



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

Brainstorming at an early age

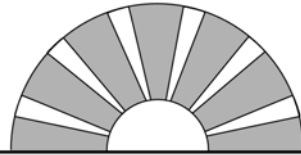
Children are naturally curious and creative. Adults can encourage that creativity by asking children open-ended questions about every-day activities and every-day objects: "What would happen if we left the ice cubes on the counter?"

Simple games featuring every-day objects can be fascinating and fun for kids. Here's how to play:

Name a specific object—a pancake turner, for example—and ask, "How many different ways can you think of to use a pancake turner?"

Mention a few unorthodox examples yourself to illustrate the wide range of possibilities.

After a few rounds, kids will want to name the object themselves. □



Child's Day

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Behavior

When kids fail

Most children can handle success—but how can parents help their children handle failure?

First, your child needs to know that you're on his side, that you accept him for what he is, win or lose. Your comments should reflect on what he's done, not on what he "is."

Second, don't be kind by being dishonest. Your child knows when he hasn't done well, when he has "failed." When you acknowledge that you know this, too, but that it isn't the end of the world, your child has confidence in you to reflect an honest value to him.

Finally, let your child know every day and in many ways that you love him. A child needs a lot of hugging, even at times when his behavior is definitely "unhuggable."

As children try to find their place in the world, they look to their parents for guidance and support. Make sure you give your child the room he needs to learn and make mistakes, but also make sure he knows you're on his side—win or lose. □

Developmental

Help children feel good about themselves

Here are some simple ideas parents can use to help children feel good about themselves.

- Have confidence in your child. Trust in him to learn from his mistakes and to outgrow aggravating habits he may pick up as he grows. He won't always slam the door or leave his shoes in the middle of the room.

- Pay more attention to her strengths than to her shortcomings. You'll find you see more of whichever behavior your focus on most. So, thank her when she closes the door quietly.

- Be alert to and encourage your child's natural talents. Have patience with him in the areas in which he doesn't excel. If he is good at printing, ask him to make a poster for the refrigerator door. If he has trouble with numbers, tell him you'll help him with his homework.

- Try to give her the benefit of the doubt when you find your confidence in her lacking. After all, wouldn't you like for her to have the same kind of confidence in you? □

How much does it weigh?

To conduct some experiments about how much things weigh, put your kitchen or bathroom scale on a table along with several interesting objects to weigh: a shoe, toy car, doll, apple, cup, a box of toothpicks, and anything else that looks interesting.

1. First, have each person guess how much an object weighs. Then put it on a scale and see what its true weight really is.

2. Next, compare the weights of different objects. Which is heavier: the doll or the shoe? The toy car or the apple? Weigh the objects again to show the difference.

3. If you're using a bathroom scale, put it on the floor and weigh each person who's participating. Then line up by weight—lightest to heaviest.

4. Make some more compar-

sons: Is the heaviest person the tallest?

5. Which weighs more—big objects or little objects? Try to think up “stumpers” such as a jar of peanut butter vs. a sack of potato chips. Or a package of marshmallows vs. a can of soup.

6. Solve this problem: How can you measure the weight of your pet if it won't stand still on the scale? (It's not higher math but it is a good problem for older kids to solve.)

7. If you have more than one pet, which one weighs the most?

8. Liquids have weight, too. Everybody guess how much a gallon of water weighs, and then weigh one gallon and find out.

Think up additional problems to solve that match your child's interests and skill level. □

Children learn to help

Beginning very early, children show us they can be kind to others and can help them. Even toddlers love to help.

Children really seem to enjoy helping out and will continue to act this way if they are taught how to help and then encouraged to do so.

Fostering kind, thoughtful behavior in the first place will help prevent a lot of the hurtful, aggressive behavior seen in some children as they develop. Some guidelines:

- Plan “nice to do” activities. Occasionally involve your child in the planning and carrying out of “nice to do” activities that benefit other people like picking out a library book to take to a sick friend or drawing an original birthday card.

- Verbally label thoughtful, cooperative behavior. When you see an act of kindness or helpfulness, point it out by putting a label on it. “It was a thoughtful thing for Mrs. Thomas to do when she drove us to the garage to pick up our car.”

- Role-play cooperative, helpful behavior. Children learn to cooperate when they have had a chance to actually practice these behaviors.

Young children enjoy playing with puppets and you can capitalize on this by doing some brief puppet role plays that focus on helpfulness. For example, your puppet drops a box of nails. Ask the child's puppet how it can help. □

A few kind words about being a parent

Being a parent is a joyful experience but there are also days when nothing seems to go right. Here's some practical advice to help you feel better on those days.

- Take comfort in the fact that almost every parent has felt what you are feeling right now.
- There are many good things about your child's growth and development right now that can give you pleasure; focus on them.
- One or two problems now are not going to warp your child forever.

Here are some positive steps you can take:

- Enjoy your child by laughing with her, holding her close when the dark things close in.
- Talk to a close friend or another parent who can share his or her experiences.
- Let your child know in a many different ways that you love her!



The politics of parenting

I had a thought-provoking encounter with a mother of a preschooler recently. She began the conversation by asking about her child's nightmares, a frequent occurrence that was disturbing the family's sleep most nights, sometimes several times. We discussed the phenomenon, often common at this age. She was intrigued by the graphic descriptions of the scary images that her child could recount later in realistic detail.

As the conversation proceeded, the parent referred to her child's favorite TV show—"The Fear Factor." Although I didn't get involved in discussing the suitability of the show for preschoolers, I asked her if she saw any connection between the child's viewing of the startling images of that "reality" show and the later anxieties showing up in nightmares. The mother frowned, but replied that the program was her daughter's favorite.

Clearly the notion of exercising veto power over the show, even if it might be contributing to the sleep disturbances, was something the mother found discomforting. By taking that position of inaction, she was giving her young child the power to make a decision that was probably not the best for her.

Politicians in our time seem to pay a good deal of attention to popularity polls and focus groups as a guide to their decision-making. If their ideas receive widespread approval, they proceed; if the feedback

indicates that the actions may not be received with equal support, they hesitate, delay, and postpone appropriate action, even though they know a decision might be for the greater good.



Long-term gains are sacrificed for short-term approval ratings. And, one suspects, deep in their hearts the politicians know what they should be doing, but don't do it since such actions could cause the people to vote them out of office.

It seems to me that many contemporary parents are also playing political polling games with their children. Rather than risk seeing a little face cloud with disapproval, many parents avoid taking the unpopular steps that they know they should.

In this case, the mother's response indicated she realized that the appropriate parenting action might be to limit the preschooler's exposure to the fear-provoking images, but she hesitated in the face of the child's displeasure directed at her.

Having experienced the angry reactions that children can dispense when parents make complex and unpopular decisions—"You're the worst Mommy ever! I hate you!"—I realize that being out of favor, even temporarily, is a tricky position to take. But it's a lot easier when parents understand their true role in life.

It is not, as so many present-day parents seem to feel, to be their child's buddy or best friend. That's what other kids are for. It is, rather, to be the person who has a long-range view of what circumstances and experiences will ultimately support their child's healthy growth through childhood and on into adolescence and adulthood.

It is to recognize that taking unpopular stands for what is right may not win the polls for Best Mommy today, but may ultimately yield happy results. And luckily for all us parents determined to do the best, we can't be voted out by our small constituents! □

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