



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Academics

Learning in real life

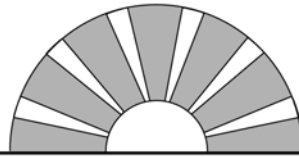
It's easier to understand a new idea if the lesson includes real-life objects rather than using pictures or words.

For example, the word "orange" stands for the fruit we eat as well as for the color of certain things.

But that idea may be hard for children to understand if we just tell them about it or show them pictures.

If children touch, smell, peel, and eat an orange, and then look around for objects that match the *color* of the orange peel, the idea will come alive.

Any time a youngster is having trouble understanding something from a picture or from words, trying using the real object or action itself. □



Child's Day

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Health & Safety

Safe commuting with children

Commuting with a child is a fact of life for many families today. The thought of traveling with your child or children during rush hour may be enough to make you cringe, but it need not add to your already stressful day. Here are some ways to make each trip a safe and enjoyable time.

Play a game. Ask your toddler to find his nose, his toes, and other body parts. Your preschooler can play simple guessing games with you or be on the lookout for specific things like yellow cars, white cows, or brown boats. If you drive the same route each day, clue your child ahead of time to watch for the white church, or red building.

Music and singing. If you have a cassette or CD player in your car, play your child's favorite albums and let him sing along.

You don't necessarily need recorded music, though. You can make up song to familiar tunes. Action songs which include hand motions will give an energetic child an outlet, although it's best to teach the song when you're not in the car.

Something to eat. In case your child gets hungry or if you get stuck in a traffic jam, pack a non-messy snack: an apple, half of a sandwich, a granola bar, a

small container of a favorite dry cereal. Use a plastic cup with a lid and drinking spout for drinks.

Talk and share. Use this time together for talking and sharing. Even an infant will calm down at the sound of your voice. Encourage an older child to talk about his day, what he's looking forward to doing or who he'll play with. Tell him about your day.

Try to focus on the positive—this is not the time for lectures. If he has a hard time separating from you in the morning and fusses all the way to childcare, try to talk about something he can look forward to that evening: shopping, visiting grandpa, or reading a special bedtime story.

Safety rules. Using a car seat is not only the law but it makes the job of driving with small children easier and much safer.

No matter how tired or preoccupied you are, your most important task is to get you and your children safely to your destination.

If you travel with more than one child, they can play with one another, or they can fight. If you have to settle a dispute or calm an upset infant, pull off the road to a place of safety. Don't try to drive and solve a problem at the same time. □

Learning by listening

With all the education jaunts our children go on, we never think of the field trip we can take without budging from our favorite arm chair—to the world of sounds that lie in wait everywhere for careful ears to catch.

Take the sounds of words, for instance. It's one thing to understand what someone is saying; but it's a tricky business to catch consonant sounds as they fly, to hear syllables, to grab onto a rhyme, to sort the short from the long vowel. Luckily, training a child's ear is as delicious a game as making silly faces, or hopping on one foot.

Do it in the house first. Just sit down with your child and close your eyes, both of you. Shhhhh! What do you hear?

Your child may not be at all clever at first. If you say, "I hear a bird," he'll hear birds for the next ten minutes. That's okay. He's learning to pluck bird songs from the buzzing confusion of noise around him.

Mention easy noises like trucks roaring by; but begin to wonder out loud: Was it a truck, or was it a motorcycle or was it a car?

There are noises no one hears because we hear them so much—breathing, airplanes far away, tiny voices on the street, the humming of that refrigerator.

If it's dull for your child to sit so still, take a listening walk around your home. Blindfolds are fun for some children but scary for others, so try one, but

give up easily if he doesn't like it and just let him close his eyes.

Now, switch on machines—mixer, electric razor, vacuum, TV. Get the water boiling in the kettle, turn on water, flush the toilet, click a light switch, close a door, rattle a knob, open a drawer, drop a spoon, let him listen to a dial tone.

When ordinary things get too easy for your child, be cleverer. Scratch your fingers on the rug. Put something in a small box and shake it around—a pencil, a ball, beans, and a stuffed toy. Bite off and crunch a pickle, a stalk of celery.

Have you noticed that no game takes more than a minute or so? That makes catching sounds easy outdoors too, where there's too much distraction for long games. Closing one's eyes is just too hard outside where there's so much to see, but here's another way to play.

Who's the first to hear a dog bark, a baby cry, a woman laugh? Again, don't forget the noises we forget to hear—footsteps, clothes rustling as you walk, wind, keys or coins jingling in someone's pocket.

From wind to whispers is a small step. Whisper a sound in your child's ear—ssss, ffff, th, ch, shhhh, hhh—and ask him to make the same noise he heard.

One day his sharp ears will easily catch the b's in bubble, the z's in fuzzy, and the p's in pop. And ears that can catch—can catch on. □

Tips for more effective discipline

Parents sometimes wonder about more effective discipline strategies. Here are ten tips:

- Focus on only one behavior or misbehavior at a time instead of bringing up old complaints.
- Make sure your child knows what behavior you expect.
- Make direct statements ("You spilled sugar on the floor.") instead of unclear statements ("Remember, I want you always to be a good girl.>").
- Be as specific as you can. ("Don't hit your brother.") and avoid vague directives ("Didn't I just tell you to be nice to your brother?").
- Be as brief as possible.
- Focus on the here-and-now instead of dragging up past history ("Haven't I told you a thousand times not to . . . ?").
- Be consistent in what you say and how you discipline. Don't punish your child because you are in a bad mood today and then allow bad behavior to slip by when you are in a good mood tomorrow.
- Keep your emotions under control. Never take your anger out on a child.
- Keep the tone of your voice as calm as possible without yelling or screaming at your child.
- Let your child know you love her even when you dislike her misbehavior instead of using sarcasm or hurting remarks. She needs your love. □

Serve something fancy to eat

We all like to try something new, and kids are no exception. Here are some ideas for snack time that will entice bored appetites. Start with a different kind of bread than the one you usually serve—whole wheat, rye, pumpernickel, wheat berry. Thinly sliced sandwich bread works well when flattened with a rolling pin.

To add interest, cut the sandwiches into triangles, quarters, or finger-length strips; or use decorative cookie cutters for special celebrations. Coat one side of the bread with a light spread, such as reduced-fat margarine or low-fat cream cheese. This will prevent the sandwich from becoming soggy.

Use a variety of fillings—some sweet, some savory. Peanut butter, thinly slice cucumbers, banana slices, ham and sprouts or mustard—try some new ideas but include children's favorites.

If you want your small sandwiches to look fancy, it's best to cut the crusts off just before serving. Stack two or three sandwiches and cut the crusts of all at once. (Use the leftover crusts to make bread stuffing or croutons.)

If you want to make sandwiches ahead of time, you can keep them moist by covering them with waxed paper and laying a damp kitchen towel over the waxed paper. Refrigerate.

Bread is a good source of complex carbohydrates and other nutrients. By using low-fat and reduced-fat fillings, these little treats become nutritional—as well as tasty—snacks. □

Moving toward independence

When a toddler is around 18 months old, her feet are taking her everywhere. No place into which she can squeeze her little self is safe from her busy explorations.

Every day dawns on a world of exploration, and she shows a growing desire for independence. So, take advantage of her interest in new activities to start her on the road to independence.

One of the ways a toddler learns independence is by imitating parents, brothers, sisters and other people in her environment. She follows Mom or Dad around the house acting as a "helper."

Every parent who has tied a toddler's shoelaces in a double knot knows that even this is not really proof against the prying, pulling and poking fingers of a persistent child.

She also begins to explore her own clothes—pulling off as much as she can. She may even enjoy the freedom of running around without any clothes!

Don't let your child's apparent determination to set up her own nudist colony worry you. She is just as interested in exploring her clothes as she is in exploring the rest of the world.

As you get your toddler ready for her bath, encourage her to help. Unfasten her shoes and loosen them as you say, "Now we'll take off your shoes." Show her how to pull them off gently.

Get a grip on each shoe before she throws it to see if shoes will fly, or drops them on the floor to find out what kind of noise they will make. And don't forget to say "thank you" as she lets go of them. From your example she will learn

to say "thank you" too.

Socks must also come off. Push the top down over Toddler's heel and pull the toe loose. Twitch it and pull it a little saying, "You pull it off."

As you and Toddler go about getting the rest of her clothes off, follow the same procedure. Get the garment part way off and allow her to finish pulling it off.

Does all this sound like just play and perhaps time consuming for a busy parent? It *is* play and it *is* time consuming, but Toddler is learning important lessons about her clothes and herself, about the concepts of "on" and "off," about how to balance herself while she pulls off a shoe or sock.

During this period it is necessary to be a diplomat. If you intervene too soon or try too hard to help her undress, she may become angry. If she is deprived of the opportunity to undress herself because you are so helpful, she may not develop the motivation and desire to try for herself. If, on the other hand, you never assist her at all, she probably won't succeed and will feel frustrated. □

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