



# Growing Together

Newsletter for  
parents of preschool children

Behavior

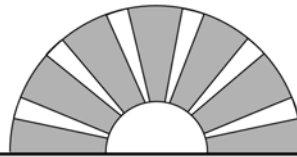
## Does your child have an imaginary friend?

If your child has limited access to friends, don't be surprised if he or she creates imaginary companions. This may be a doll, stuffed animal, or invisible pal.

Some parents fear they will blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality if they acknowledge or participate with these invisible companions. But these fears are needless. With few exceptions, preschoolers drop their imaginary pals between the ages of three and a half and four.

If your child creates an invisible friend, listen to the conversation your child carries on with this imaginary companion—it will provide you with valuable information about your child's thoughts and feelings.

Talk to your child's invisible friend as if it's an important member of the family. This can provide playful conversations and help you develop a good friendship with your own child. □



## Child's Day

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### Social Skills

## Building trust in children

How can you encourage trust in your children?

- **Keep your promises.** To begin with, make only promises which you can keep. Suppose your son wants you to take him to the zoo on Saturday, but you know that you may be called to work that day. Explain the predicament. Reassure him that you do want to take him to the zoo, and set a definite date when you will go, regardless of what comes up.

- **When the answer to a request is no, explain why.** If your child asks for something you don't want him to have, be honest with yourself and with him.

One child asked to go to a video arcade. His parent didn't approve of video arcades but was tempted to soften her negative answer by saying, "Not today, dear." If she had said that, her son would have reached the conclusion that on another day, she might allow him to go. Instead they discussed her reasons for the decision and planned some alternative activities which he might enjoy.

- **Answer honestly.** Try to answer all questions honestly. Choose words to suit the child's level of understanding.

For example, when a 4-year-old asks what the moon is made

of, it's not necessary to launch into geological terms and explanations. A simple answer about rock and sand will be easy for her to understand. If she needs more information, she'll ask.

- **Don't evade.** Sometimes we're tempted to give our children evasive answers because we're afraid they won't grasp our meaning or they may be upset by the answer. Death and sex, for example, are both topics that make parents uneasy. Both death and sex are realities, however, about which all children must learn eventually.

Protecting a child from learning about the experience of death may hinder his ability to cope with the experience in the future.

Holding back information about his sexual nature won't prevent your child from misusing it. The less he knows, the more likely he is to have problems. When appropriate, share your knowledge and values with him. This doesn't mean you need to tell children everything you know about these topics, but you can answer questions simply and truthfully.

- **Admit shortcomings.** When you don't know the answer to a question, admit it, and then offer to find out. The reality is that no one has all the right answers. □

## “Tell me more”

Language is more than the words we use to communicate with one another—it is a shared experience where one person speaks and the other person listens.

Through active listening you can give your child the message that she is important and that what she has to say is important.

First you must listen to what she tells you—about her day; what she had to eat; what didn't work out; what was funny; something new she learned. Then you can ask her questions which encourage her to tell you more.

Finally you must be patient by waiting for her response to your questions—she may have difficulty finding the words she needs.

We've all had the experience of talking to a poor listener. Just because they're smaller doesn't mean children can be fooled—they know when they are not being heard.

When times are busy, schedules must be met, and there's no time to listen, say so. “I'm sorry, Sally, but we're in a rush right now. Let's remember to talk about this again before bedtime.”

And remember to do it. Shared conversations keep the lines of communications open and active. □



## Gun safety

Even if you don't own a gun, for your child's safety you need to instruct him about the dangers of guns.

If he encounters a gun in a friend's home, he won't know how to behave appropriately unless you teach him. He needs to learn from his parent that guns are not toys and should not be played with—not even touched.

Why is it necessary for parents to discuss gun safety with their children? Statistics indicate that dangerous weapons are part of an epidemic of violence among young people.

The National School Safety Center estimates that about 100,000 students carry a handgun to school every day.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, there are over 200 million privately owned guns in the United States.

It is estimated that half of all families in this country own at least one gun. Most times the gun was purchased for protection and is kept loaded, ready for use.

### What to tell your child about guns

1. Guns are not toys. They should never be touched—no matter how safe a friend says it is.

2. If he sees one of his friends with a real gun, he should assume it is loaded. He should leave the place immediately and tell an adult what he saw.

3. Explain the difference between actors who use guns in movies or on television and the tragedies of real-life gun violence. Use newspaper stories appropri-

ately to back up what you say.

### Should you keep all guns out of your home?

Some persons (such as some farmers, police officers, or security guards) are required by their jobs to have a gun in their home. Most other people have a choice.

In deciding whether to keep all guns out of your home, the Children's Defense Fund recommends that you consider the following:

- Every year hundreds of children accidentally shoot themselves or someone else.

- Over 2,911 American children are killed every year with guns.

- By the time a child is one year old, he can squeeze your finger with seven pounds of pressure, which is approximately the same amount needed to squeeze the trigger of a gun.

- If you keep a gun in your home, it's 18 times more likely to kill someone living in your home than to kill an intruder.

### If you keep a gun in your home

1. When you use the gun (for hunting, for example), don't ever leave it where a young child can have access to it.

2. At home, always unload a gun before putting it away.

3. Store the gun in a locked cabinet, which no child can open.

4. Keep all bullets locked in a safe place separate from the gun.

The best solution: If there are children in your house, do not have guns in your house. It is a small price to pay to protect your child—or any child—from an accident. □

