



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities

Make your own applesauce

Here's an activity for parents and kids that results in a tasty dish for dinner.

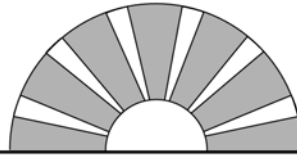
Start with 3 cups of sliced, peeled apples. Place them in a 1-1/2 to 2 quart casserole dish; add 1/4 cup water. Then microwave on high for 5 to 10 minutes. Stir the fruit at the 5-minute mark. The apples will start to turn transparent when they're almost finished cooking.

After removing the casserole from the microwave, add 1/2 cup of sugar and stir.

Let the apples stand for 2 or 3 minutes with the lid on the dish. Then give them one more stir and serve.

Kids can help wash and peel the apples, measure the water and sugar and stir.

Safety tip: Monitor the use of a knife for kids old enough to use it, and be sure to remember that dishes are very hot after being microwaved! □



Child's Day

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Infants & Toddlers

A mirror is a self-discovery toy for a baby

Although a baby is fascinated with faces, it is ironic that her own face is the hardest one for her to get to know! A mirror is a self-discovery toy that will help a baby become aware of her own appearance.

At first, Baby may not realize that the face in the mirror is her own. But she will still have fun interacting with her reflection. Every time she changes her position or moves the mirror, she will see something new.

If you play with her, she will see and learn even more. For example, put her hand on your nose and say, "Nose, my nose." Then put her hand on her nose and say, "Nose, Olivia's nose."

As you move your fingers on her face, name the parts you are touching. Then do the same with her hands on your face. You can do all these things in front of the mirror.

Here are some activities to help Baby learn about her reflection:

1. Hold Baby on your lap with both of you facing the same direction. Hold the mirror so that

she can see herself. Point to her reflection and say, "I see Olivia." Then ask, "Where is Olivia? Find Olivia."

The aim of this game is for the baby to smile and reach for herself in the mirror.

2. Pick up a small toy that Baby is familiar with and move it behind her head so she can see it in the mirror along with her own reflection. Say, "See the rattle? It makes noise."

The aim of this game is for Baby to watch the object in the mirror and in your hand.

3. Catch a beam of light on the mirror and make its reflection dance on the walls or ceiling.

When does Baby really understand that the face in the mirror is her own?

Put a bit of masking tape on the tip of her nose and let her look in the mirror. Where does she reach to remove it: to the mirror or to her own nose?

Make sure the mirror you use is unbreakable and safe for Baby to handle. □

Leo the Late Bloomer

By Robert Kraus
HarperCollins Juvenile Books
Reissue Edition 1994

Leo the tiger can't do the things that the other animal kids do—he can't read, or write, or draw, or eat neatly, or even talk. His father worries that something is the matter. But Leo's mother isn't worried. She recognizes that Leo is just a late bloomer.

"Better late than never," thinks Leo's father.

Leo's father watches him every day for signs of blooming, and wonders anxiously if he is a bloomer. But Leo's mother cautions patience: "A watched bloomer doesn't bloom."

Leo continues not to bloom, watched or not watched. Then one day, in his own good time, Leo blooms and is able to do everything that he'd been trying to do.

And his first words are: "I made it!"

The nice little pictures in this simple story make it evident how painful it is for both Leo and his father when Leo isn't measuring up to expectations or others' performance. And the joy of mastery shines through in the final illustrations.

What a gift this philosophy of patience is for both children and parents. The uniqueness of timing makes it doubly difficult in our competitive society for those late bloomers. But the process of development is something that cannot be rushed, no matter how we push or pressure.

The thing is, we often fail to appreciate how all the little failures and messes, all the mistakes made in the process of learning, eventually add up to those more dramatic moments when a new level of development is finally achieved.

While the milestones show up as dramatic new behaviors, they do not just suddenly appear. Development happens slowly, bit by bit, several steps backwards or sideways before one step forward. There are lots of failures before eventual successes.

Leo was not just sitting on the sidelines waiting for the big moment. All the time he was practicing and trying—and all that messing about does have purpose. Children need both time and supportive understanding as they journey on, as well as encouragement to accept their "unreadiness."

I remember smiling as I heard my daughter Lila mutter to herself, "I'm too little for this," when a new skill seemed beyond her grasp. It is vital that children understand that we are confident that one day they will be big enough and they will be able.

Most importantly, we should remind ourselves that there is little need to watch anxiously for the blooming, as did Leo's dad. Healthy children are born motivated to push on when ready, to get to the place where they can proclaim as triumphantly as Leo does, "I made it!" □

Teaching children about traffic safety

The statistics are grim: Thousands of children are killed in traffic accidents each year. These accidents happen so frequently because young children simply have no idea about the danger of moving vehicles. They are completely unaware of traffic laws and they don't know instinctively that cars can hurt them.

Preschoolers are at a physical disadvantage, too. Stoop or kneel beside a street to get a feel for the difference.

From a child's point of view, you can't see nearly as much and it's very confusing whether a vehicle is coming, going, or standing still. It is possible, however, to begin teaching preschoolers the basics of traffic safety.

From two to three years old, children can be taught where it is safe to play and to walk, and where to stop.

At four years old they can understand the dangers caused by moving, parked and backing-up vehicles, and how to look for cars in the street.

After four years you can add the more abstract concepts of direction and what signs mean.

By five years of age, a child is capable of learning to cross a street safely at mid-block and by six should be able to obey traffic light signals at intersections.

Teaching children about the dangers of traffic and how the rules work helps them be responsible—and safe. □

Clothes show a child's identity

A child who insists on wearing mismatched colors, pants that are too short, tacky costume jewelry or other favorite items that get worn and worn — and worn — can exasperate and sometimes embarrass parents.

But we should remember that adults, too, dress to express how they feel inside. We feel prettier in bright colors, more comfortable in well-worn jeans, braver in boots. Through years of experience, we know how to put things together to make a “look” that becomes us.

Children need time to develop that sense. Rather than fight it, parents can help the child along by finding out just what it is the child likes about a certain piece of apparel — and working from there.

You may be surprised to find that there's one specific feature that your child is attached to. Ask your child why he likes something. It may be the big shiny zipper on that old windbreaker. Or the ladybug applique on those too-short overalls. Or the sparkle of rhinestones in that gaudy costume jewelry.

Maybe it's how the piece of clothing fits. Stretch pants that don't bind, for instance, or velvety fabrics that are soft. Find out, and make use of those preferences.

Transfer the applique to a new pair of coveralls. Get a small barrette with rhinestones. Buy a new velour shirt. Together you can “put together” a look that you're both comfortable with. □

Preschoolers love stories

Most picture books with real stories that have a beginning, a middle and an end are not really designed for preschoolers but rather for five- and six-year-olds,

However, given a little help, a two- or three-year-old may use certain books longer and get more out of them than the older child.

A well-chosen storybook becomes first a workbook, then an idea book, and eventually a familiar story through which the child has adventures and discovers possibilities for himself.

While an older child may wander off on his own explorations, the child who is willing to be a lap-sitter benefits greatly from the discoveries he makes in books.

The first trip through the book should consist almost entirely of conversations about the pictures. Watch to see what interests your child, and what he does and does not understand as you go through the pages.

Move through the book at your child's pace, as rapidly or as slowly as he wants.

With your finger, point out what's happening. Speak and read with expression in your voice. This makes the reading more interesting and provides clues to the meaning of the pictures and words.

Ask questions that invite the child to participate actively:

Where is that bear?

There he is!

What is the bear doing?

What is he riding?

He's riding a bike!

Oops! He fell off!

Once the child is familiar with the basic words and concepts in a book, he is ready to become aware of the story.

If the text is really simple, read it. If not, just tell the story in words and events that he can understand.

As you talk about what happens in the story, the child gradually discovers that one thing leads to another. Important phrases are ... and now ... and then ... and suddenly ... and after that ... and then what do you think happened?

Once you've set the pattern, you can read and tell the story again and again.

A good book that's loaded with language and rhythm and ideas will enrich every aspect of your child's life, and will especially enrich your times together with books. □

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