



Growing Together[®]

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Games & Activities 

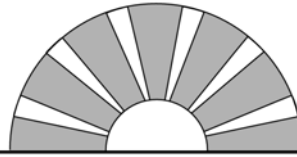
Games for any time, any place

The next time you wait for an appointment—or can't think of anything else to do—here are some easy activities that require only children and a large empty space. Ask this question: How many different ways can you walk? Can you walk:

- Very fast
- Very slowly
- In a circle
- Taking big steps
- Taking tiny steps
- On tiptoes
- On heels

Pretend you are:

- Walking uphill
- Walking downhill
- Walking in mud
- Walking like a robot, a rabbit, a giraffe, a penguin, a blue jay. □



Child's Day

Preschool · Kindergarten · Child Development Center

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

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Discipline

Parents: Let others discipline kids, too

We're told it takes a community to raise a child, but many parents say "hands off" when it comes to letting others discipline their child. A Purdue University child development expert suggests that children might benefit from the authority of others.

"Many Americans take an individual responsibility approach to child rearing," says Judith Myers-Walls, a Cooperative Extension specialist and associate professor of child development and family studies. "The attitude is, 'It's my job to raise my child, and your job to raise your child—and don't judge my way of doing it.'" She says factors that contribute to this attitude include:

- We're a mobile society, so we don't live close to relatives or next to neighbors whom we've known for a long time and trust to help discipline our children.

- We worry about the safety of our children, telling them not to talk to strangers for fear they'll be abducted or hurt.

- We have widely varying views on the proper way to discipline children. Myers-Walls says there is a reluctance to allow others to discipline our children, but at some point it makes sense to

share those duties. She says rearing children can be stressful, and letting others assist can relieve some of the pressure.

Knowing when to offer assistance to a parent can be difficult. Myers-Walls gives a few suggestions on how to know when it's appropriate to correct or discipline another person's child:

- Watch the child. If he or she wanders away from a parent, follow and guide the child back. If the child does something dangerous, try to protect him or her.

- Watch the parent. If a parent looks exhausted, embarrassed, angry or desperate, ask if you can help or just talk with the child and provide a distraction so the parent can relax for a minute.

Myers-Walls points out that children can act very differently around persons other than their parents. "A child who might cling to mom may be very independent and even a leader when in a setting away from her parent," she says.

She says parents are often amazed at how well their children behave for relatives, teachers and coaches. "Recognize that other people can do more with your children than you think," Myers-Walls says. □

Plan a good day, every day

When stress strikes, it becomes hard, if not impossible, to look toward the upcoming day with joy.

The most effective way to break that kind of negative mind-set is to approach each day in a positive, hopeful, optimistic way.

Wolfe J. Rink, a management consultant and adjunct associate professor at Johns Hopkins University says: "If you don't automatically feel upbeat, look around and find something to feel good about. Start out each day in a positive way."

In order to have more positive days, Dr. Rinke suggests the following:

- Use a clock radio that plays soft and pleasant music to wake up to. Don't use a loud alarm clock.
- Allow yourself enough time to prepare for the day's activities at a civilized pace. Don't get up at the last possible moment.
- Think about the positive things you expect to accomplish today. Don't listen to news of the world's problems or worry about your own problems while you are dressing.
- Eat a healthy breakfast. Don't drug yourself with coffee or cigarettes.
- As you go about your day's activities, always expect the best. □

Problem solving is an important skill

A child needs to develop problem-solving skills. If she is constantly told what to do by her parents, she will continue to depend on someone else to give her the answers.

A child who is encouraged to think about possible solutions and pick those that might work develops a method for thinking about a problem. At times she may need suggestions, but as long as these are given as suggestions and not orders, the child learns to take responsibility for the solutions if she chooses.

If the problem is satisfactorily solved, the child can feel proud that she solved it. If the solution she chooses was not the best but she is praised for trying, she will want to try again.

It is good practice to give even very young children exercises in making choices. For example, a two-year-old might be given a choice between the green shirt and the blue one. A four-year-old might choose between two restaurants. Having a say in decisions can have an enormously positive influence on a child. □

Beginning to understand

We have no way of knowing what words mean to a child. We can only observe what happens when she hears a particular word.

We know that a baby understands when she consistently responds with a definite reaction to our words. For example, when a parent raises his voice and says "No!" in disapproval, the child stops the movement she is about to make. But is she reacting to the word "no" itself, or to the pitch and rhythm of our voice?

Parents and caregivers tend to repeat the same words and sentences each time they talk to a baby. Before long, she borrows the tone and even the rhythm of the voice and uses it in her imitations of you. Showing your pleasure will encourage her to say more and say it better.

Even if her repetitions are imperfect, her pitch will resemble yours. In a study made of vocalizations of infants between six and eight months of age, it was possible to identify a Chinese infant because of his distinctive speech patterns.

Another study demonstrated how quickly children learn to mimic intonation. The researcher recorded the babbling and crying of two babies, 10 and 13 months old, under three conditions: when they were alone; in the presence of the mother; and in the presence of the father.

The results indicated that the pitch of their crying did not vary with any of the three situations. However, the pitch of their babbling did vary. For fathers, the infants' pitch was much lower than was the pitch used for the mother. □

Telling a lie

Many parents view truthfulness as the most important characteristic of a good child, more important than cleanliness, obedience, or friendliness, for example.

Not surprisingly, therefore, these parents get very upset whenever a child utters an untruthful remark.

Children begin saying things that are untrue at about age three or four. At this stage of development, they are beginning to explore the world of imagination and fantasy—and this exploration continues throughout the next few years.

Parents may hear about the “elephant” in the neighbor’s back yard or other tall tales of the child’s creative imagination. The child is not trying to deceive. He is just telling the parent a tall story—perhaps just like the one a parent read to him the night before!

What to do? The development of a child’s creative imagination should generally be encouraged rather than frowned upon, as long as the child is not seeking to deliberately deceive the parent.

A parent can enter into the child’s fantasy game, yet instill a sense of reality by saying, “Draw me a picture of your *imaginary* elephant.” □



Take advantage of music’s charm

Most people like and respond to music—it is one of the most natural things in the world.

All cultures—primitive and advanced—sing and dance and play instruments. But no one knows exactly why music makes us smile, or why it calms children. It just does.

To relax both you and your children, soft gentle music usually works best. And music also works best for those times when nothing else seems to lower the noise level in a room.

One little suggestion that sometimes works at naptime is to tell kids they don’t have to sleep, but they need to be quiet and listen to the music. In the process of listening, sometimes eyelids just become too heavy.

At other times, music can be a source of great fun with simple games you make up yourself. Kids will love it if you participate too.

Here are a few not-so-common ideas to get started:

- **Roll around the clock.** Put on a song with a good, strong beat and get down on the floor and roll.

Yes, it sounds silly, and it’s even sillier to see a bunch of kids and adults rolling around on the floor. But it’s a guaranteed ‘pleaser’ activity with the kids and some people have been known to laugh out loud.

- **March to the beat.** Give everybody a hat and a noisemaker (make your own from simple, safe kitchen items) and

march in time to the music.

This is an excellent experience for learning about rhythm and matching movement with sound.

- **Line dancing.** Hold hands and teach little ones a few simple steps you can all do together. If you know the words to the song, sing along. Kids LOVE to dance with mom or dad!

- **Remember the Bunny Hop?** If you do, teach it to the kids.

If you don’t, ask your parents how it goes. Or make up an energetic song of your own and give it a name.

All of these activities are great fun and a good way to get rid of that extra energy (theirs, not yours). Happy dancing! □



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