



# Growing Together

Newsletter for  
parents of preschool children

Science/Nature

## Science lesson: The wind

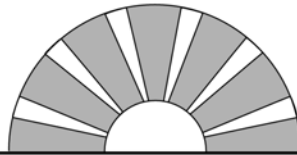
From which direction does the wind come? What can we learn about wind? Some simple experiments are revealing.

Provide tissue or other paper, a ping-pong ball or another lightweight object for children to blow on. They will discover that they are unable to blow anything toward themselves: things tend to move away from a wind!

Another challenge: How can one determine the wind's direction? Wet a finger and hold it in the air. The wind is coming from the direction of the side of the finger which dries faster and feels colder.

What else does the wind do? Look for things it holds **up** — a kite, an airplane, birds. It can blow things **away** — paper, clothes, leaves.

Distance, height and speed can be explored by tying old greeting cards to a string on the clothesline. □



## Child's Day

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Academics

## Learning about the relationship between volume and quantity

How many times have you chosen a container for leftovers only to find that it's the wrong size?

This is just one practical application of an important mathematical concept: The relationship between the capacity of a container (volume), and the number or amount that will fill that container or space (quantity).



Estimating what containers will hold is a skill that requires practice.

You can help your child develop this skill using items you have around the house.

1. Give your child several different shaped containers, which hold the same amount, such as a pan, a jar, and a plastic container, which each hold a quart. Ask the child which one will hold more.

Then give her some maca-

roni, dried beans or similar material to fill one of the containers. Ask her what she thinks will happen when she puts the contents into one of the other containers. Let her try.

2. Encourage your child to repeat this game of filling, dumping and comparing, using different materials and different sized and shaped containers.

Try sand or water in clear containers so she can see how far an amount that fills a short, wide container will go in a tall, thin one.

3. Let your child help with jobs that require estimation of how much will fit in a particular space: Choosing a container for leftovers; putting cans away in a small amount of shelf space; finding the right sized box to hold a gift for someone.

Don't expect the "right answer," even when the evidence is right before her eyes.

She needs both practice and maturation before she'll fully understand the relationship between volume and quantity. □

## Here we go again!

Fortunately, we don't keep count. If we did, the numbers would be staggering.

In the last year alone, you may have played 267 games of Candyland and read "Curious George" no less than 392 times.

Just when you think you will scream at the sight of the man with the yellow hat, here comes your child asking you to read it again. In self-defense, you have bought new games and books, but no, at story time, out come the tattered favorites anyway.

There is actually a developmental purpose to all this repetition. One of the important components of self-confidence is a sense of mastery, a certainty that a skill is truly one's own.

Most of us can summon a childhood memory of that delicious feeling when a new ability finally clicked and off we went, whether it was on a bike (at last without training wheels!), zooming on roller skates, or dog paddling through the water.

Many first accomplishments are physical—walking, jumping, or skipping. I remember watching a toddler who had just figured out how to walk backwards. Back and forth across the kitchen floor he went, all morning long.

Anyone watching would have been astonished at his single-minded focus in repeating the action.

Similarly, I watched a child on the playground who had fi-

nally gotten up the courage to climb the ladder of the tall slide and fling herself down the slide. No sooner had she reached the bottom than she was back around climbing again, over and over.

Having learned how to play Candyland—understanding the rules and requirements—brings a fulfilling sense of mastery just like those feelings of accomplishment.



That sense of achievement translates into confidence to eventually try a new challenge. I recall a child in a preschool class who began each day of the entire school year by taking the same puzzle off the shelf and putting it together.

That finished, he evidently felt reassured to move on to another activity, but the repetition seemed necessary to reassure him of what he could do.

Not only is there an awareness of accomplishment and mas-

tery with such repetition, but also recent research on brain development suggests that repeated activities strengthen the neural connections in the brain.

The brain of the young child actually develops billions more neurons than are found in the brains of adolescents and adults. Those nerve pathways that are made stronger by repeated use become thicker and survive the later pruning.

Perhaps the child's drive to repeat is related to innate wisdom for optimum development.

When children repeat actions and activities, they reassure themselves that there are familiar and known events in their lives. How reassuring it is to know how the story goes, and what will happen on the next page.

Literacy specialists tell us that predictable books are an introduction to the process of decoding that is required in reading. There's certainly nothing more predictable than knowing the words that describe the next trouble that "Curious George" will encounter.

Obviously we want to encourage children to sample new experiences and books as well. This consideration of repetition is just meant to give parents an appreciation of the benefits of "here we go again." □



## Translating nonverbal communication

Young children understand more than they are able to communicate using language.

Nonverbal language is generally considered to mean hand gestures, body movement, facial expressions, eye contact and voice intonations.

It conveys important information about what children are thinking and experiencing.

For example, Molly is drawing a picture when her mother interrupts by asking, "What's that?"

Without saying a word, Molly tears up her drawing, throws it in the trashcan, and runs from the room. Her actions are more powerful than any words she might have said.

Many parents are not aware of the nonverbal messages they give their children.

For example, when young children talk to their parents, the parents' facial expressions reveal how well they are listening.

Many of us are guilty of half-listening. Our heads nod, we respond with "uh huh" and fail to make eye contact.

We're not suggesting that parents "hang onto" every action or word their child emits. But it is important for parents to (1) translate their children's nonverbal messages and reflect their understanding, and (2) be aware of the silent messages parents themselves convey. □

## Being a calm, positive parent

Often, as much as children are loved and wanted, it's easy to develop a negative attitude about them. Influenced by the media, friends, neighbors, and fatigue, parents sometimes come to view children as an overwhelming burden.

It's true that when a baby enters family life, there are many new duties and demands involved in keeping him or her contented and healthy. Naturally parents are anxious and worried about doing everything correctly.

New moms especially often pick up the message that it's their duty to devote every minute to their children, constantly entertaining them and catering to their every whim.

For those parents who work outside the home, the burden seems even more overwhelming. Yet an attitude of devotion and self-sacrifice can work against children and parents and against having a happy and peaceful household.

Choosing to be a parent who has a calm and positive attitude is not difficult.

- Don't view your child as an enemy. Sometimes parents unknowingly take on their parenting role as if it involved a constant battle of wills.

Let your child know by your touch, voice, and words that you love and cherish her. But let her come to know that you, too, are a person with your own needs.

Holding on to who you are while being concerned for your child will prevent unnecessary demands on her part and irritation

and frustration on yours. It also gives tots a sense of security and sets the stage for the firm and fair rules of discipline older children need.

- Adopt an easy-going approach and don't worry about being a perfect parent. It's not necessary to follow every rule of childcare to the letter. What feels natural to you is usually what's best. When little ones are cared for in a calm and unhurried way and allowed to develop at their own pace, you can almost be guaranteed they will blossom and thrive.

- Look forward to each day with joy. Few things establish bonding more firmly than getting into the spirit of whatever you are doing with your child. Act as if bath time or mealtime were the most important things in the world to you at the moment. Since daily routines have to be performed anyway, why not make them fun for both of you?

For most of us, being a parent involved on-the-job training and this can be scary. Yet, it helps a lot when our attitude towards our children, and ourselves, is caring and nurturing. □

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