out of fashion like everything else.**

Trends in parenting change year by year. For instance, decades ago childcare experts warned mothers not to let their husband play with their child when he arrived home from work, as the child would become upset by this break in routine. Such a strict rule seems ridiculous now and yet it was strongly advocated at one time.

Carefully consider how such trends may affect your family before making major changes.

- **Some people insist on giving unsolicited advice.**

Giving advice to parents is usually done with the best of intentions. People want to help.

Regardless, advice you never asked for can be very irritating. Parents do have the right to ask people tactfully to give you breathing space. It's your child, not theirs. Don't lose sight of this.

Try to avoid snapping at the person who insists on giving advice, and instead tell the person gently—but firmly—that you'd like to think things over carefully before taking any action.

The good news is that there is always the possibility that among all the advice showered upon parents by well-meaning friends and relatives lies a useful tip. □

Discipline with kindness and respect

When a child makes a mistake, let her know you don't like what she did ... without making her feel that she's a bad person for having done it.

For example, if she hits her baby brother, take her aside and explain that you won't allow her to hit him, even though you understand how mad she gets when he takes her toys or interrupts her games.



Listen to her side of the story, and try to work out a solution to the problem together.

Try not to make her feel guilty and ashamed. We all make mistakes, and mistakes are an excellent opportunity to learn better ways of behaving.

By spending a few minutes with her in quiet discussion, you show her that you respect her feelings but there are certain rules of behavior that she must observe.

At the same time, she learns that you are unhappy about a particular behavior which is not acceptable, but that you still love her—an important distinction. □

How heavy is air?

Air is all around us, but it is a concept that is difficult for young children to grasp. But they can understand what happens with air and a straw.

Here are two games that demonstrate the principle that air is there—whether we can see it or not.

• Jump or Not Jump

Collect a group of objects that are heavy and light, such as a tissue, comb, paper clip, cracker, mitten, dry pet food kernel, small piece of paper, empty soft drink can, and so on.

Ask the kids to divide the items into two groups depending on whether they think the item will jump when they blow on them with a straw. Then provide everyone with a straw and find out.

• Air Race

Provide each contestant with a straw and a “racer” which can be a small piece of paper or another object that “jumped” in the previous experiment.

Put down masking tape for start/finish lines, and the race is on! Each player tries to win by “blowing” his or her “racer” to the finish line first. If there are several players, hold heats and a “final.”

To make the race more difficult:

- Use blocks to construct identical mazes or draw mazes on a large piece of paper.
- Use small feathers as racers (very difficult to control).
- Use a heavier racer that is difficult to move.
- Give each player two pieces to race at the same time. □

Good behavior at the grocery store

Probably most parents can tell a story or two about something embarrassing or maddening that happened while shopping with the kids.

There are ways to avoid bad behavior and unacceptable language (theirs *and* yours). Here are a few:

- Go over the rules before going into the store. For example: “Stay by the cart. No running. No begging. No yelling. You can select one acceptable snack before we leave IF you follow the rules.”
- Kids who are old enough can help find items on the shelf by identifying the label.



- Hum a favorite song. Have her guess its name.
- Ask the child to look for a package with a B on it, or one that has a picture of the can's contents, or a product in a box as you move up and down the aisles.
- For kids too young to walk, bring a bag of small toys and tie it to the cart. Include some healthy snacks.

- Have the children help you select a new item—breakfast cereal, cookie, vegetable.

- Ask questions about the items you put in the basket. What is the name of this vegetable? What color is this box? How many cans are in the cart now? Whose picture is on this container? Who likes to eat this vegetable at our house?

- If a child is out of control, remove her from the scene. Go to the car or rest room and wait until she is calmed down. Talk quietly but tell her that her behavior is not acceptable. When she is able to control herself, return to the store.

- Kids who are tired or hungry belong at home, not at the grocery store. Find a sitter instead.

- Reward positive behavior with your attention. Say “thank you” when your child is helpful and make positive remarks about her good behavior. What gets rewarded—gets repeated. □

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