



Growing Together

Newsletter for
parents of preschool children

Toys

Favorite playthings have additional benefits

In the preschool years, children learn much from repetition.

They will return again and again to a favorite toy, book, or puzzle or a favorite set of materials such as blocks or other building toys.

Each time children play with these familiar objects, they learn something new about them.

That information was always there to be learned, but the child who returns to the familiar toy is not the same child who played with it a month ago.

Now he brings to his play everything that he has experienced and learned since the last time he handled the toy or material. Because of this added experience, he is now ready to learn more from his present play than he could have learned a month before.

The toy, puzzle, book or set of blocks is the same — but as the child brings more to the activity, he learns more from it. □

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Science & Nature

Discovering nature with children

As she skips down the sidewalk after a rain, your youngster nearly steps on a slinky, pink earthworm.

Bending down to investigate, she asks, “Where are his ears?”

Your first reaction may be one of disgust. “Don’t touch that!” Or you might feel embarrassed about being unable to answer her question.

But you’re pleased at her inquisitiveness and want to encourage her desire to learn.

The way you deal with your child’s explorations will shape her feelings about the natural world.

Your reactions can tell her that nature is something to fear and avoid, or that it’s a source of endless interest and excitement.

Foster curiosity

What can you do to foster a child’s innate curiosity about nature? How can you rediscover your own sense of wonder and share it?

Look

In this instance, you might say, “I don’t know if earthworms have ears—let’s have a look.” Bend down together and spend some time observing in silence.

Your child’s original question might go unanswered, but she might notice that one end of the worm’s

body is more pointed than the other and there’s a thick “belt” around it’s middle.

Touch

If your child wants to pick up the worm, encourage her to be gentle, and ask, “What does it feel like when it crawls on your hand?”

Instead of leaving the worm on the sidewalk, suggest that she find a safe place for it in a nearby lawn or garden.

Pretend

Later, at home, you can encourage your child to wiggle across the floor like a worm, or make some earthworms in play dough.

Read

If you’re still wondering whether or not earthworms have ears, you may want to visit your local library together to find a book that will help you both with answers. □



Summertime fun

Here are some inexpensive and fun activities for the whole family:

Relay/obstacle course

Improve your child's physical stamina, ability to follow directions, and memory of sequential order by setting up a challenging relay race or obstacle course.

An example course might be: "Run backwards carefully to the apple tree, swing from the second branch, go down the sliding hill, jump over the sandbox, and go back to the start."

Another route might call for cooperation between siblings or friends: "Leap-frog across the lawn, take turns pushing each other on the swing, play ring-around-the-rosy, then race back to the starting line holding hands."

This game is easily adaptable to your family and environment.

Treasure hunt

Conduct a hidden treasure search by leaving notes around the yard (or house or both) which you can read back to your preschooler — that lead from one clue to the next. Example: The next clue is hidden where squirrels store their nuts.

Clues can be adapted to the participants' ages and ability levels. A prize such as a little toy or snack can be the reward for the successful detective.

Night walk

Take an after-dark family walk. Outfit the children with flashlights for a nighttime adventure that will stimulate both conversations and the five senses.

Talk about night noises ("What was that?") sights, and smells, and nocturnal creatures. This is also a great opportunity to allay the anxiety of a child who is afraid of the dark. □

A handy helper right in your home

When you're tidying up the house and your youngster is underfoot, instead of fabricating play activities, invite her or him to share in family chores and responsibilities.

For example, when preparing a meal, provide real tools and instructions for operating them.

Keep the tools simple, like a hand eggbeater or a carrot peeler. If the equipment is placed at the proper height, there will be fewer spills—on children or equipment.

While preparing to wash dishes or load the dishwasher, children may be assigned the job of sorting the silverware.

In the dining room, offer a damp cloth to remove finger marks from the woodwork or a soft cloth for dusting furniture in the living room.

Wastebaskets can be emptied into larger receptacles.

In the bathroom there may be a tendency to splash in the water unless you suggest genuine work. Allow Youngster to wipe off glass cleaner from mirrors, windows, or tile.

There are many reasons for recommending practical experiences in the home:

- The exercise is equal to, if not superior to, such things as push-ups or knee bends.
- The need to pay attention—to choose, arrange, use equipment—is a school-readiness skill.
- The ability to make decisions and then change them when they turn out poorly is essential for cognitive learning.
- The recognition and confidence gained for a job well done builds up good feelings about oneself. □

Should parents take children to a funeral?

Since death is a part of life, it is something about which children must learn.

The death of a family friend can be a learning experience for a child.

It is important that parents and other adults handle the matter with sensitivity so the child's words or actions at the funeral service or home do not cause undue pain for the bereaved family.

- How old is the child?

While seven is not the magic number for all children, it is the age at which most children can reason and understand.

- How well did the child know the deceased?
- Does the child want to go to the service?
- Is the child capable of respect for the ceremony?
- Have you talked with the child, explaining what to expect, what he or she will see, how other people might react, and why the service is important?

Be aware of other conversations going on around you and your child at any services or gatherings.

Some conversations do not take young children into account and remarks may be beyond their understanding.

You may need to have another conversation after you return home to answer questions or clear up misunderstandings. □

Providing good role models

How can parents teach their children to be responsible? By being good role models themselves.

- Be predictable. Children need to know the rules. In a world full of contradictions and change, a parent should be predictable.

If a child makes a mistake, she needs to know what to expect. Parents' position should be clear. A few simple rules, firmly enforced, are more effective than many rules, loosely enforced.

- Be respectful. No one likes to be ridiculed or embarrassed. Within the heart of every child is the potential for greatness. Don't squelch it.

Respect the opinions of children and recognize their intelligence. When making plans involving them, ask for their views and give consideration to their preferences.

Treat children as though they are important, because they really are.

- Be dependable. As children grow, they need less from their parents and more from themselves, but one need they will always have is dependable parents. They need to know they can count on their parents. Parents are the roots of their changing world.

- Be an example. Avoid hypocrisy. If you tell a child not to smoke or use drugs but you smoke and use drugs, what behavior can you expect?

Children love honesty. Living truthfully and acting truthfully are powerful examples.

With children, one living example is worth 10,000 empty words. Children mirror their parents. See them and you see yourselves. □

Learning to compare quantity

An important part of understanding numbers is learning to see difference in amount.

Five-year-olds can distinguish between one and many or between a small amount and a large amount.

With time and practice, they learn to put things in order from the least amount to the most. This is the conceptual basis of counting.



Here's a simple game:

Give a child a snack of nuts or raisins. Divide it into two piles, one with just a few, the other with noticeably more. (Note: This game is not intended for children under three as nuts or raisins can pose a choking risk.)

Ask her which pile has more, which has less.

Add some from the large pile to the small one, and ask again.

Try spreading the ones in the small pile out in a line while keeping the large pile bunched together in a smaller space.

Now ask her which has more.

Her answer may surprise you. Her

thinking at five years old is based on how things look to her.

She may answer that the one that's spread out has more since that's how it appears.

Have her count each group; give her help if she needs it. Ask again which group has more.

It will take maturation and practice with this and other kinds of experiences with different quantities of materials arranged in different ways for five-year-olds to learn that an amount stays the same even when it looks different.

Try to find ways in your day-to-day life to give children practice with the words and ideas of more and less. □

Something New!

"Grandma Says" is a twice-monthly special message that includes general parenting tips, words of encouragement, and children's book reviews. To receive your free issues, go to:
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FreeGrandmaSays
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Articles in **Growing Together** refer to both boys and girls. For simplicity, the pronouns "he" and "she" are used interchangeably unless otherwise noted.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>5</p> <p>For breakfast: pancakes with crushed, fresh fruit on top.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Build a tower with six blocks.</p> 	<p>7</p> <p>Try a new and different meal sometime this month.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Shawvot</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Play with a toy telephone. Call a friend, a parent, or your grandparents.</p> 	<p>10</p> <p>Take the shoe laces out of a pair of shoes — and then put them back in.</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Practice listening—close your eyes, what do you hear?</p>
<p>12</p> <p>Name five things that smell really good.</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Draw some chalk pictures on the driveway.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>Flag Day.</p> 	<p>15</p> <p>How many cousins do you have?</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Make a sign to put on the door of your room.</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Squeeze some oranges for some fresh OJ.</p> 	<p>18</p> <p>Jump rope outside.</p>
<p>19</p> <p>Father's Day.</p> 	<p>20</p> <p>Discuss safety crossing streets and the meaning of safety signs.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>First day of summer. Go fishing!</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Go outside and play catch with a large plastic ball.</p> 	<p>23</p> <p>What's a bagel? What do you do with it?</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Count the stars in the sky tonight.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Help sweep out the garage.</p>
<p>26</p> <p>Help make a salad for dinner.</p>	<p>27</p> <p>What is your favorite cookie?</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Donate non-perishable items to a community food bank.</p>	<p>29</p> <p>Draw a picture of someone who lives at your house.</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Can you turn a somersault?</p> 