



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Academics

Encourage writing

A parent's positive approach to writing as a pleasurable activity can have rewarding results.

Just as you began talking to an infant who could not repeat anything recognizable back to you, you can provide a similar exposure to the art of writing.

Build on children's natural curiosity and encourage them to explore the world of writing—encourage writing play anywhere:

- Write in the snow, in the sand, in the mud with sticks.
- Write in the icing on the pan of brownies.
- Write on your sidewalks and driveway.
- Write in the car, the stroller, the grocery cart. Safe, fat crayons keep children occupied.
- Write in restaurants. Markers and tablets are essential diaper bag items, although disposable placemats make wonderful impromptu paper. □



Child's Day

Preschool · Kindergarten · Child Development Center

2525 Wallingwood Drive # 100 • Austin, Texas 78746
Phone: (512) 327-3274 • FAX (512) 327-3281

January 2005

Grandma Says

The politics of parenting

A mother of a preschooler began a conversation recently by asking about her child's nightmares. We discussed the phenomenon, often common at this age. She was intrigued by the scary images that her child could recount later in realistic detail.

The parent then 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 the "reality" show and the 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 disconcerting. And 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, de-

lay, and postpone appropriate action, even though they know a decision might be for the greater good.

It seems to me that many contemporary parents are also playing similar games with their children. Rather than risk 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.

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. □

Making music together

The human voice is a wonderful thing. Just as children explore and play with spoken sounds, they naturally explore and play with sounds that are sung.

You can reinforce these sung sounds just as you can reinforce a baby's babbling and first words. You don't need to be a great singer—or even consider yourself any kind of singer!

When is singing appropriate?

- Bedtime. It's never too soon to start, and even early elementary age children enjoy a favorite song as part of tuck-in time.

- Table grace before meals.

- Playtime. Sing along with favorite CDs and tapes. You can also make up words to fit any situation using familiar tunes.

- In the car. Sing along with tapes and CDs. Learn a song together from childcare, school or church or even television.

This is an excellent opportunity to make up a song that tells kids what comes next in a busy schedule as you run errands in the car, or what they can expect from a new situation or outing.

Use a favorite tune to make up a wacky song that has no meaning but uses funny sounds and words. Your children will think you're brilliant! Be careful to remember your creation, though. They may demand to hear it again!

Don't worry if a child's first attempt to sing is a whisper or even nonexistent at first. The invitation to participate and the exposure to singing as pleasure are the important things. □

Teasing

Parents frequently ask how to help their children combat teasing from peers or older children.

Psychologists tell us that children who engage in the cruel kind of teasing usually come from homes where sarcasm and hostility—fashioned in joke form—are abundant.



Most parents are able to control their irritations and do not physically hurt children. Yet some parents do not stop to consider that regular teasing is a similar type of punishment. While the parent cannot be accused of wrongdoing, the effect is essentially the same.

Then there is the gentle teasing which is well intentioned. Nevertheless, most preschoolers do not have thick skins or the sophistication to laugh at themselves at their own expense. Further, youngsters often don't have the fluency to talk back.

So, what can parents do to discourage the teasers and bullies outdoor?

With young children, a parent's

presence helps keep older children in line. Then when trouble appears to be developing, the parent may redirect the play or introduce a new activity, both distractions.

Children take their cues from parents' behavior. If parents do not appear to be upset, the children will remain calm. However, if indignant parents, in front of their child, retell teasing or bullying experiences, these experiences become magnified in the child's mind and tend to reinforce his timidity and fearful feelings.

Also, when parents intervene and "rescue" their children too soon and too often, they teach children that their only defense is their parent's presence. This certainly does not help a child build self-confidence.

So, what can parents do to help their children combat teasing and the effects of teasing?

1. Eliminate teasing from your own behavior.

2. Be present unobtrusively when children play outdoors.

3. Children can take a stand by speaking up. Sometimes just saying "Stop doing that" is enough.

4. Keep cool and don't become agitated when you hear stories about how your child was treated. Listen to his story, comfort him, and send him off to do something else.

5. Avoid discussing the episode in your child's presence.

6. Tell your child to stay in a group. Sometimes it helps if others are present and can keep an eye on the children. □

Negative words

There are many unsavory words that attract the attention of young children such as stupid, idiot, dummy, and various “bathroom” words.

Many children know impolite words because they have heard them, but they do not use them for two reasons.

The first is because they have been told not to use such words, and the second is because they do not hear the words regularly used by their parents or caregivers.

It is easy to use a negative word when we feel discouraged or frustrated, but there are some good reasons to avoid this: (1) Insulting words make people feel bad, and (2) the use of unflattering words reflects a lack of high standards and values,

By giving a few second of thought before speaking, negative sentences can be changed to reflect a positive attitude. For example, “That stupid, dumb door needs some oil” could be: “That squeaky, noisy door needs some oil.”

Making positive statements that are as positive as we can make them has a positive effect on everyone — speakers and listeners alike. □



Finger-food safety

Toddlers delight in feeding themselves. However, caution is advised to help prevent food from lodging in small airways.

For children less than three years of age:

- Check baked goods for nuts which are the number one food-related choking hazard for young children.

- Avoid giving hard or difficult-to-chew foods like raw carrots or other crunchy vegetables, hard candy, jelly beans, nuts, and lollipops. Spread thick and sticky peanut butter very thinly.

- Modify the shape and texture of firm and round foods. Cook carrots, potatoes, and other hard vegetables until soft, then cut into small pieces. Cut grapes into quarters and hot dogs into fine lengthwise sticks. Dice meats. Chop apples and firm fruit into very small pieces.

- Keep an eye on small children when they are eating. They might eat in a hurry, stuff too much food in their mouths, or chew their food inadequately.

- Feed small children in a relaxed atmosphere, and only while seated. Do not allow children to run and play with food while chewing.

- Train toddlers to chew food thoroughly before swallowing or trying to speak.

It is also important for child caretakers and parents, when possible, to receive appropriate emergency training, including how to perform the Heimlich maneuver on children and cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques (CPR). □

Loving without smothering

It's hard to be a parent.

Sometimes all the advice from “experts” can make you worry that you're not doing enough. This guilt can make you over-protective and over-directive of your child.

Try to be alert to how your behavior affects your child without becoming anxious about it. If you make mistakes, try to learn from them and then let them go.

The wonderful thing about young children is that you get a new chance with them each moment: they don't hold resentments.

Give your child a chance to be her own person. Don't do things for her that she can do for herself or protect her from the natural consequences of her own mistakes.

Expect her to take responsibilities for herself, as she is able. This helps her learn to be responsible for her own actions. □

\$200

Reward



for referrals!

Ask for details!