



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Social Skills

Writing a simple 'thank you' note

An important social skill is the writing of a thank you note.

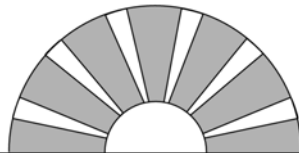
As adults, most of us know the surprise and delight we feel when we receive a thank you note from a child.

Even preschoolers can be coached to dictate a note to a friend, relative, or grandparent. Often a single sentence of gratitude is sufficient.

Most kids can be encouraged to draw a picture of how the gift is being used, or a photo of the child and the gift itself can be sent along.

Taking time to express thanks shows children that we value others' thoughtfulness, a value we want to instill in our children.

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Child's Day

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Infants & Toddlers

Explorer in diapers

Once a baby begins to creep, a whole new world of space exploration is open to him.

A baby is increasingly curious about everything he sees, hears, or touches. This curiosity is a precious thing. It leads Baby on exciting trips of discovery across the floor, behind chairs, under tables.

Sometimes it leads him into the dead end of a corner or behind a door. What to do now?

Perhaps Baby has never crept backward before except by accident. Now he must shift into reverse to solve this problem.

If he has not been creeping long, he may not be able to do this easily. He may just keep trying to push his way ahead until he becomes frustrated and begins to cry.

If this should happen, of course you will go to his rescue—but make this a learning experience for him. Comfort him with your voice and hand. Gently coax him backward until he is free. Then praise him for his bravery and his learning.

A playpen makes a fine protected area for play. But if a baby is frequently confined to his play-

pen, he will soon lose some of his wonderful curiosity. The restricted space will not give him enough room to perfect his creeping and to learn the many things about himself that creeping will teach him.

Unless Baby can experience the various distances between objects, he will be slower to learn about judging distance and time. These early lessons form part of the solid foundation for later learning at school.

If Baby is to explore safely, you must take a good look around your house, at low cabinets and drawers, at the tops of low tables, and at any containers that may be standing on the floor.

Remove all cleaning materials from lower and under-counter kitchen cabinets—soaps, detergents, window or oven cleaner, cleansers, furniture polish, disinfectants, floor wax, other liquids—anything that Baby might break, pour over himself, put in his mouth, or swallow. Replace these with safe, unbreakable objects such as pots, pans, pie tins, lids, plastic bowls and the like.

Now if Baby pulls open a cabinet door, he can explore and learn in safety. □

Misbehavior may be a sign of stress

Sometimes behavior that can't be easily explained might be a symptom of stress. Unfortunately children under stress usually misbehave, so they are more likely to be punished than helped.

What can adults do? If there are signs that a youngster is under pressure:

- Try to get the child to talk about the way things are going for her. Encourage her to express her feelings about people, incidents or situations that bother her.

- Listen patiently without criticizing or lecturing.

- Give immediate comfort. Let the youngster know, with words and hugs, that she doesn't have to bear bad times alone.

- Read or make up stories about a child with similar difficulties and how she handled them.

If a situation is going to be around for a while, parents can take long-term precautions to minimize stress.

- Provide enough family structure and routine to increase the child's sense of security. Don't overdo, though, or she may end up feeling more stressed than ever.

- Maintain basic limits on the child's behavior, even though it's tempting to relax discipline. She needs to get the crucial message that parents care about what she does.

- Provide plenty of opportunities for vigorous exercise, creative play, constructive work—and play.

These things may sound ordinary, but many children do not have opportunities to do such things, and the adults around them may not remember how important they are to a child. □

Spend time reading together

Reading is a wonderful way for parents and children to spend quality time together. In addition, reading together now sets the stage for later reading alone.

So while she is young, read to your child. Then as she becomes older, encourage her to read on her own.

Have books available in your home; when your children see you read, they are more inclined to pick up a book themselves.

Visit the library weekly. Encourage your child's own reading interests.

Finally, make reading a special bedtime treat or have a family reading hour once a week. □

Learning—one step at a time

As children grow gradually, so do their abilities to handle increasingly complex tasks.

Parents and other adults can help this process by maintaining reasonable expectations of the child's present abilities . . . but also anticipate growth and expect just a bit more from the child.



For example, when your child is attempting a new task alone and becomes frustrated, don't rescue her right away. Instead gently remind her of the next step in the task. Speak sparingly but offer your encouragement. A word or two may be the only clues she needs to finish the job.

Another way to encourage growth is to teach in steps. You can begin a task for the child and then hand over the project.

For example, you can set out the pitcher, sugar, measuring cup, spoon, and drink packet and then have the child take over and make the fruit punch.

Tasks should be geared toward the child's age, remembering that children are not little adults . . . but they do want to learn new tasks geared to their level. □

Encouraging the young artist

To encourage young children to become interested in creating their own artwork, start them out by providing them with their own art supplies.

A fishing tackle box with plenty of compartments makes an excellent art box.

A personal box for each child encourages creativity and the development of longer attention spans.

Children are also encouraged to take responsibility for their own supplies as they take out, use, and put away their supplies.

A basic art box would include crayons, colored chalk, plastic or round-tip scissors, watercolor set, paper, marking pens, tape, colored pencils, and glue.

Materials can be added or subtracted to the art box according to a child's ability to use the equipment properly.

Incidentally, new or special items for the art box can be given as gifts on various occasions during the year.

A few rules for creative projects may be in order, such as taking some precautions ahead of time to prevent a mess and cleaning up afterwards. (A large plastic tablecloth reserved for art projects works well to protect a work area.)

There is no better time to foster creativity than while children are young. Creativity can litter a kitchen floor in minutes but the results can be extremely worthwhile. □

Handling anger

How do you handle your anger? Everyone is born with the capacity to feel anger. Our culture may tell us that decent people don't display their anger.

Consequently we work hard to conceal our feelings. But we can't conceal the bodily changes that occur: blood pressure rises; heartbeat increases; blood vessels expand; and the result is a massive explosion of energy!

How we handle that explosion is often related to how we were raised by our parents. Some families practice physical punishment. Other families tend toward verbal punishment such as name-calling or sarcasm.

Still other families suppress and repress their anger. It is still there, however, in the form of headaches, asthma attacks, itching, or perhaps insomnia.

What is the best way to deal with one's anger?

(1) Acknowledge that anger exists. It is a human characteristic. It's all right to be angry with your child and your child can be angry with you.

(2) Agree that it is not acceptable behavior to injure someone as a result of anger. Anger is an emotion. Aggression is not an emotion. It is an action.

(3) Talk about the anger. It's okay to admit how angry you are. Tell your child, "I'm angry when I see those crayon marks on the wall. I have to clean up that mess." Or, "I know it makes you angry when I have to do this," as you deprive the child of

a treat.

(4) Emphasize your own feelings rather than attacking your child. To do this, use statements that begin with the words, "I feel as if . . ." or "I feel upset when . . ." Don't use words that attack and hurt someone such as, "You always . . ." or "You never . . ." or "You are a . . ."

(5) Avoid anger-producing situations. Sometimes we ask questions that we should know will produce the opposite of our wishes, such as, "Do you want to go to bed now?"

We could anticipate that the answer would be "No!" So, to avoid getting angry with our child's negativism, we could use a statement ("It's time to go to bed") instead of a question.

(6) Seek strategies cooperatively. Encourage your child to generate ideas to solve a problem. If he or she is involved in developing the solution to a problem, the solution will more likely be successful. □

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